

# **THE IDEOLOGY OF THE FREE SUBJECT**

ON THE RADICAL HISTORICITY  
OF DISCOURSE

**FREE ISSUE**

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**THE IDEOLOGY OF THE FREE  
SUBJECT**

ON THE RADICAL HISTORICITY  
OF DISCOURSE

**Pablo Aparicio Durán**

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Catalunya Literària Fundació Privada

Rambla Nova 106-bis 7º 4ª

43001 Tarragona

Tel. 977214661

Courriel: [adminstracio@clfp.cat](mailto:adminstracio@clfp.cat)

<http://www.clfp.cat>

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## Prologue

The appearance of *La ideología del sujeto libre* by Pablo Aparicio Durán marks a new stage in the appreciation of the work of the great Spanish Marxist, Juan Carlos Rodríguez, author of the seminal *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* (1974). Necessarily so, in that, while the capitalist relations dominant in 1970s continue to dominate today, together with the ‘ideological matrix’ that, according to Rodríguez, those relations secrete, we are talking about two radically different socio-historical conjunctures. If the school and university, as ideological state apparatuses, have always serviced capitalist production, they did so, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, from a relatively autonomous standpoint, which allowed even those scholars forced to live under dictatorial regimes, such as Rodríguez, a certain space from which to mount oppositional critiques. By the 1990s, however, finance capital had affirmed its hold, and education had been systematized accordingly in the interests of capitalist productivity. In effect, education has come to be regulated by an ideology of production. Language teaching, it would seem, on the evidence of Durán’s own text, proved particularly vulnerable to the new vocationalism. The goal of teaching is simply that of rendering the contents of the subject as comprehensible as possible, which has made it necessary, in large measure, to ‘dejar al margen la cuestión histórica ideológico-discursiva’. Changes, then, there have been, since *Teoría e historia* first arrived on the scene, changes that, however inconsequential when viewed in the broader context, have substantially transformed the educational state apparatus. But to get a better grasp of them, let us briefly turn the clock back, specifically to a text that would prove crucial to Rodríguez’s own development, namely Louis Althusser’s *For Marx* or, in Spanish, *La revolución teórica de Marx*.

A Hegelian contradiction, Althusser argues, is never *really over-determined*, even though it may sometimes appear to be so. Thus, whereas in the *Phenomenology of Mind* consciousness seemingly charts a complex course in its ascent to Absolute Knowledge, the development of consciousness merely consists of the unfolding of its own essence. For Hegel, we are reminded, every consciousness has a suppressed-conserved past even in the present, in the form of the latent worlds of its superseded essences, never, it is to be noted, in the form of a truly external determination. We are talking, in other words, of a dialectic of consciousness. '*A circle of circles, consciousness has only one centre, which solely determines it*' (102, original italics). For Marx, on the other hand, Althusser continues, contradictions are always over-determined: 'the material life of men explains their history; their consciousness, their ideologies are then merely the phenomena of their material life' (107). And the rest followed, notably, the notion of a social formation, consisting of its separate instances, and the ever-pre-givenness of a structured complexity, the rejection of the problematic of *human nature*, as a theoretically workable concept, and the notion of an ideological unconsciousness (233). Which is where Rodríguez began: 'Lo leí', he confessed in an interview in 2011, with respect to Althusser's text, 'y me quedé pasmado' (165). With immediate effect, as he explained in the postdata to the second edition of *Teoría e historia*: he simply took his 'planteamientos anteriores' and cast them through the window into the street.

What these prior formulations consisted of is not altogether clear. Of the same Hegelian heritage, one guesses, that Althusser had similarly come to discard. Equally hard to define, by the same token, is what exactly Rodríguez had imbibed from his reading of Althusser. For while the 'continuing presence' of Althusser is dutifully acknowledged and registered on every page of of *Teoría e historia*, 'eso no quiere decir que yo sea althusseriano' (55), or so, at least, Rodríguez would maintain

in 1998. Moreover, when questioned subsequently as to what remained of the Althusserian legacy, the notion of 'ideological unconsciousness' appears to have slipped Rodríguez's mind (158-5) and, later still, he would minimize Althusser's contribution to the theory of ideology: 'Althusser, pues, dijo cosas muy buenas sobre ideología pero solía meterse en algún embrollo sin aclararse el tema' (214). In the Introduction to *Teoría e historia*, one is reminded, Rodríguez dismisses the whole polemic over Althusser's alleged 'anti-humanism' as superannuated, for being 'boring' and 'blind' (10). Even as he introduces, somewhat obliquely, it must be said, his concept of the ideological unconscious, which is manifestly indebted to the Althusserian notion of an 'ideological unconsciousness'. The latter seems to have figured unthinkingly as a part or extension of the Althusserian problematic, in contrast, it should be noted, to the notion of a *radical historicity*, which Rodríguez is concerned to promote from the outset.

Within the context of his own work, Pablo Durán throws some light upon this rather complex legacy. Althusser, he suggests, took on board a Lacanian 'subject', albeit in an ideological guise, through which to explain the mechanics of 'interpellation', otherwise the process through which the individual is recruited by a dominant ideology. 'Y esto es lo que JCR matiza: no hay un sujeto universal, sino matrices ideológicas para cada tipo de individualidad histórica.' A valid point: Rodríguez certainly had his reservations on this score. But equally valid, in my view, is the implication, on Durán's part, that the 'subject' appears in Althusser to perform the function of a 'holding category', which could be filled with a variety of contents, according to the relevant mode of production. Thus, by Masters/slaves for the slaving-owning mode, Lords/serfs for feudalism, and Subject/subjects for capitalism. The philosopher, it might reasonably be surmised, expected the practitioners of other disciplines and sciences to provide the relevant analyses at ground level. Althusser,

*qua* philosopher, was, after all, quite entitled to pitch his discussion at an appropriate level of generality, alongside ‘modes of production’, ‘forces’ and ‘relations of production’, social ‘levels’ or ‘instances’ (economic, political, and ideological), and so on. Such distinctions are what allow structural Marxists to balance the claims of general theory against those of concrete research.

Other terms raise the same kind of problem. ‘Individual’, for example, undoubtedly, needs to be treated with some degree of caution or, as Durán would phrase it, to be ‘cogido con pinzas’, insofar as it immediately conjures up the spectre of its opposite, namely ‘society’, which locates it within the parameters of a bourgeois ideology. ‘Individuality’, while available for general reference, can prove somewhat laboured in practice, and, reasonably enough, Durán does not hesitate to use the ‘individual’ as a holding category, whose meaning is to be determined by the historical context. Ditto with respect to ‘philosopher’. To what extent is it legitimate to compare Aristotle with Aquinas and Aquinas with Wittgenstein or to assume that they belong to the same category? Althusser was widely critiqued, unjustifiably so in my view, for a ‘philosophism’ that, allegedly, obliterates necessary historical distinctions and collapses the Western tradition into an unbroken continuity. If two or more terms are radically incommensurate to the extent that they lack a superordinate term in common, then there can be little basis on which to compare them, and, for that matter, little reason to do so. Nobody is going to compare bananas with craters on the moon, or either of these with canaries.

In this context, ‘human nature’ is in a class of its own. British Marxism has been relentless in its attack upon Althusser for his rejection of the concept as theoretically valid. Norman Geras, for example, reputedly one of its leading practitioners, writes: ‘The supposed replacement of the idea of human nature by the central concepts of historical materialism, that

theoretical incompatibility alleged here by “theoretical anti-humanism”, is merely bombast’ (107). A remarkable statement, coming as it does from an informed student of the Marxist tradition. Symptomatically, Geras never gets around to engaging with the ‘discriminating historical and social’ detail whose importance he otherwise promotes and whose relevance he recognizes. Durán will rightly have nothing to do with such nonsense. But he would be advised to proceed with care. His claim, for example, that ‘human nature’ only became a problem in the eighteenth century and that no scholastic philosopher would ever have dreamed of deploying any such notion is emphatically not the case. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, author of the fifteenth-century *Corbacho*, to take one example, speaks freely of ‘la naturaleza humana’. The important point, to follow the logic of Durán’s argument, is that he fills ‘human nature’ entirely with ideas drawn from his Scholastic legacy, which are totally alien to a modern understanding of ‘human nature’. Pressed to their extreme, the claims regarding ‘radical historicity’ can easily land Althusserians in the never-never land of a super empiricism, ironically so in view of the importance they otherwise attach to social structures. But to better grasp the importance of such distinctions, let us pick up the thread of our historical review.

The debate over Althusser’s anti-humanism, it turned out, which Rodríguez so casually dismissed, was simply a foretaste of things to come, precipitated by E. P. Thompson’s *The Poverty of Theory* (1978) and its scurrilous assault upon structural Marxism. On one side, those with a theoretical bent defended the importance of the social structures that unconsciously determine subjects, on the other, cultural historians promoted individuals’ freedom to determine their fate. I have reviewed the details elsewhere. Suffice it to note, in the present context, that, amidst all the screaming and shouting, the kernel of Althusser’s argument was lost from view, namely the need for Marxism to ‘break’, epistemologically, with

the ideological attachment to the subject/system opposition and all its variants. Only in this way, Althusser had argued, was it possible to ‘change the terrain’ or ‘cross the frontier’ and embrace a new problematic. ‘The concepts whereby Marx thought reality, which real-humanism pointed out, never ever again introduce as *theoretical* concepts the concepts of man or humanism; but other, quite new concepts, the concepts of mode of production, forces of production, relations of production, superstructure, ideology, etc.’ (244).

The greatest threat to Althusserian Marxism, it transpired, came less from British Marxists, of the likes of Geras, who were firmly rooted in their native empiricism, hence incapable of dialectical thought, but, as Durán rightly proceeds to argue, from the North American Marxist, Fredric Jameson, who, his Hegelian formation notwithstanding, attempted positively to take Althusserianism on board. Hegel, it is true, raised the possibility of history as a process without a subject and of forces operating ‘behind the backs’ of individual subjects, which, in turn, suggests the existence, within a social context, of an ideological unconsciousness. The Hegelian Marxist, Georg Lukács, to whom Jameson was much indebted, talks revealingly of a class-consciousness that, ‘on the objective side’, is tantamount to a ‘class-conditioned *unconsciousness*’ (Lukács 1971, 52, original italics). But it was in the teleological unfolding of the Idea where the true Hegelian Subject lay, and it would take some heavy lifting on Jameson’s part, in his *The Political Unconscious* (1981), before such a resolutely anti-Hegelian thinker as Althusser could be recruited for the Hegelian cause. In the end, there remained a world of difference between the Althusserian *identity of differences* and the Hegelian *unity of opposites*. Added to which, as Durán explains, the picture of Jameson as a solitary Marxist within the North American Academy rather misses the point, which is that the promotion of Marxism as a methodology, albeit of a superior, dialectically totalizing kind, fits rather snugly in an American

pragmatism that sees different literary ‘approaches’ converging on the same object.

By the 1980s, it was pretty much all over. E. P. Thompson was occupying himself in matters pertaining to nuclear disarmament and Perry Anderson was quietly taking his leave of Marxism. Perhaps, after all, a ‘good’ capitalism was, realistically, the best that could be hoped for. More generally there was a movement away from Marxism towards ‘lifestyle’ and ‘identity’ politics, as those radicalized in the 1960s and ‘70s began to enter middle age. While it was still permitted to rant on about corrupt politicians, over-paid bankers, greedy entrepreneurs, and the like, socialism itself was surreptitiously dropped from the agenda, at least within the public sphere, the press and television, and even within the academy. It was all very sad. So many of those who had criticized Althusser for his ‘pessimism’, without confronting his arguments, accepted with surprising ease the cultural attractions of late capitalism and the joy of riding the waves of post-structuralism with Foucault and Derrida, along with more mediocre talents, like Lyotard and Baudrillard. A transformed social world allegedly required a different kind of politics, one accepting of the break that, allegedly, had occurred in the capitalist mode of production. Pablo Durán captures much of the spirit of the ‘new times’ in his portrayal of the graduate classes on literary theory run by Professor H. Fry in the University of Yale. From his suitably transcendental position, Fry will survey the respective positions of the different methodological approaches, for the benefit of a body of suitably attired students, who will emerge appropriately qualified to pursue their professional careers. ‘Es decir, en una atmósfera mucho más “relajada” y “abierta” que nunca, pero cuya esfera discursiva es cada vez más estrecha, las nuevas generaciones se despiden de un marxismo convertido en una de las grandes ideas tras las que ya no se debe correr, porque fue, sí, una de las “lentes” históricas con las que nuestra “condición humana” ha sido observada.’ (133)

To all which, Durán will say: No! Beginning where it is necessary to begin, with a concise statement of a position that breaks emphatically with the above and the priority accorded to the subject/system opposition, in any of its multiple variations. 'Ideológicamente, nuestro mundo no es material ni espiritual, sino *literal*. Voy a insistir mucho en ello. Pero no por tomar partido en el debate que enfrenta a 'dualistas' contra 'monistas'. Emphatically, the ideological unconscious is always already exerting its influence, even before the debates begin. Durán's theoretical standpoint is that of an Althusserian Marxism, albeit of an appropriately 'nuanced' kind, mediated through Rodríguez's *Teoría e historia*, hence correspondingly inflected less towards the notion of the Ideological State Apparatus, favoured by erstwhile Althusserians, and more towards the notion of the mode of production structured in dominance. In essence, *La ideología del sujeto libre* is concerned to expose the pervasive influence of an ideological unconscious that presupposes the existence of a 'human condition' and, alternatively, a 'human nature'. In the case of historians of pre-history, Durán targets a narrative strategy that traces linearly the 'evolutionary' unfolding of the 'essential' capacities of a 'free subject', a strategy that consists of breaking down its 'object of study' into discrete elements, otherwise 'parts', 'factors', 'elements'. and 'processes'. Durán explains: 'hay una serie de "constantes" universales que la misma historiografía ha asumido como esenciales tanto en su objeto de estudio como en la propia labor documental.' Such constants will include, for example, 'creativity, 'curiosity', 'desire for knowledge', 'communication', 'experience' and, of course, 'individual' and 'society'. The relevant object is thus revealed in the fullness of its detail. The discrete constituents, Durán could have added, can be finally listed alphabetically in the form of an 'index'. 'Theory', in such circumstances, can only compromise the descriptive immediacy of sense impressions, which is why an empiricist text teeters constantly on paraphrasis.



Durán might well have paused at this point to contrast the *linear* narrative with its *spiral* equivalent, which he himself pursues. Spiral insofar as, after introducing, say, the notion of an *ideological matrix*, *La ideología del sujeto libre* will subsequently double back on itself, to tease out one further aspect of its argument. Such a design rests upon the justifiable assumption that the subsequent stages of the process are a prerequisite for understanding what preceded. At first blush, it may seem a somewhat paradoxical to claim of a text such as Durán's that an understanding of the whole is a precondition for an understanding of its parts. Althusser, it will be recalled, posed the same question with respect to Marx and famously replied that the paradox is only apparent, insofar as a symptomatic reading is circular but not vicious. In the philosopher's own words: '[T]he circle implied by this operation is, like all circles of this kind, simply the dialectical circle of the question asked of an object as to its nature, on the basis of a theoretical problematic which in putting its object to the test puts itself to the test of its object.'<sup>A</sup> Such an approach, it is true, is perfectly attuned, to capture the complex, causal determinations, transitive and intransitive, operative within the social formation, when viewed as a whole. At the same time, I confess, the juxtaposition of, say, Borges, Zweig, Quevedo, Montaigne and Goethe in *La ideología del sujeto libre*, amidst sometimes endlessly proliferating parentheses, sometimes left me craving for the clarity that, for all its ideological limitations, characterise the empiricist text.

Durán's discussion of Artificial Intelligence proceeds along much the same lines as that of pre-history and its exponents. AI, we learn, including the discourses generated by *ChatGPT*, unconsciously incorporates into its programmes the same kind of ideologemes that figure throughout its corpus. With increasingly complex and massive corpuses, it is to be assumed, the capacity of the computer will progressively approach our

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<sup>A</sup> For Marx, p. 38

own, with the result that, like human beings, the computer will find itself replete with elements unconsciously inflected for ideology. Except for one fundamental difference: whereas AI is saturated with an ideology borrowed from elsewhere, the ideological component in human beings is the product of a protracted socio-historical process. The latter defies the replicability so essential to *ChatGPT* for the important reason that the ideological unconscious, whose existence it presupposes, ‘forma sentido por descarte y represión’. AI, by way of contrast, cannot repress what is configured beforehand.

Durán concludes his discussion by drawing together the threads of his argument, as these apply to linguistic pedagogy. As throughout, he is rightly insistent that nothing escapes the reach of an ideological unconscious, including science. But it is one thing to argue that all the sciences, even including astrology, are spontaneously inflected for ideology and quite another to argue, as Durán and Rodríguez do, against the distinction between ‘science’ and ‘ideology’. To conflate the one with the other is to promote an ideological paradox that effectively precludes any access to the real, notwithstanding the amazing advances of modern science. In the same way, the psychoanalytic paradox precludes any knowledge of the Thing that is repressed beyond the grasp of consciousness, notwithstanding the knowledge that can be achieved of myself through psychoanalysis. In sum, I was this infant, with these parents, born in this society, at this point in time. If the notion of an alethic Truth, as opposed to a post-‘truth’, no long serves any analytic function, one is left wondering why one should take the trouble to grasp the ideological function of the ‘free subject’. It is all very well for Durán to confess his unavoidable location within the boundaries of postmodernism, but a Marxism worthy of the name must defend itself against any tendency to privilege the subjectivity of experience over the objectivity of reality. As Robert Paul Resch perceptively observed: ‘The threat of idealism – latent

in philosophical modernism from Kant to empirio-criticism – is finally realized in a postmodern move that releases subjective experience from its subordination to the materialist principle of ontological realism. The result is ontological relativism.’ Such important matters remain to be discussed and Pablo Durán has yet to raise them.

By way of conclusion, let us survey the ‘lie of the land’ that *La ideología del sujeto libre* is destined to confront. A vision of the relevant prospect was recently furnished to me by a reading of George Monbiot’s *How Did We Get Into This Mess? Politics, Equality, Nature* (2017). Monbiot, for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the relevant scenario, is a writer who regularly contributes to *The Guardian*, one of the few examples in Britain of intelligent, albeit staunchly liberal, journalism. Nobody, I hastene to concede, has exposed better than Monbiot the destructive consequences of a capitalist neo-liberalism that ‘treats the natural world, civic life, equality, public health and effective public services as dispensable luxuries’. His relevance to the present discussion lies in the ideological assumptions that underlie his arguments, beginning with the ‘freedoms’ of which, allegedly, capitalism is threatening to deprive us. Hardly has the reader penetrated the volume before Monbiot nails his colours to the mast: ‘Civilisation is but a flimsy dust sheet that we have thrown over a psyche rich in emotion and instinct, shaped by the living planet.’ Such is the assumption that underlies the project of ‘rewilding’ that Monbiot would have us undertake, based as this is on the ‘mythic representation’ of ‘perceptual openings, fissures that allow us to see, though briefly and darkly, the ancient soul of humankind’. There is only one problem about the project in question: most people fail to see what seems ‘so blitheringly obvious’ to Monbiot. ‘Are they stupid?’ No. To claim as much would be outrageously condescending. People have been ‘systematically misled’ by the ‘media’ or, more obscurely, by something called ‘systematic justification’. But there is a bright side to all of this. ‘We are not born with

our values. They are shaped by the social environment around us.' The solution? A knowledge of an ideological unconscious is never an option. We are advised, rather, to 'foster an understanding of the psychology which informs political change and show how it has been manipulated.' We must 'shed old thinking and stand up for those who believe there is more to life'. Such is the kind of thinking, shared depressingly by many so-called Marxist, erstwhile and otherwise, to which Pablo Durán wishes to call a halt. We wish him the best of luck.

Malcolm K. Read

## Introduction

The ‘free subject’ is the ideological norm of modern individuation. According to this norm, the subject possesses at least two things: *their* life to sell/buy, and *their* story to tell/withhold. As such, ‘modern man’ possesses at all times a biography with an intrinsic value (hence the picaresque of the poor man who dares to tell his story as it is, as the ‘protagonist’).<sup>1</sup> In other words, the life of *this* subject has a ‘meaning’ that lies in its own immanence, from which follows the freedom for it to be interpreted (by the subject who experiences it and by other free subjects who ‘sympathise’ with it).

Ideologically, our world is neither material nor spiritual, but *literal*. I am going to emphasise this point. However, I will not take sides in the debate between ‘dualists’ and ‘monists’, which would make our original claim a mere ‘third way’, i.e. ‘social constructivism’, except to make one thing clear: that the ultimate meaning of debates about what is or is not *reality* is determined by the practical meaning of social relations, this literalness being ‘elaborated’ in different ways by those who believe in the separation between matter and spirit (soul, consciousness/conscience, taste, poetry, authenticity, etc.) and those who believe that everything must have its ‘explanation’ in the laws (and ‘exceptions’) of physics.

Contrary to what one might think, this is not relativism or social/cultural constructivism, since neither the former nor the latter (whether ‘extreme’ or ‘moderate’) take into account the concept of the ‘ideological matrix’,<sup>2</sup> which objectively (and rigorously) explains the meaning of such relations, which exist between free subjects in ‘modernity’.

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1 See Rodríguez 2001b.

2 Cf. Elder-Vass 2012.

It is therefore a question of looking at the practical reality, which, as Juan Carlos Rodríguez (hereinafter, with some exceptions, JCR) has shown in *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* (1990), is not only economic, but also (generally) vital and (specifically) discursive. This matrix underlies what we say when we say ‘I am’ (which we do, whether we want to or not, when we talk about the ‘world’ or its ‘things’), precisely because this relationship between (supposedly free) subjects is the starting point of the meaning given to what we do in the practice (i.e. in the everyday reproduction) of our lives.

If we did not reproduce our way of life together every day, there would be no possibility of *being* and *seeming*, attributive verbs that require a grammatical subject. However, especially when it comes to ‘we’, the question arises as to whether this ‘subject’ (person, thing, or entity), where there seems to be nothing but a pure conceptual abstraction about language as a ‘system’ or ‘structure’, has always existed, and the answer is a clear *no*.

In other words, the subject of the observation or the thought expressed was born much more recently than is assumed, i.e. the speaker (or actor who sets the system in motion, or rather, who is the system itself), who unfolds or polarises themselves (in an I-Thou) and who establishes communication from their autonomy as a subject, independently of the being of things (Plato-Socrates), of syntax as a technical (philological) problem in the establishment of the koine (Apollonius Dyscolus) or even of the ‘dignity’ of the vernacular (Dante).

Our subject, who ‘conceives, judges and reasons’ from their ‘I am’, legitimised as being free by virtue of this *raison d’être* (insofar as it is ‘private’), is neither present nor expected in the entire theory of language prior to the Port-Royal *Grammar* (1660),<sup>3</sup> i.e. until well into modern mercantile social relations, which began to view language in

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3 Cf. Cabrera 2017, pp. 13–68.

terms of itself and thus to ‘play’ with it as something immanent and autonomous (as Góngora does in Spain, for example). When we speak of this ‘language’, it is the concept of the subject that we reproduce through a discourse that inscribes us in the historical practice of modern ideological legitimisation, even if we believe that, strictly speaking, we are referring to the ‘linguistic ideas’ of the ancient grammarians.

The paradox here is that this answer can only be given to us by a theory inscribed in the very ideology of the free subject: Marxism.

It is a theory that also tells us that other social relations and thus other forms of individuation, alien to what we understand today by ‘subjectivity’ and its opposite, ‘objectivity’, have existed in the world, i.e. that in history there have been individuals who were ‘masters’ or ‘slaves’; ‘lords’ or ‘serfs’, and only today do we have ‘subjects’, with a meta-linguistic consciousness of an ontological nature, who speak of their condition as ‘speakers’, otherwise known as ‘subjects of the statement’<sup>4</sup> or ‘communicators’.<sup>5</sup> ‘Communication’ is thus a concept that alludes to the view according to which the aforementioned subjects ‘interpellate’ each other, i.e. the historical view of the ‘subject’ as the inherent possessor of a representative ‘voice’ (ultimately, in the specific social problematic), but which, considered in itself, metamorphoses into a linguistic ‘object’ (in the abstract discursive problematic). The ideological key here is that of an object in which the historicity of the social relations that produce it is not taken into account and only its ahistorical transcendence is considered; specifically, language as a timeless ‘phenomenon’ that is inherent to ‘human nature’. What is more, the object conceived in this way is the result of this disregard from the outset.

But for us (according to the theory of ‘radical historicity’), the fact that the Greeks already spoke of the ‘syntactic subject’ does not

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4 Cf. Benveniste 1966.

5 See Rodríguez 2001<sup>a</sup>, pp. 61–127.

imply this conscious *man-language* relationship, since for those individuals, the problem of ‘saying’ referred to the general question of the exchange of essences between one matter and another: more precisely, between the matter ‘thing’ and the matter ‘name’, where resides the (abstract discursive) problem of the substance of the idea, etc. The ideological key here, however, is a different one: the practice of slave-owning social relations, in which the *ousia* of the free man (the citizen) was also essentially legitimised as against the inferior, subaltern or animal nature of man, woman, property, and so on. Moreover, this first ‘grammar’ is known to have responded to the problem of defining writing (even if one assumes that it is a ‘reflection on language’).<sup>6</sup>

We would therefore add that the concept of the ‘ideological matrix’ is a concept whose ascertainment corresponds perfectly, for example, to the criterion of ‘falsifiability’ invoked by Karl Popper to determine the scientific nature of any assertion about reality.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, if one were to consider the meaning of discourse as something that is exclusively relative to the ‘point of view’ (as happens within the ‘phenomenological horizon’ in which we nevertheless inscribe ourselves),<sup>8</sup> and not to the particular concretisation (or socially productive and therefore verifiable use) of the notions that structure it, one could not subscribe to such indisputable assertions (in relation to the dialectics of meaning belonging to the first modern ‘discursive formations’)<sup>9</sup> as this one on the radical historicity of the

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6 Cf. Cabrera 2017, loc. cit.

7 Cf. Mora 2023, pp. 349–351.

8 As such, in order to counter our own ideological unconscious, among other postmodern discursive tics, we have consistently avoided entitling the essay ‘A history...’, ‘A treatise...’, ‘A theory...’, etc.

9 Among them (in all their complexity, of course), we can go from *Elogio de la locura* (1511) to *Testo jonqui* (Preciado 2020). However, what is interesting is seeing the precise discursive inscription (full of radically historical contradictions) in which each text is rooted.



transition from feudal to modern discourse found in *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* (*op. cit.*):

Insofar as the objective functioning of the political level ultimately always ‘represents’ social relations, which is why one would say that it cannot ‘create’ ideologies: it can influence the ideological structures that are in turn embedded in these social relations to make them ‘act’ in one way or another, to create ‘needs’ and ‘themes’ for them, which these ideological structures will have to ‘assume’ and ‘elaborate’, and so on. The effects of the political level on the ideological structures of transition [from feudalism to the bourgeois social formations of the 15th to 17th centuries, and later to capitalism, etc.], however, do not have the same impact on both: they do have the general ‘necessity’ for both to adopt the ‘private/public’ dialectic, but this is understood – and ‘elaborated’ – in one way or another, depending on whether it is a matter of organicism or animism.

As such, animism, as a matter of principle, will accept such a ‘private/public’ dialectic in its own autonomy (i.e. in the autonomy of the two spaces). And this must be so, since, as mentioned above, the functioning of the political level presupposes the obvious tendency to consolidate bourgeois relations infrastructurally, while organicism, as representative of feudal relations, adopts the dialectic of private/public and at the same time claims to reject it (to deny the ‘autonomy’ of both one sphere and the other), insofar as it continues to accept as the only truth the unified (‘totalising’, ‘homogenising’) writing of the signs of God above all things. (p.134)

It is one thing to say that ‘God is dead’, and yet another to say *when, where, how*, and – often without getting to the heart of the matter – *why* this process began. And, by the way, God has not ‘died’; he has simply entered the space of the ‘private’, so much so that the Nietzsche in the delirium of his own writing (the Nietzsche of ‘Why I write such good books’) is also unaware that what he feels is the vertigo of the immanence of his own discourse, of the free language that his story, however poor it may seem to him, places before him: his condition as an author.<sup>10</sup>

Hence also the unique significance of the new outbreaks of fundamentalist violence and oppression (such as those of radical Islamism), which, however regressive they may seem (a ‘return to feudalism’), are in fact – if we take our radical historical condition seriously – a strict consequence of the present conjuncture, namely, the particular (infrastructural/superstructural) ‘impact’ of (present-day) intersubjective social relations on this fundamentalism, which basically assumes (unconsciously, insofar as its objective social practices are equally private/public: bureaucracy, employment contracts, the market, the financial system, etc.) the private/public dialectic (as a real condition of existence), but does so – and herein lies the contradiction that

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10 Hans Blumenberg (2008), in his brilliant book *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (another case of the history of ideas without the ‘ideological matrix’, but which nevertheless hits the nail on the head of ideological limits) states, ‘The patterns and schemas of the salvation story were to prove to be ciphers and projections of intraworldly problems, like a foreign language in which is expressed the absolutism of the world, of man, of society, so that all unworldliness would be a metaphor that had to be retranslated into literal speech. The problem in such a case, quite logically, is not secularisation but the detour that made it necessary in the first place. For detours, of course, we do have the trusty schema of the consciousness that finds its way to itself, that achieves consciousness of its own identity. sheep from goats, the clarification of fronts, but rather the unveiling of the identity of the one interest for the realisation of which a God had to exist at most as an assistant in the process of its accomplishment. But would it not have been better, then, if He had not existed at all?’ (p. 16)

goes beyond the pale – on the basis of a fundamentalist discourse that seeks to abolish it, i.e. a discourse inscribed in nothingness, in a material/social void in which there is only room for madness in the form of atrocities: terrorism, hatred, and horror. And this is called ‘neurosis’, which does not involve denying reality (as in ‘psychosis’), but it does involve not wanting to know anything about it.<sup>11</sup> This is something that we all suffer from to a greater or lesser extent, even though our inscription is made on an established (i.e. legitimate) practical material basis, which even makes allowance for behaviours that involve ‘punishment’, precisely because the latter is always understood within its own limits.<sup>12</sup>

The first (ideological) problem of modernity for radical Islamism: within the sphere (the limits) of the private, lives the *author*, who is also a *reader*, which means that they can read/write the holy book, and therein lies their freedom. This is a reality that the radical Islamists do not deny (because, unconsciously, they are aware of it: it is the internal logic of the market to which they belong, which they know deep down is *pertinent*), but which they do not want anything to do with (hence their theocratic dictatorship in the field of ‘education’, which they prefer to refer to as the ‘study’ of the Koran, etc.).

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11 See Castilla del Pino (1969), p. 48. In addition, one would have to speak here of the differences between what is known/not known that is known/not known, etc. along the lines of Lacan-Rumsfeld-Žižek. For the question of social ‘neurosis’, see also Ferguson (2023), p. 64 and subsequent

12 Foucault (1983) brilliantly explores the different forms and meanings of punishment (and of crime or offence): corporal punishment (where the body is the only thing that belongs to the subject being punished, hence the bloodletting of the theatrical play *El médico de su honra*), legal punishment (i.e. that inflicted on the ‘subject of law’); in other words, because the nature of the crime and therefore that of the punishment are also different. Hence, too, the different ‘episteme’ on which the different concepts of the offender as ‘author’ is constructed. One might argue that what is missing in Foucault is the delimitation of the types of individualities he indistinctly refers to as ‘subjects’, but which, in reality (in their radical historicity) only the ‘legal’ is; the ‘corporal’ belonging to feudal organicism, where one is only master or serf.

The second (ideological) problem modernity presents for this same fundamentalism: not accepting this free reading/writing, while at the same time accepting an economic way of life (the capitalist market) that does not function outside this private sphere (and which comes from the factory with free subjectivity, like the kind of software that adapts to the circumstances of the user) from which the subject *constructs* their imaginary relationship with the material necessity of selling their labour (and, very importantly, extracting the ‘absolute added value’, their time, which is everything, or allowing it to be extracted, and the ‘relative added value’, their qualification, which, by default, also includes education in being a free subject). And so, *we have a problem*.

In this sense, the study of the ideological problematic presented in the book by JCR cited above, although it deals with the first three centuries of modernity, is an excellent guide to training in the ‘art of war’ against one’s own unconscious: a war that consists above all in becoming aware of the historicity that defines us and analysing the notions we spontaneously deal with in our discourses, in a way that is no less natural than that of those we call ‘the other’ but who live in the same ‘market world’. In this sense, our world is a world full of authors, whether recognised or not.

On the other hand, the above quote from *Teoría e historia* serves as a warning to the reader as to what we mean here by the ‘importance of nuance’ (and the sometimes-complicated prose that makes it possible), which will be a constant throughout this book. And it is precisely in these nuances (and in their own ideological inscription) that its strength lies, because it is exclusively about one thing: the problem of *belonging* and the *pertinence* of what we say and what we do, with or without words, in this world, but also, hypothetically, what this saying/doing could have been in others.

It is precisely because we belong to a very specific world (Spain and the globalised market in which its society is inscribed today in 2023) that the relevance of what we say does not depend exclusively on our (conscious/unconscious) intention as authors. For example, this book *does not deal with* the meaning or meaninglessness of everyday life, but it does belong to a world in which this is a relevant topic,<sup>13</sup> from which, therefore, nobody can remove themselves. If one does one's best to avoid the discussion, the topic will be equally present in one's discourse, but *in the negative*. Therefore, everything that belongs to the world of this concern (of literal social relations, as a world in which everything is on its own terms, starting with the market, must be literal) will be considered a 'personal view', whether sincere or biased, worried or unworried, certainly, but always concerned by this 'universal theme', i.e. in the final analysis, by a position taken with respect to it.

In this sense, our book fully embraces his ideology: *the ideology of the literal meaning of life or, in other words, the ideology of the free subject whose transcendence requires a sublime object destined to be reproduced on its own terms: subjectivity itself.*

The present text is thus pervaded by another abstract discursive question that has been inescapable since the 18th century: that of human nature (with or without uppercase), through which our ideology (in general) has been conceived in a multiplicity of meanings of life (those of each 'author', in other words, of every mother's son in their everyday life). 'Human nature' is again (even if its postmodern critics, among whom I count myself, abhor the term as a bourgeois inven-

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13 However detached it may be because of subversive or transgressive postmodernism, conformism or alienation, consumer intoxication, drugs, entertainment and new technologies such as 'artificial intelligence' (which we will discuss in the third part of this essay), etc.; but, even so, as a 'theme' that centres on very specific discursive coordinates, and precisely in the problematic raised by all these questions.

tion that is today even controlled through pharmacology) the concept that provides the necessary transcendence to realise our inscription in modern critical discourse. This could be considered paradoxical, were it not for the fact that this book criticises ideology from a position that defends knowledge of it, even in its unconscious dimension. And, in due course, we will enter into the heart of the ideological/libidinal question.

Another paradox in which our ideological unconscious entangles us is that our struggle against the dichotomy of form/content may be reinterpreted as a particular form (the genre of the essay) and a particular content (the opinions of a free subject), as opposed to the conviction that form and content complement each other in expressing the vision, voice, sincerity or vitality of an individual expressing themselves out of their own sense or reason (which corresponds to common human nature); an expression that is simultaneously intended for oneself and for others (which, strangely enough, is not perceived as paradoxical by anyone, because it is also part of what the unconscious dictates to us), namely as a particular ‘order of discourse’ of this author.

Our book deals with the issue delineated in the last parenthesis; but with the expressive relations between the previous two, we have a ‘conscientious objection’. ‘Discursive genres’ (and specifically, here, the ‘essay’) are forms established by a radically historical content, insofar as it alludes to a concrete social problematic, which must necessarily be displaced by another discursively abstract one. The meaning of the latter is radically historical, and therefore the ‘cultural significance’ of a particular genre in practice (in the life of so-called modernity) presupposes the separation of the same form of *merit*: the public value of private virtue (which one could call sensitivity, or intelligent, critical, creative thought, etc.). This, and not the phenomenology of artistic forms, is what shapes discursive, literary and other genres. This might

be called an alternative vision, or ‘thought provoking’, or simply ideological or political.<sup>14</sup> But our aim is to relativise this established prejudice against the ideological/political.

Thus, for example, the idea of human nature embodied in the subjectivity that expresses itself is not just one interpretation among many of this nature,<sup>15</sup> but, above all, the logic from which discourse in general emerges today. It is the logic or subject/nature dialectic that characterises every manifestation of (more or less intelligent) visions or voices, sincerities or deceptions,<sup>16</sup> vitalisms or negativisms, be they individual or collective, because they are always seen as the work of subjects who are (ideologically) autonomous, and, when the time comes, authentic, even if they forget this in their daily alienation, since this forgetfulness is in fact the consequence of having this freedom as a presupposition.

This will always be the key to the nature of the subject: to be and to seem free from its history, or, in other words, from the sign of legitimate exploitation. The subject is ‘free’ in that sense. Anything else will simply be meaningless; it will be ‘nothing’.

And, of course, reference to nothingness is particularly appropriate at this historical conjuncture, in which existentialism has thematised it as a key concept (i.e. as a supposedly universal theme). And this is what I would like to make clear from the outset: that notions expressed at historical conjunctures, notwithstanding their lack of connection with the way of life of particular social groups, remain

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14 Elsewhere (Aparicio 2018a, pp. 135–146), we have explored how the dominant ideology is concentrated in ‘paratexts’ such as those on book flaps. It would be interesting to perform the same analysis with the judgements for the different Nobel Prizes for Literature. For the rest, this paper aims to argue why the ideological difference is not in the paratexts or in the texts, but in discourses belonging to different historical (and, therefore, also ideological) conjunctures. It is as simple as that.

15 Cf. Stevenson (*op. cit.*)

16 See Sokal and Bricmont (1999).

ideological terms. As such, they are specifically symptomatic of the problems experienced through social relations from which these debates are saturated with responses that suture (but do not settle) their contradictions; in this case, those of the ideology of the free subject of modern commercial societies, or, what is generally the same, absolutely all the contradictions that have had to be legitimised in modern (and postmodern) intersubjective social relations.

The fact that existentialism has dealt with the converse, the paradox or the irony of the social/material existence of this subject at some point in the 20th century does not imply a difference in ideological foundation from other discourses that opt to sublimate the meaning of this same existence through notions like *will*, *nation*, *motherland*, *party* (of whatever political persuasion), *God* (as has already been pointed out, in modernity this will always be a private option), or (free and communicative) *true love*, or a thousand other notions, all of them inscribed in the ideology of the free subject.

In view of all of the above, the following reflection by Leslie Stevenson (1992) would seem to be incorrect. It is worth quoting at length:

But as I have already suggested in quoting Sartre, there are many other views of human nature than these two. The theories of the ancient Greeks, especially of their great philosophers Plato and Aristotle, still influence us today. More recently, Darwin's theory of evolution and Freud's psychoanalytic speculations have fundamentally affected our understanding of ourselves. And modern philosophy, psychology and sociology continue to offer us new theories about human nature. Outside the Western tradition, there have been Chinese, Indian, and many others.

Some of these views are embodied in human societies



and institutions, as Christianity and Marxism have been. If so, they are not just intellectual theories, but ways of life, subject to change, growth and decay. A system of beliefs about human nature that is held by some group of people as giving rise to their way of life is standardly called an 'ideology.' Christianity and Marxism are certainly ideologies in this sense, but existentialism does not seem to be, since there is obviously no social group for which it defines a way of life.

An ideology, then, is more than a theory, but it does involve some theoretical conception of human nature that suggests in some way a form of action (...) (pp. 20–21).

To be precise, this explanation of the ideological seems incorrect, not because in it the notion of human nature is presented as a presupposition which simply examines itself in the light of the various visions/theories in which it has tried to recognise itself (i.e. according to the kind of Hegelian positivism passed down through American pragmatism which only considers concepts as a series of reactions by 'human experience' to reality, in which the progress of 'knowledge' is the product of a deductive or inductive process), but because it defines ideology as that vision/theory which gives rise to a 'way of life' (Max Weber's position, for example, according to which Protestant morality gives rise to the first capitalism, when it is exactly the other way round)<sup>17</sup> This, of course, requires the exclusion of existentialism for the simple reason that there is no known society or social group with a particular way of life that is ideologically existentialist, as the way of life of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba or North Vietnam would have been ideologically communist, which we would question since it may be the case that words and deeds simply speak of a great contradiction,

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17 Cf. Weber 1930.

that occurring within a world fundamentally controlled by capitalist logics, which communist policies simply oppose with the domination of their respective ‘revolutions’ which are, above all, ultimately repressions of a hegemonic global logic. This also applies to ideologically Islamist societies, which are dominated (but ultimately not controlled) by discourses that deny free subjectivity (which is the ideological key to today’s global capitalism), but not the kind of exploitation in which they live in practice (with all the ‘cultural differences’ one might think of), such as the Taliban or the Islamic State, which impose an extreme discursive morality and theocratic policy (very different from Western liberalism), but which are not leery of autonomy at an economic level.

In other words, in our opinion, Stevenson makes the mistake of not taking into account that explicit discourses (such as existentialism) are one thing, while the ideological unconscious (the norm of the free subject, which can manifest itself in different ways depending on the person, group, and upbringing) is another. And it is perhaps the latter that has suffered from various kinds of neuroses in the case of communism and Islamism. And, make no mistake, we also suffer from these same neuroses in our free Western world (where freedom is taken for granted), for reasons that are essentially less different from what one might believe, for example, discourses that deny the existence of God but seek his transcendence in statements of the type of ‘we are energy’, ‘we are stardust’ or ‘the selfish gene’, etc., while at the same time abstracting from the specific character of what determines them in practice and influences the meaning of their lives and their discourse: their mode of production. Hence the heated debates about the ‘mystery of life’, ‘culture’, ‘free will’ (which today, unlike theological notions that no longer play a role at the public level, involves the dichotomy of *agency/physical reality*) or ‘gender identity’, etc.

However, if we consider their radical historicity and not phe-

nomenological abstractions about ‘the political’ or ‘the religious’, the discourse in the various communist dictatorships of the 20th century and the discourse of radical Islamism (e.g. from 2001 onwards) are two ways of inscribing oneself in the concrete social problematic that globalised capitalism has generated. And, of course, each conjuncture has brought with it very specific problems in other regards, apart from its particular violence and oppression.<sup>18</sup>

What we would like to make clear is that, when we speak today of Bush (junior), Osama bin Laden or Vladimir Putin, for example, it would be a mistake not to see that the infrastructural basis of the world in which these three ‘models’ of their respective ‘societies’ coexist at any given moment is influenced by the same hegemonic social relations on a global scale (this and nothing else is what ‘globalisation’ essentially is), with the result that their discursive responses (and attacks are discourses, however odious they may seem) will logically be very different. But the underlying problem, which is experienced through the ideological/libidinal unconscious, is the same.

It is now necessary to return to the notion of the *merit* of the author who expresses himself, because here perhaps it becomes clearer what we mean when we say that the basic ideology is the same in explicit discourses that build on antagonistic positions or even, as Laclau and his followers suggest, on an agonistic/Habermasian pluralism (even when these discourses are extremely uncomfortable operating within their limits of meaning). And here, the question is not limited to the concepts of ‘success’ or ‘fashion’.

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18 Of course, religious violence is a constant in the history of Islam, as with other religions; but here we are concerned with the particular effects of capitalist social relations (and their unconscious norm): the free subject) in societies whose discourse – like feudal society – is still organic, implying as a relevant feature the fact that it excludes – again, only discursively, since this is impossible in practice – the idea that subjectivity belongs to the individual (and in this sense, such a discourse denies the individual’s freedom to be free, and to seem free), etc.

In other words, according to our initial thesis, the fact that some are more *successful* with what they write and others less so is explained by the different ‘impact’ that the ideological matrix (the free subject) has on the social problematic underlying these social formations as a whole, in which certain individuals, due to the particular character of their ideological/libidinal unconscious, manage to expose the contradictions that this matrix encounters in practice, and do so in a way that is much more problematic but also – and this is the key – much more legitimate. From *this* follows the interest and value of these individual discourses, which now create ‘trends’. Therefore, success (which should not be equated with merit, since the latter is rather the unwritten norm or criterion that establishes the social value of individual discourse) should not be seen as the result of the (superfluous or meritorious) glorification of ‘originality’, which may even be considered tendentious or, if not, unjust. On the contrary, success through discourse itself implies a particular way of inscribing oneself in the ‘normal’ that the author *concedes* to the audience.

But we must also consider another nuance: even works that find little ‘public reception’ assume the notion of merit that *precedes* their discourse, so that, regardless of the ‘quality’ of the author’s ‘propositions’, these are always realised through the image of the ‘similar’, multiplied in the image of which merit is the ‘ephemeral mediator’, i.e. the modern notion of the *audience*, of which the author himself is part and which he makes potentially exquisite.

The concept of ‘audience’ thus expresses a *similarity in the literality* of the immanent subjects, who are therefore open to interpretation (within the norm of free subjectivity, of course), in this case separate from the economic instance of the market of works, whose price (including the price of the book as well as the price of the ticket to the show) likewise merits a whole discursive field, because here one buys

the right to criticise content, form and even intent (a problem that – in the sense of the similarity of individuals and the immanence of their lives, thoughts and creations – would occupy philosophers from the 18th century onwards). This concept, together with the concept of purchase, creates nothing less than a new discursive genre: criticism with public/objective value (and non-essentialist, i.e. quite different from the essentialist truth-value with its antithesis, that of the cynic or sophist, and in a certain sense the stoic typical of the classical Greco-Roman slave-owning world; nor the other critique inscribed in feudal serfdom, where judgement must be anchored in the religious/dogmatic, or even in organicist notions such as those of the decadence of the body and the allegorical value of the sublunary world, etc.), and an amateurish/professional type of individual who practises it: the critic.<sup>19</sup>

But we also know that one doesn't need words to say or do things that are relevant to society. One belongs to life and is relevant only through one's practical presence in it, i.e. through one's participation in the process of reproducing life (not necessarily in the biological sense, although that was very relevant until recently). What happens is that words leave concrete/observable 'traces' of a belonging, but never of originary truths lost for the future, which must, therefore, be traced (according to the claims, until recently at least, of post-modernity). No. If there were such a truth, it would become necessary and therefore pertinent, such that it would sooner or later be expressed (produced) anew. But, in the radically historical practice of discourse, that seems impossible to us.

Perhaps writing leaves such traces in time, but this is a time that covers them over with *its* history, with a completely new ideological 'humus', under which the old utterances barely produce an echo of meaning, which moreover always comes too late (as Hegel recognised). At best, future readers of these texts have to reinvent their relevance,

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19 See Rodríguez 2001a, pp. 11–32.

(as Borges was able to see). This is what philologists do, after having broken them down letter by letter, sentence by sentence, context by context. At the end of the road, whatever the findings, the same sense with which the search began is still relevant. For example, this is the transcendence of our ‘humanities’, which incidentally have always been in ‘crisis’ since their appearance in Italian cities, because there the word humanity takes on its meaning not only anthropocentrically, but also in the most complete and radical theological (Christian) sense: only the free subject can say of themselves that they are not poor in spirit and – if they sincerely recognise it – deserve heaven.

In this sense, immanent (literal) humanity (not citizenship, *ousia* or nobility) does not exist until Petrarch’s time. This first economically and politically mercantile society, which abandoned blood and lineage in favour of merit, albeit in extremely ambiguous forms, is the one that invented the ‘human interpretation’ of the Greco-Roman classics (from the Renaissance to our studies of classical philology), while also being open to the free interpretation of the scriptures (the Protestantism which also emerged from this world, and not the other way around, as Max Weber thinks). Both interpretations belong (even in embryonic form) to modern (pre-revolutionary) intersubjective relations, and only in them does it therefore become relevant to reread these texts as works that interpellate us even today.

But this immanence of the classical word is a very concrete form of meaning that has nothing to do with the ideological matrix that produced the ancient texts. This is, in part, why Foucault famously said that we are the Greeks. That is to say, insofar as this means that in ancient texts one finds an enormous number of statements that can be assimilated to the ideology of the free subject, Foucault’s *boutade* simply seems correct, ‘I only know that I know nothing’, ‘know thy-

self’, ‘take care of oneself’,<sup>20</sup> etc., except that the same statements (and what they presuppose for us) put into the mouths of the classics are no longer anachronisms, but a refusal to recognise the meaning of a world made up of a history that is infinitely different from our own.

However, as far as history and historicity are concerned, the world of smell and sight are graces that heaven did not want to give us, for we do not see beyond our noses.

Take, for example, the image of the Greek ‘logos’. Although scholars have an extremely precise (i.e. anachronism-proof) etymological grasp of the term in question, it ultimately speaks to us today of a kind of ingenious intuition on the part of the Greeks to divine what we today presuppose in our concept of ‘language’ (in the current and more general sense that connects it to the problematic of the container and content of ‘thought’ and ‘knowledge’), etc. Consider now, for example, the myths of the ‘Magna Carta’ (1215) or the ‘Laws of Burgos’ (1512), still considered by many today as milestones of constitutionalism and human rights, respectively. In other words, are we not perhaps dealing here with the repression or ignorance of the fact that the

Barons’ rebellion was asking for guarantees for the nobility in revolt, and that this has nothing to do with *parliamentary democracy (with or without monarchy)*, something that the bourgeoisie would invent much later, by cutting off the head of Charles I of England in 1649? The bourgeoisie, a class that can be entered if one prospers, as we see in the literal, or rather, in the life narrated by Lazaro de Tormes himself, a poor man of this literal world and not a ‘poor man of God’;<sup>21</sup> although in 1554 there was still the refrain of the poor who were born and died as such, as the nobles were born and died nobles, and whose existence, in the book of the world, was not literal but allegorical: a degraded reflection of the di-

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20 Foucault (2005), pp. 13–35.

21 See Rodríguez 2001b, op. cit.

vine book, where they worthily occupied the last or lowest ‘natural place’ amongst men, etc. Equally suppressed and ignored is the history of the ideological disorder that marks a social formation in transition from feudalism to the modern state, which led the Spanish monarchy to declare the ‘natives’ of America subjects (introduction of the ‘*requerimiento*’ and the *encomienda*).<sup>22</sup> However, although the American Indians were removed from the animal kingdom, they were included under the aegis of servile exploitation, which, in time, would lead to the second bourgeois revolution of the Spanish-American wars of independence.<sup>23</sup> Nothing to do, then, with what we understand today by ‘human rights’.

Or, without going further afield, an image that is much closer in time, outdated in terms of its classist air, but which retains its positive aura (partly promoted by Hollywood, of course, but always responding to what is relevant in our social relations): the figure of the ‘gentleman’, whose qualities are still cultivated precisely because of its lack of definition, in which any type of film destined to be of interest must be inscribed. This interest or charisma resides in the special way it is inscribed in the contradictions of its material (social) conjuncture: specifically, those arising from the need for transcendence in a world of literal relations (that is, between equal people in a world whose immanence includes them all), an ideology undermined by contradictions: authenticity, self-improvement, and the capacity for amazement, for example, coexisting with loneliness, unemployment, political correctness and exploitation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, we find that the gallant and discreet gentleman (let us now forget the Victorian original, who does not work and simply hobnobs with the aristocracy) is, at best, always at the boundary

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22 For an analysis of the issue of Lascasasism, see Rodríguez and Salvador (2005), pp. 26–33.

23 *Ibid.* 52–365.

24 For us, this is a basic concept inherent to the social relations that mark the practical meaning of life.



in the generational process of what the concept of ‘good taste’ is for the current concept of ‘education’ (from which educational laws are now compulsively reformed, which is where the relevance of discourse is most urgent): namely, a ghost, an echo.

Incidentally, it is the ‘generational’ for which there is a certain sense of historical loss, both in terms of belonging to the world beyond us and the relevance of what was said and done in the past in relation to the present. We still give relevance to those who have lost their place in our lives as readers; we call them ‘the classics’. In one of these 20<sup>th</sup>-century classics, Hermann Hesse has his most famous character, Harry Haller, say the following:

A man of the Middle Ages would detest the whole mode of our present-day life as something far more than horrible, far more than barbarous. Every age, every culture, every custom and tradition has its own character, its own weakness and its own strength, its beauties and ugliness; accepts certain sufferings as matters of course, puts up patiently with certain evils. It regards certain sufferings as natural, while accepting certain evils with patience. Human life is reduced to real suffering, to hell, only when two ages, two cultures and religions overlap. A man of the Classical Age who had to live in medieval times would suffocate miserably, just as a savage does in the midst of our civilisation. Now there are times when a whole generation is caught in this way between two ages, two modes of life, with the consequence that it loses all power to understand itself and has no standard, no security, no simple acquiescence. Naturally, everyone does not feel this equally strongly. A nature such as Nietzsche’s had to suffer our present ills more than a generation in advance. What he had to go through alone and misunderstood, thousands suffer today.

But this is an analysis that is unconsciously Lukácsian, in the sense that it associates the social with an ascendant or decadent *Zeitgeist*,<sup>25</sup> whereas we associate the social with the production of the notions with which individuals inscribe themselves in their social relations. Hence, let us be consistent (not by accepting Mannheim's paradox, which is based on accepting the subjective condition of the ideology from which the ideological object is studied, but by accepting the ideological condition of the subject/object dichotomy that determines us, whether we see it or not) with the fact that criticising the ideology of our conjuncture does not mean that our text is not inscribed in it. In a word, the critique of the ideology of the free subject as a radically historical ideological matrix may well be just another way of distilling the image of the free subject. And, in fact, it is. However, there is one caveat. If exploitation does what we say it does, then Althusser's theory of ideology, of ideological state apparatuses, masterfully nuanced in JCR's later theory of the 'ideological unconscious', points to the possibility of knowing what makes us say 'I am', whether we want to or not. Hence the importance of the link between Marxism and psychoanalysis.<sup>26</sup> But the scope of this theoretical link will be defined later.

At this point, we shall only note that the above phenomenological treatises on the pair of quasi-homonyms (*pertenencia/pertinencia*, or belonging/pertinence) would be idle here (but never impertinent in an ideological terrain steeped in phenomenological linguistics) if we did not place them on a solid foundation, i.e. if we did not clarify their affiliation to and relevance in certain social relations. This is an idea that we find not only in sociological-Marxist cultural criticism and studies, but also in authors evidently inscribed in the general cultural debate. What

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25 Something that we see addressed as a theme primarily in Spengler (2020).

26 See Rodríguez 2022.

is relevant here, then, leads us to take the following words from the story ‘Putois’ by Anatole France,<sup>27</sup> out of context when he says: ‘Putois was. I can affirm it. He was. Consider it, gentlemen, and you will admit that a state of *being* by no means implies substance, and means only the bonds attributed to the subject, expresses only a *relation*.’

Physical matter belongs to social materiality, but is not relevant to it. What is relevant is the relation between being and seeming and the subject. But this is, of course, the propositional relationship between the subject and its predicate. With social relations, on the other hand, the problem is that the ‘subject’ did not always exist and the attribute was not always ‘subjective’ or ‘objective’. To be relevant, i.e. to make sense, the relations of which the character Monsieur Bergeret speaks in the above-mentioned story must pertain to a way of being and seeming in which there are ‘subjects’. The characterological description of Putois by those who, in the story, rather than remembering him, are taking him into account for their conscious forgetting, denotes the importance both of the physical form and of what in our phenomenological tradition (Ortega or Julián Marías)<sup>28</sup> is referred to as the biographical *instalación* of the ‘person’, in which the relations between the individual and others come into play; and of the relations of the individual with themselves (their ‘projects’, ‘illusions’ and ‘concealments’); or of the individual with objects, etc. But this is a subject that already takes for granted its freedom to be and to seem in and before the world. The question now is whether this biographical subject emanates from a (psychological) ‘I’ or whether, on the contrary, it is forcibly separated from an ideologically constructed (historical) ‘I am’ by the necessity to install/inscribe itself in their world.

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27 In CRANE, M. (1984). Fifty Great American Short Stories. Bantam Classics, New York, pp. 118–132.

28 Cf. more concretely Marías (1997).



**I**

**THE MARXIST PARADOX**



# 1

## From *I* to ‘I am’

*As I must do something or go mad, I write this diary.*

Bram Stoker

### Non-meaning or the poetics of the self

That we are mortal, speaking and gendered is perhaps the only thing that is clear in Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory. ‘Everything else is a mess’, JCR stated one day in a (truly masterful) lecture on Cervantes. Indeed, the Lacan who places death in the ‘realm of faith’ (for ‘if we did not believe in it, it would be impossible to endure this story’) is, in our opinion, as clear and concise as can be.<sup>29</sup> The rest can be considered a tremendous mess, yes, but only as far as the thematisation of the problem of the ‘I’ is concerned.<sup>30</sup>

Louis Althusser, JCR’s mentor, adopted the Lacanian ‘subject’ in its ideological dimension. However, this consisted of a ‘form of the subject’ conceived as the universal (or transhistorical) form in which individuals were ‘interpellated (in the passive) by ideology’, through all

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29 Naturally, here there is the Lacanian interpretation of Heidegger and man as a being for death, and so on. For a ‘radically historical’ study of Heidegger’s work, see Rodríguez 2011b. For the relation between Lacan and ideological critique, see Žižek (2006a and 2006b).

30 Rodríguez (2005a, 2022).

epochs. According to Althusser, the self only makes sense insofar as ideology interpellates us as subjects, and in each epoch this subject has adopted different notions depending on what each society accepted as a subjective norm. A good Roman citizen is not the same as a good feudal vassal or a good citizen of the Republic of France, etc. In other words, the form of the *subject* is the form of *meaning* from which the self is recognised and can communicate (interpellate and be interpellated) as an individual in a particular social formation. However, it should be noted that it is the condition of subject that implies the possibility of being interpellated in each of these senses. And that is the nuance emphasised by JCR: there is no universal subject, but ideological matrices for every kind of historical individuality.

It is here that we find his ‘nuance/matrix’, the difference with respect to his mentor (‘he taught me to read’, he says), for JCR (the ‘disciple’) understands immediately (from his seminal

*Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica*) that the key to the problem of the self lies in the delimitation of the specific ‘ideological matrix’ from which radically historical meanings are produced, and not in the problem of the phenomenon, in the abstract, of interpellation. For JCR, this is instead a problematic referring to modes of saying ‘I am’, modes of which the ‘subject’ is only one, namely the ‘I am (a free subject)’ as *a form of interpellation in the capitalist mode of production*, or, more precisely, the ideological (discursive) production specific to intersubjective social relations and not to others.

And the latter is the theoretical ‘path’ that we also take, because, if the problem of subjectivity itself seems insoluble to us, focusing on the historical complexity that determines it reveals to us a whole observable and recognisable practical problematic. Indeed, in order to delineate the different historical forms of interpellation, one must consider the history of the subject-subject relations in the different mod-



ern social formations, i.e. in the different phases of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which naturally develop differently where the bourgeoisie and its social relations evolve in an economic, political and ideological terrain which is also unequal, since the effects of these relations on the feudal structure within which the birth of the new (and thus the death of the old) system of servitude takes place are also different. In this sense, England, France, Spain and Germany are clearly different. Nevertheless, there are a number of similarities concerning the relations between the private and the public, the relations between the constitution of the ideological ('free') subject of the new economic relations and the public domain, from which the concept of 'merit' is derived. It is this productive relationship on which we are going to 'focus'.

With many problems and contradictions – since, let's say, Petrarch and his concept of 'beautiful souls' (which was already in the air, but which he thematised in his sonnets) – there have been countless concrete ways of saying 'I am', since the ideological production of this subject has always been tied to each conjuncture.

The individual and their subjectivity (a concept that means nothing without its concrete ideological composition or filler) has not always been that of the subject. In history, a person interpellated or was interpellated as master or slave, lord or serf, or as subject versus subject. It therefore seems to us that this is the essential beginning of *understanding something*, if one wishes to avoid losing oneself in that other clamour of thought in which one must first unravel the Gordian knot of interpellation that results from the Lacan-Hegel binomial. There is a marvellous book that may be said to do this: the problem of interpellation as that of 'one that divides into two'.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, JCR taught us to delineate the central problem in such a jumble. He showed us the shortcut to understanding the unity

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31 See Dolar (2017).

(the problem) of the *I* in the plurality (dialectic) of ways of saying ‘I am’. He taught us to see in history what others look for in the clouds, at the bottom of the sea, or in the eyes of their beloved. And it is not that there are no answers in these places, or that we have become embittered cynics (anything is possible), but that these places are always reached by way of history. In history, we learn to tell what we have seen – a story that does not ask whether the individual or the collective was first, because it is a story, a voice that expresses only a relationship, the one found, for example, in every poem, every equation, every contract (of whatever kind), etc. Perhaps even more disturbingly, the haze from which good and bad verses emerge, the struggle with numbers, laughter and tears, etc. has only one meaning, the order of which we must simply know how to exchange in a very specific discursive market: the ideology of the *free subject*.

There are many ways to develop the themes dealing with the problematic of the free subject, but the puzzle is that the ‘ideological unconscious’ prevents us from addressing it as an ideological norm, and therefore our discourse ends up opting for the thematisations (original or not) that best fit our particular way of saying ‘I am (a free subject)’. Frankly, we do not quite know what this approach is due to, but it would not be too audacious to associate it with education. In any case, in the final analysis, the meaning of what is inside the last parenthesis depends on what each person understands within very clear limits: the private and the public. Therefore, every (modern) discourse is always a thematisation of one of the two levels in relation to the other (private/public; divided into subjective/objective discourse and their respective gradations and combinations). No matter how extreme the end result is, the spectre of the other level will always be present.

We can see that the private/public relationship is the unfolding of the intersubjective (subject/subject) relationship in the following

proposition: if the subject is the idea of inner autonomy, then its exterior must be a copy of that autonomy. The political level must likewise be autonomous insofar as it is governed by private subjects, who all the subjects legitimise in exchange for protecting their autonomy. This is what we mean when we say ‘I am’ in modernity.

But beneath the forms of saying ‘I am’, there is an ‘order of discourse’ (Foucault). Questioning it as such leads to the assertion that it is only possible to abandon this order through subversion. As a rule, this means adopting one of the dialectics inscribed in this order and taking it to its – supposedly – ultimate consequences to the detriment of the others: be it silence, absurdity or suicide. Worse still, when one sets out to be neutral (to speak from objectivity, humanism, reason, communication, etc.), as on so many occasions nowadays, one turns to the classics to speak for us, almost without fine distinctions. And there are a lot of fine distinctions involved when you put Aristotle, Nietzsche and Augustine together in a debate; because that’s the problem: we are well aware that they think differently, but we don’t realise that the problems that define their discourses, however brilliant they may be, also isolate the topic of debate. In other words, we are resorting to a disparity of contemporary dialectics (i.e. the various current linguistic theories that move between the lexico-semantic, the morpho-syntactic, the sociolinguistic and the pragmatic, the textual and the contextual, as if they were different sides of the phenomenon) and those from the past (e.g. we relate Athenian democracy to the current partitocracy), as the script of one’s approach requires.

The question is complex, but the theory allows us the following simplification: in history, there have been other subjectivities, i.e. processes of individuation outside the subject (i.e. neither free nor chained). Thus, in the slavery of antiquity, there were *masters* and *slaves*, and in feudalism, *lords* and *serfs*. Those were the ways of saying ‘I am’.

Nowadays, this statement (most of the time not explicit) alludes to seemingly symmetrical relations. But this is the goal of our argument: to arrive at an effective understanding, we must first examine something no less debatable, but much opaquer. Let's first try to understand it, and then see how the 'I am' (ultimately, the ideology of the social relations involved) takes over in terms of its practical sense of life.

But there is another level, the dark, deep one hidden at the level of the production of egoic meanings, a level that seems to satisfy its own *needs* (but never its *desires*) by blindly insisting on an interplay consisting of projecting the paradigmatic axis (that of the inventory of possible combinations) onto that of production (the axis of effective combination, i.e. of movement, modernisation, the reproduction of meaning with a certain present sense – albeit unrecognisable – at a conscious level, etc.), just as with the poetic function of language,<sup>32</sup> but as if that ultimately determines the practical (viable) meaning of the voice of the ego, an interplay that is dangerous in principle, since – if we follow Lacan – it looks to madness or death not as limits but as obstacles to *the excess of enjoyment* (the notion of *jouissance* points to this if nothing else), which, of course, in reality exists only as a phantasmatic symptom (the *objet petit a*): without this instance of the psyche, we would not like anything or anyone much.<sup>33</sup>

And yet the psychic machinery is able to experiment with, test and reproduce itself normally in a world full of limits: material, social,

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32 Jakobson (1974).

33 As we see it, *jouissance* by no means signifies a possibility of breaking with the 'subject position', as Roland Barthes (2007) suggests, since, as we shall see, the subject is the exclusively productive position in bourgeois social formations, whose social relations exist exclusively between subjects. One would, therefore, have to disagree with Barthes in the sense that the texts of 'pleasure' (the sayable) are no more subjective than those of 'jouissance' (the ineffable), the latter being those in which, for the French structuralist, the individual would supposedly liberate themselves, as in sexual relations (and the purely physiological 'does not exist' for Lacan) by freeing themselves from the condom, etc.

cultural and psychological (fears, phobias, obsessions, etc.); i.e. the self as the limit of the self and thus as the inner separation between its being and *the nothingness* into which the limit itself splits. But, as we have seen, what creates the conditions making possible the practical stability towards which the ego tends is, paradoxically, what subverts it: the ego itself with its needs, desires, frustrations, passions and pleasures, etc. In this – let’s say – playful take on the ‘I’, with its madness and its security, which realises itself in its mutual confusion, lies the interplay of the Ego. It is the ego that seems to chase its own tail, especially during the interplay of dreams, where the ‘I’ can even openly express itself, but when one awakens, not only does one forget the dream, but its meaning is retroactively truncated: ‘It wasn’t (and therefore never was) exactly that’.

In this sense, the presence of meaning is generated by forgetting itself: the dream ‘I’ only enjoyed, or was horrified by, not a combination of forms, but by the combining itself. (cf. Žižek 2008).

The *I*, then, must surrender to the evidence, during conscious wakefulness, of the sense of forgetting something that never was, forgetting a concrete nothingness, a kind of geometric dance that one only recognises when it falls apart in conscious memory (identifications, displacements, reversals, gradations, etc.). This is why the process of forgetting the dream becomes forgetting wakefulness, a state which, as we shall see, is also largely unconscious, because the ‘I am’ is taking control (without domination) of the ‘I’. This is the conscious ‘I’, but its practical voice, the (historical) ‘I am’, that of the social relations that each one lives from their condition as an individual belonging to a collectivity, not as the sum of individualities, but in the form of the constant subtraction of everything in individuals that hinders these social relations. It is in the radically historical dialectic of the ‘I am’ that we find the opposite procedure. Unlike the ‘I’, the ‘I am’ is projected

onto the axis of combination, where it produces the ‘discourse’. This, in turn, is projected onto the paradigmatic axis, i.e. by the fact that the merit or social value of discursive practice is ultimately that acquired by this or that genre, this or that profession, this or that taste,<sup>34</sup> in its texts and in its gestures.

And yet, what we objectively know about the self is very little (and very controversial).<sup>35</sup> It leads only to the conclusion that we don’t really know anything. What’s more: knowing we do not know is precisely what the ego dedicates itself to *proving*, converting the known nothingness, as one might say, into a paradigmatic series (the available forms:<sup>36</sup> literary, political, economic, moral, religious, scientific, etc.) of a whole whose combination (the specific mode of production in which these paradigms occur) is unappealable. Hence, the best psychoanalysis (at least the most celebrated) resolves itself in acceptance of the fact that one must accept the insoluble and sabotage as the only solid material. The objective excess of the aphorism as a textual form that calls for moderation, for temperance before its sublime object of study, can be nothing else.

Sentences that are as hermetic as their exegeses are awaited, based in turn on a process of forgetting that which serves no purpose for social relations. This leads back to the only thing that can make complete sense: ideology, in other words, the fact that the dialectic of conscious wakefulness is also symptomatic of another familiar nothingness, that surrounding the social whole, whose control is projected onto the individual’s domain every time he or she says ‘I am’. More-

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34 The text by Francisco Rico (2003), *Los discursos del gusto*, has always drawn our attention, both for its traditional prose and for its agile ideas. It is an exercise in good rhetorical taste as well as an exaltation of philology in the 21st century.

35 But it is precisely this Gordian knot of the psychic machinery that psychoanalysis (according to the Freudian-Lacanian line of thought) assumes to constitute its object of investigation. See Lacan (2007).

36 Heidegger speaks of ‘availability’ as the essence of technology.

over, this nothingness means something very specific: that there is no other way of enunciating it than that which occurs in certain real conditions of existence. This, and nothing else, is the subject of this book.

But first, we need to say a few words about this dimension, which is beyond the scope of our work (and our competence). Specifically, we would like to clarify, before it is forgotten, why it is important to discard the psychological sense of the pronoun 'I'. As mentioned earlier, it is because the self is based on a strictly configured non-sense. It is important to understand why our inquiry must start with an idea that remains reasonably true to its *reality*, precisely because it must be left behind. And in order to leave it behind, one must first get to know it, at least briefly. Only then can we come to terms with the effective construction of meaning: that of the '(historical) I am'.

And, when this is done, we enter the realm of individuation, which includes both the 'I' (which we will leave behind) and the 'I am' (which we will examine in depth).

And we have a dual relation to these everyday journeys (which for many are impossible or in any case full of misfortune): on the one hand, that which presupposes a *before* the point of departure,<sup>37</sup> a before the home (which of course in so many cases is uncertain or directly denied); and, on the other, childhood as a supervening metamorphosis, i.e. one's response to the fact that what is given is in fact (in practice) the materiality of our life, one's own social inscription. Hence the armour that covers us entirely when we wake up, like a 'beetle'. We are thus exposed both to the chaos of inner time (this fusion of past, present and future) and to the order of outer time (a single material time: uncertain, changeable, but dominant), which determines us in advance, i.e. with no compassion for the previous world from which we are torn at birth, etc.

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37 And we are not talking here about the 'ages of man'.

This material transit, which imposes its meaning, is that of history. And this absolute realm in which everything appears at once, but at different points in a journey that is erased at the beginning; a moment of non-return, of pure constant new beginnings, whose truncated echo does not even have the sense of a contradiction. We are speaking of the voice of the *I*. But let us first see what that which is discarded consists of.

In a few words:

Since Freud, we know – at least – one thing, that the ego, the ‘I’, does not reign in its own house, the psyche. In it, the ego is only a part of its structure, the changing room, to be precise. In this dwelling, all decisions are made by the ‘superego’, which is the ensemble of inhabitants of the ideal house, and so the ego (its voice), is always divided into the *other* (another voice), a state in which the ego senses only a strange, nameless discomfort (or noise): the ‘id’.

For Heidegger, on the other hand, the ‘house of being’ is language. According to him, this has also, to a large extent, lost its ideal qualities of habitability. That is why Heidegger, in his search for ‘authenticity’, must reclaim the original concepts of the hearth (the heart of the house, the source of warmth) and with them trace (for Heidegger, thinking is nothing else) the ‘history of being’ back to its origins. And where better to do this than in the texts of the ancient Greeks, where words, when interpellated, can still be made to reveal the truth that their roots and morphemes once held? This would be the sediment on which marks of the ‘traces of thinking’, etc., remain.

But neither Freud nor Heidegger take into account one basic question: the radical historicity of the problems posed by their respective works. Indeed, the notion of ‘object of study’ (for both the Austrian psychiatrist and the German philosopher) implies, on the one hand,



the displacement of the problem (common to the whole of modernity) from the *literal view* of the world,<sup>38</sup> and, on the other, a concern (specific to the circumstances of the 19th and 20th centuries) with the *relative autonomy* of the observer with respect to their own synthetic judgments (hence analytical philosophy takes refuge in the analysis of propositions coherent in themselves), as well as the presuppositions and notions with which Heidegger considers the Greeks not only capable of interpellating *Sein* ('being') in *Seiende* ('beings') but also of leaving a record of it in the language bequeathed to posterity.

Indeed, the presuppositions on which these 20th-century authors base their approach to these problems make them a completely different matter, and make their discursive activities radically different from those of earlier authors with whom they nevertheless claim to be related. In reality, with their works, they inscribe themselves within a horizon that is completely alien to the humanity they claim to embrace, which is all of humanity. And, like Penrose's successive universes, each has his own.

Freud's and Heidegger's, and, to a large extent, our own is the 'phenomenological horizon'. This 'time of the magicians', of which Eilenberger (2019) speaks, is a conjuncture in which an entire social formation renews the attributes of its historically configured subjectivity through the concepts of *culture and thought* (Ernst Cassirer), *authenticity and thought* (Heidegger), *communication and thought* (Wittgenstein), or *modernity and thought* (Walter Benjamin). But Eilenberger tells us that they are all – and I repeat all – inscribed in the philosophy of language. And he is right, only he does not see this as an ideological unconscious, but as a further stage of human thinking about one's own being.

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38 And all the human sciences. Hence the 'crisis in the humanities' seems to be a fundamental but misunderstood question, because the humanities have always been in crisis in the sense that we have just described.

A philosopher who, in the year 1919, had nothing to say about the role of language in human knowledge and ways of life had absolutely nothing to say. Cassirer saw it that clearly. In fact, Wittgenstein, as well as Heidegger, Benjamin and Cassirer, would have confirmed the following statement without reservation at that stage of their thought (and at any other): the form of human life is a form of language. Language is not, in this sense, one symbolic form among many, but the most important and elementary form. It is the very foundation of our idea of the self and of the world. And, not insignificantly, it is the form in which philosophising is recognised and carried out as an unlimited 'discursive activity'. (119)

But this 'I' is nothing more than a precondition that has nothing to do with the effective subjectivity that expresses this 'world'. This subjectivity is historically shaped by a discursive 'I am' (e.g. I am free in my language or, in a negative sense, I am free because I know that 'the limits of my world are those of my language', etc.), without which there is no recognition of the 'you', as Hanna Arendt suggests, because it would be equally unthinkable, or, in the same elementary sense, in Pedro Salinas' *La voz a ti debida*, i.e. an authenticity that forces one to exist authentically and, at the same time, radically renewed through plurality (the you and the I), etc.

This ideological fullness of the 'I am' in no way excludes transformations of the individual through the effect of the 'other', because it is an initial fullness that is in any case at the root of the possibilities of transformation. The ideological matrix lies at the heart of maintaining the system (in the case of capitalism, the relations between free subjects) and of its transformative reproduction (the meaning of the subject's freedom is changed, its scope, etc., but not the form of the subject), as long as the system does not develop the cancerous growth

of another mode of production within it (like an *alien* that justifies its condition as host and manages to dominate the ship, but without controlling it). In this case, one matrix is replaced by another until both domination and control are achieved (which the bourgeoisie achieved from within feudalism between the 14th and 16th centuries, gaining full control from the 18th century onwards).

Therefore, to speak of an 'I' or a 'Being' prior to this historical shaping is simply useless. In any case, what precedes is not knowable except through a series of symptoms that allude, not so much to a substantial reality, but to the effect of the problematic of life. Lacan places the symptom on three levels or themes: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real.<sup>39</sup> For us, these three theoretical levels of analysing or interpreting the symptom are somewhat superfluous, since the question in this case is much simpler: texts (oral or written), however complex or simple they may be, always have the same real discursive thickness: that given them by a specific social problematic to which they invariably allude. In this sense (and we hope not to be misunderstood), the problem of the individual and the collective is the same with Hitler as with Gandhi: 'The Final Solution' and 'non-violence' are two possible solutions to the same specific social problem, i.e. capitalist social relations and their need for reproduction. However, it is the specificity of the European crisis in 1933, i.e. of the same capitalism that financed, from one day to the next, the outright attack on democracy Hitler proposed to the great German fortunes,<sup>40</sup> and the specificity of the impact of this same colonialist capitalism as it was implemented in India barely ten years earlier that gives substance to the discourses of one or the other. The horror of the Third Reich lies in what Hitler means when he speaks of the value of a people; but the concept of a people is the

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39 Žižek (1989, 2006b) develops it further without restraint.

40 De Jong (2022).

same as with Gandhi: in both cases, it is imbued with the concept of the individual – let us say – by precisely the spearhead that is supposed to heal the wound.<sup>41</sup>

Far from being relativism, this is the realisation that the impact of capitalist social relations in both conjunctures cries out for a happy ending. Yet we know that desires are always excessive and that necessity generates monsters or monstrosities of exploitation: that of war and that of peace.

The existence of the symptom, then, points to the fact that *what exists in practice is an apparatus that produces meaning and is unconsciously responsible (insofar as it has control) for the process of individuation, without which the self simply cannot function*, in which case we can (usually) speak of ‘madness’. The idea is as follows: in order to function normally, the drive/libidinal needs to be structured ‘as a language’, i.e. as a certain form of meaning, e.g. an obsession, a fixation, a habit, a sympathy, a sublimation or idealisation, a lapsus, etc. The symptom indicates that there has been repression or displacement from the formal rawness (chaos) of the pure ‘I’ (as a psychic reality without conscious meaning) to the practical life (the effective unfolding) of the ‘I’ on the historical basis of the ‘I am’.

However:

- a) When we say ‘I am’, we are always alluding to a practical reality, without which (biological) ‘life’ also means nothing real, i.e. our social relations. So, we allude to existing social relations that affect us at all times, because our lives exist in them.
- b) We say ‘I am’ – always – based on the *specific social problematic* that characterises social relations. Each historical conjuncture has its own, arising from the type of relations

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41 Žižek (1989, op. cit., p. xxvi)

imposed by the structure (or internal logic) of the Mode of Production, e.g. antiquity with its *master/slave* relations (or dialectic) in different phases (including the last one, the transition to feudalism); feudalism with its *lord/serf* relations (or dialectic) in different phases (including the transition to mercantilism and then to capitalism); capitalism with its relations (or dialectic) in different phases and specific regions (including the failed revolution of communism). Inevitably.

c) Social relations are imaginary, but the individual imagines through the 'echo of social practice', in other words, through the problems that individuals encounter when inscribing themselves at a given moment in the way of life (in society) in which they already recognise themselves through their unconscious. In this sense, according to the famous Althusserian formulation, *ideology is the imaginary relationship we establish with our real (i.e. social/material) conditions of existence*. These are too real for us to relate to them directly; hence, the imaginary is established at the level of production as a conscious/unconscious discursive relationship. The conscious is the work of combining possibilities; while the unconscious is that which, by definition, makes sense beforehand. To say 'I am' is only possible if what we signify is taken for granted. Yet the premises on the basis of which the 'I am' has been expressed throughout history are the product (the 'ideological production') of the diverse social problematics that have characterised each of the 'social formations' of history, within which in turn the most diverse 'discursive formations' have unfolded.

The 'I am' and its discourse are, therefore, not universally interchangeable either, in the sense that they cannot be extended to other historical moments, because in them we always find another practice of life. This practice is the only thing that makes sense. Trying to explain the present with concepts from the past (the consolations of philosophy) only makes sense as rewriting those past meanings. This is, of course, only if we accept that meaning is more important than significance. Moreover, without meaning, there is no significance. That is why those who play with the significances of the past (linguists, philologists, philosophers, historians, etc.) usually give them the meaning of the present.

There is no 'I' without its historical shaping, just as there is no (human) language without its discursive inscription. Speaking of 'human nature', for example, inscribes us in the 'positivist horizon' of classical secularisation, which began in the 18th century during the Enlightenment. However, no one uses this term any more in opposition to scholasticism, which still regarded human beings at that time as part of a world whose nature was a degraded reflection of the divine world. The radical historicity of discourse means that an expression may have lost its meaning forever, not so much because there are different views on the same thing but because, as the social problems are different, the thing has changed considerably or it no longer exists, i.e. it has lost all meaning.

## **The genres of doubt**

The only thing Descartes did not doubt was the meaning of his own 'I' when he said 'I am'. The foundation of this meaning in *thinking* and *existing* was only the anchoring or concrete discursive inscription: the level of *use* and thus the dialectical *production* of the notions that were avail-

able in a particular discursive formation, such as France under Louis XIV. Descartes knew this at the deepest level (the one that matters): to say ‘I’, plainly and simply, is only possible from madness; and this, in turn, is something unthinkable, as, in a strong sense, the nothingness towards which the *I* directs its voice in search of the opposite side of an echo (cf. Ferrater) is also unthinkable. What is unthinkable here is – to put it plainly (in less postmodern language) – that the ‘I’ says this to itself from its own psychic instance. The problem is that it is an apparatus that, regardless of its complexity (or precisely because of it), leads to the functional normalisation of the constitutive irresolution on which the self bases all meaning: the constitutive irresolution is what we call meaning. For Descartes, it was a matter of being able to say something unresolved but already effective for his historical conjuncture: the *free subject* of *literal* social relations, a literality that arises from social practices among individuals who value their new possibilities of transit (by virtue of a logic of *merit*, essentially, of practical meaning that affirms them as free *agents*)<sup>42</sup> between the private and the public, i.e. precisely what had to be thematised (saturating it with answers to suture its contradictions): the private (*ser*, the intransitory condition of being) in the public (*estar*, the transitory state of being) through merit (and its dark side, *seeming*).

But what is more, the sense of the private slips into the private/public dichotomy (and in doing so, in turn, produces it), where the

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42 This began in the Italian cities and is at the centre of the whole Renaissance and Baroque question (see Rodríguez 1990). It was fully established in the 18th century (e.g. in Feijoo’s text ‘Amor de la patria y pasión nacional’, in which he criticises precisely the vanity of certain expressions of merit in relation to the patriotic/national, something that can very easily be confused with the glory-seeking of the ancients, but has nothing to do with it). Rousseau also recognised that this is something new in the modern individual, who is more concerned with the judgements of others, today transposed to the self-help of ‘love yourself’, of which the image of the ‘selfie’ is part. This, far from being an expression of the desire for ‘recognition’ or everyone’s minute of fame that Warhol spoke of, instead functions inscribed in the logic of the free subject, whose homeland is governed today (even if one has not read Foucault, Judith Butler or Paul B. Preciado) by ‘biopolitics’ or the ‘particular modes of subjectivity’ (see Žižek 1989, p. xxiv).

subject does find the sense in which their existence is realised. In other words, the subject exists neither in the private nor in the public, but in being *between* the private and the public and actually only in appearance: as a *notion in practice*.

But the subject cannot be stated without violating its principle of reality, which is not unity (what the subject is) or plurality (the complexity of the subject), but the specific indefiniteness of a meaning. Take, for example, the concept of nation (or people), with which the subjects of the 19th-20th centuries not only understand the power of states, but do so on the basis of a meaning that can almost be said to be embodied in their leaders, rulers, etc.<sup>43</sup> They speak from an instance of meaning production, the discourse, which displays the (uncontrolled) dominance of the purely abstract level of signification. It is there that paths fork, or electrons can be and not be at the same time, but the sense of motion or the composition/decomposition of matter are governed by the same starting point or degree of entropy. And life on Earth has a surprising ability to preserve it.

And it is here that genres enter the scene, as thematic blocks

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<sup>43</sup>Some will call it a ‘thing’, i.e. a concept like any other, and they will see in our (phenomenologically grounded) position an ‘antifictionalism’ (cf. Harman 2016, 38–40), according to which ‘abstract constructs’ (*sic*) have no *real existence*. This kind of critique is made, for example, in OOO (object-oriented ontology). But this is by no means our idea of the ‘national’ problem, or of any other discursive entity of an objectual/material (in the physicalist sense), institutional, corporate, fictional or mythical, etc., nature. On the contrary, for humans at least, there are realities that are constituted imaginatively. And these are real, even if they are fictitious, due to the fact that they have a practical meaning (as explained above). We call these realities (not substantial, but practical) *notions*. The fact that notions (and sometimes these are housed in concepts) are one of the most vivid realities with the greatest impact on people’s day-to-day lives does not mean that our criterion for considering an object real is that of its ‘real effect’ on those lives, since we are talking about the practical reality of meaning, something independent of other kinds of reality that one would wish to attribute to the object-idea. Otherwise, we are only concerned with the fact that the ‘nation’ is an ‘object of knowledge’ relevant to our argument: as a socially (ideologically) configured notion.



with a unity of meaning in multiple forms of merit: the good or bad writer, the intelligent, the humorous, the sensitive, the shrewd, the cynical, the transgressor, the politically correct, etc. And each in their own way. Despite their individual diversity, these discourses are structured in these genres precisely because their distinctive value can be determined in them despite this unity of meaning. What is this unity of meaning and why is it like this and why does it seem like this?

### **Divine words: the standard of merit**

It is well known that there are two kinds of people in today's world: those who value themselves and those who do not; those who give profusely of themselves and those who do not; those who succeed by word of mouth and those who let their works speak for themselves. But both, without exception, display their (*de-*)merits on common ground: social relations in which both the achievements (the specific works) of competent individuals and the mere words of charlatans who waste their strength through their mouths have the same meaning: they seem to be the works and words of 'free subjects'. That the *free subject* has their ideal image (we will talk about those that have existed, but they are all exclusive to modernity and postmodernity) as well as their abject image means precisely that there is a *Norm* on which merit and demerit depend.

Merit splits into two moments of the same dialectic: what (not) to say and what (not) to do. In both cases, the *not* in parenthesis is the Norm, since this is what must never be said. Accordingly, all discourse consists of the concrete form of not saying, of not revealing, of prohibition. This is something, moreover, that is very natural and spontaneous, because the norm is unconscious; it is taken for granted. But

discourses adopt the order of genres, and, as already mentioned, each one establishes its own forms of merit.

But let's return to the question of the (abject) chatterers versus the competent individuals (full subjects). Among the 'speaking' individuals, the works of those (subjects of action) who do not rely on their words are conspicuously absent; we must then conclude that they presuppose the words and that, as part of these presuppositions, the expression of their merit is ultimately discursive. That's why the discourse of advertising has succeeded in selling us smoke all this time. Of course, recognition by others will be full in the case of the achievers, but both approaches, the truthful and the fallacious, stem from the same need for merit (and nothing else) to imbue the *authority* of each way of saying 'I am'.<sup>44</sup> That some achieve it and others do not is indeed normal. But taking attitude and aptitude for granted, the subject's meaningful appearance is what is valued. Individuals in our society create this merit through their ways of doing things. But these ways in turn create new perceptions and possibilities of appearing meritorious. They share the same historical conjuncture, and, therefore, with more or less merit, are inscribed in the same 'social formation'.

Today's world, i.e. the world that functions at any given moment, is what we refer to with every word, every gesture, every glance we direct at ourselves or at others: our daily practices are those in which being and seeming make sense. And it is our everyday practices, with their particular concreteness and value, in which everyone has a part (both constructive and destructive, manual and intellectual, cooperating and sabotaging). It is this particular concreteness and value that one alludes to *in the background* every time one blinks one's eyes. Even indifference and *not doing anything* have their own meaning at each moment.

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44 Except for this point, the study by Kojève (2005) on the notion of 'authority' seems to us to be key.

This is so much so that what you recognise in yourself when you say or hear ‘I am’ is unconsciously the meaning of what you do (or don’t do) every day. But one can say (or hear) ‘I am’ in several ways at any time: waking or sleeping; when speaking, writing or remaining silent; succumbing to the most blatant imitation, or out of a desire to differentiate oneself. We all, without exception, start from a form of interpellation that is wholly connected to our practical lives and that characterises the peculiar sense with which we say ‘I am’, usually without realising that we are doing so.

This means that by being and living in a way of doing (i.e. in a certain ‘social formation’ with its inner complexity, contradictions, problematics, etc.), one develops a way of seeing and understanding oneself that, being unconsciously practical, takes on forms that are completely alien to its material reality, forms that nevertheless necessarily allude to what is at every point the problem of reproducing material (social) life. This way of doing, wherein life (whether we like it or not) continues to reproduce itself (for better or worse) at any moment of the day (in its visible or hidden face, in the first world or in the last), i.e. precisely in its social reality, is what we are referring to when we speak of the ultimate meaning of the ways of saying ‘I am’. And there are multiple ways of saying it.

I, for example, am saying this by writing/publishing these words. Inevitably, this is essentially what I am doing: inscribing my discourse in the question of knowledge. It is a statement that is always subsumed in any other statement and that only makes practical sense when it is said for two reasons: a) because, like any statement, it is inscribed in a certain situation (and here we refer to the whole set of issues expressed in the theory of communication); but the reason that seems much more significant to us is b) that by saying ‘I am’ in any communicative situation (a game, a novel, a job interview, a tax return, an abstract painting

or a coronation) in the 21st century, one is saying something very specific and radically historical, something completely different from what was meant if one said 'I am' at other historical conjunctures.

But it is one thing to recognise oneself in our languages, and quite another to even begin to understand what is reproduced by this multiplicity of discourses through which we say 'I am', whether it is the grand narratives of history or the *minima moralia* of any authentic/autonomous identity. That was the discursive struggle of the late 1970s. In this sense, neither history nor ideologies have come to an end – far from it. But we are not referring to this, but to understanding what Lyotard basically means by the 'end of the grand narratives' and what Fukuyama means by the 'end of history'. In short, it is a question of understanding what one is talking about when one speaks of history and ideology.

One must understand what differentiates discourses at each moment, while also understanding what unites them, what forms them, and what deforms them. The discourse-forming/deforming agent of today is not an institution or one or more political or manipulative ideologies that distort consciousness, but a social norm that is in their bones: the notion of *merit*. This has a history of about 600 years, the same as modernity in general (which is erroneously dated to 1492 and not to the 14th-15th centuries and the Italian cities where the merchant class and its social network gave birth to the absolute novelty of individuals with their own merit, who would go on to invent the modern state, i.e. autonomy, or, in other words, the literality of the public sphere, thematised on a political level in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, but also with regard to the literality of knowledge, for example in the works of Galileo).

Consider for a moment the practice of writing today, since it contains a moral that is by no means insignificant. Consider in particular its history and its current form of realisation, which neither He-

gelian phenomenology nor the postmodernism of Foucault/Derrida acknowledge, since they do not consider them at all in their analyses. Neither, of course, does Oxford and Cambridge logicism, nor American pragmatism since William James and John Dewey. All of them start with the premise of the free subject and the literalness of the free subject's world. Whether they pass through dialectics, logic or the linguistic analysis of coherent propositions, or, conversely, enter the realm of metaphysics (in order, supposedly, to destroy its essentialist categories with those of existentialism), does not detract from what Hegel's phenomenology (channelled through Kojève and so-called post-structuralism), and Lacan's psychoanalysis (in the end, tragic linguisticism) said about the capital importance of recognition by the 'Other' in the construction of the 'I'.

The social recognition enjoyed by the *author* as an individual is thus relative to the way in which their discourse is inscribed in the social question of their historical conjuncture. In this sense, postmodernism is not just a 'paradigm shift', but a change in the way we say 'I am' meaningfully within the material conditions of existence (which, by the way, have been given a few twists and turns since Lyotard's book). The point being that we do not simply land on the problem by referring to the perspectives offered by new technical means (of communication, social engineering, etc.); the problem is a system of exploiting lives. One thing should be made clear from the outset: the conjunctures of history have been innumerable, and each one has produced, from its *internal logic*, a particular matrix of meaning; but, for our purposes, we are obliged to start from the three great modes of production that Western historiography has set as cultural milestones of *our world today*. But we are going to identify these milestones with their respective ideological matrices, which will function as the basis of the unconscious from which the discourses of the three types of society emerge. This, to

a much more radical extent than is usually accepted as definitional, implies that, in speaking of the three great periods of (Western, of course) history, what we are actually talking about is completely different worlds, in which the meaning of discourse loses all practical connection with the lives of those who came afterwards. Without exception.

In this respect, our discourse is also a radically historical one, since, like any other (although, in practice, discourses always subvert their own allusion to the historicity that determines them), it alludes strictly to the problems posed by the social reality in which we live; a circumstance that – and this is something Ortega does not tell us, because he did not even suspect it – we experience through the ideological matrix that gives meaning to the ‘co-present’, and is nothing other than the norm that *shapes* the way of thinking about social relations *at a given moment*, a norm shaped, in turn, by the needs encountered in the social or material practice of day-to-day life. In our case, these are capitalist relations; their general matrix is the Subject/subject relation. One must understand this fundamental relation: the first (in uppercase) is the exploiter; the second is the exploited or subaltern, but is free (in potentiality always and perhaps in fact) to become the first. This is the key: the relationship of exploitation that invariably exists at every moment. The (subject/subject) is the ideological matrix, since this (and no other) is the form in which we recognise ourselves. Yet it is ‘recognition’ that must necessarily go through a series of discursive transformations (or transcriptions), because the subject must always present itself as a newcomer.

### **The social (relation) movement**

It all happens below the surface, yes, but in life there are a number of external paths and stations that we travel to religiously for bet-

ter or worse, paths and places between which we establish specifically practical imaginary relations, in other words, the relations between movement and its specifically practical meaning, through which our lives *progress ceaselessly until death*. Everything then becomes as visible and invisible as the world we live in.

The practical sense of the motion whereby we regularly do each and every one of the things that have defined (and define) our life paths: the road that leads from home to school, or to work, or to the usual summer vacation spot (which may or may not coincide with the place ‘where you were happy’, to which – one knows – ‘you must never return’), or the road that leads to family, loved ones or love (of whatever kind). This is true even in the best of cases: there is always a sense that determines the relations between all these – let’s say, everyday or normal – movements and our inscription in them, i.e. our particular way of fitting in (well or badly) at school (whether one is a rebel or an exemplary student), at work (whether one is good, mediocre or clueless), in leisure (passive or active), in happy or unhappy relations (of all kinds).

It is the practical sense (positive or negative) with which one approaches these moments and participates (more or less willingly) in their – also practical – reality; it is the practical sense (which, however, can be of the most transcendental kind, as we shall see) with which one does one’s ‘own thing’ there (more or less conventionally or originally); and it is, ultimately, the practical sense with which one returns from all these places (remade and often undone). It is this constant departure-(re)making-return of our practical sense of movement that we call *inscription*; and it is the fact that this inscription only makes sense in the history in which certain practices make us move that we call ideological inscription. This history remakes us in its image and likeness every time we move in word, deed or omission – a history that does not return,

but to which we return, giving ourselves away with impunity as producers of its new meanings.

However, it is clear that, in order to talk about the meaning of life, it is much more practical (i.e. more objective) to look for the concrete/observable expression of this meaning in texts. In other words, everything that we say and do not say (because it is presupposed) in the texts of our lives and past lives (i.e. in all the textual ‘ideological production’ that ‘scripturocentrism’ has bequeathed to us) will serve as a reference to trace an overview of the meanings that have moved the world: the different historical problematics in which all these texts were inscribed.

*First word of warning:* the notions through which we understand each other (in theoretical practice) are *used*: they are anchored in a norm of meaning according to which there are explanations that are ‘better understood’ because they represent ideas according to this logic with words that designate it as normal, so that the terms (the words) designate the ideas of the moment in a sense that is very much characterised by this same ideology (the dominant one, in all its complexity of ‘discursive formation’).<sup>45</sup> So often, as now, this is why nodal nuance is practically impossible to communicate; and in this nuance almost always lies the central problem, the reason why the critique of discourse itself is averse to being expressed by *one and the same voice* (hence a certain tradition among critics, in which we inscribe ourselves, has shown an – occasionally unbridled – tendency towards specialisation, jargon and even terminological, syntactical, metaphorical ambiguity, etc.). Thanks to reading the masters (about reflecting on, analysing and expressing the problem of the historicity of ideas), we have been able to delve into literality, i.e. the reality underlying this ‘use’ of words. So, it is not so much a question of ‘refining’ our own language in the sense of banishing certain usages, but of knowing its premises in order to relearn it

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45 Pêcheux (1994).



and thus become, as far as possible, bilingual in our own language, in speaking/writing as well as listening/reading. The masters: Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Michel Pêcheux, Juan Carlos Rodríguez (above all!), Raymond Williams, Perry Anderson, Slavoj Žižek, Frederic Jameson and Malcolm K. Read,<sup>46</sup> fundamental contributors (as their nuanced differences are also fundamental) to the analysis of the ‘ideological unconscious’ itself.<sup>47</sup>

And it is here, in the sense of a reality that is both modern and *literal*, that the meaning of the title of this first part of the book lies: ‘The Marxist Paradox’. The reason being that by analysing discourses in their radically historical determinacy, we are perhaps doing no more than ‘contributing’ another vision among the many to which the Marxist way of dealing with the ‘problem of knowledge’ has given birth. This will become more evident as the reader advances in this text, but perhaps it is enough for now to insist on the main idea of our approach: *the ideology of modernity signifies the literalness of our place in the world*. This ‘meaning’ that we attribute to ideology (in this case, to modern ideology) is both attributive and transitive. It is attributive in that the ideology starts from the assumption that everything is literal (it is not due to an order higher than reality), because it is there, it exists and it happens, and in this it is neither good nor bad because it is in itself. And it is transitive in the sense that ideology reproduces that meaning, maintains it, makes adjustments, reforms, renovations, deletions, partitions, etc. Hence the problem of modern knowledge as something that has been recognised, not as an evolution of knowledge, but above all as a reproduction of the ideological matrix according to which our social relations are also literal. The function of thought, then, is to see

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46 See, especially, the titles selected in the bibliography.

47 Of the above names, only Malcolm K. Read (2000, 2017, 2017, 2019, 2022) uses the term ‘ideological unconscious’, following Juan Carlos Rodríguez.

in what sense this fundamental literalness of the social relations between subjects works best. From Berkeley or Descartes to Foucault or Habermas via Hume and Locke, Rousseau, Hegel and Kant, and Marx: the problem of literal knowledge is one that has gradually split into the question of cognition of reality on the one hand, and the question of the reality of knowledge on the other. But, in both cases, the possibility/impossibility of knowledge is the literal. In other words, knowledge is as it is (literal), whether we acquire it or not. In this literalness, even the idea that God is the ultimate explanation is only one of the possible conclusions.<sup>48</sup> The paradox is as follows: a) to frame this question as ideological and then to realise that, here, we too take the idea of a literal reality for granted, (this is what we mean by nature, cosmos, life – including social life –, its abstractions and the kind of knowledge mediated by it, etc.) and that this reality includes the literal space of the individual in the world (not necessarily central, of course, but what if it actually were? ); and b) to inscribe ourselves in this question by affirming that our social relations are literal and that, for this very reason, the idea of the world, together with the idea of the place of the individual in it, exists as a *specifically modern ideology*. Because relations between people who not only recognise themselves as having equal rights and obligations, but also as being equals prior to the ‘social contract’ that refers to their condition as human beings with *private subjectivity* (other-

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48 It is quite another thing to start from the assumption that God exists and to ‘attach’ any acquired knowledge (right or wrong) to this idea, as happens in the allegorical world of feudalism (see. Rodríguez 2014a). That renowned figures such as Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens have dedicated their lives to the cause of ‘secularism’ over ‘creationism’ is in some ways admirable, since beating one’s chest for a logic that has prevailed for at least 200 years might be seen as an act of civic honesty (see elsewhere); however, it has a ridiculous quality, given that the world has already been secularised at least three times (humanism, Enlightenment, and postmodernism). On the complexity and contradiction of this process, see Blumenberg (2008, op. cit.) and McLeod (2000).

wise contracts could not be signed freely) and *public objectivity* (otherwise changes within that literality in which the subject recognises himself as free could not be legitimised) are modern relations. If something so basic is ideological, the object of knowledge that we call ideology is, in effect, a 'sublime object'.<sup>49</sup>

In this respect, one must at all times distinguish something that is usually less obvious when dealing with the problem of the ideological inscription of texts in their different *epochs, times, ages* or *historical periods*.<sup>50</sup> the distinction between the concrete and the abstract. It is precisely the concreteness of history, its social relations, that will indicate the practical meaning of the movement (social praxis) at any time. This movement unites theory and practice, even if this is expressed in, or transcribed by, coded discourses with very different degrees of abstraction. For example, the question of social relations at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th is perfectly thematised in the discourses of politics, novels, advertising, children's stories and scientific publications.<sup>51</sup>

*Second word of warning:* the meaning of life is an extremely complex subject that we simply aim to outline here in its ideological dimension, since it is ideology that forms/deforms the meaning of something as fundamental as saying 'I am'. Ideology is what one understands or takes for granted when one says anything, but because any discursive practice is ultimately a way of inscribing ourselves in the problem of individuation. Individuals at each historical conjuncture find their own problems and, therefore, their own ways of inscribing themselves in the process of individuation. This is the basic problem of every ideology

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49 (Žižek 1989).

50 Certainly, unless one resolves the question by speaking of text and context as the in-itself as opposed to the 'frame of reference' of the text's meaning, or of its 'cultural value' apart from its 'universal value' (reason, human nature, etc.), etc.

51 Pêcheux (1960).

and thus of the practical meaning of life: to form the notion of what it means to be an individual in a particular type of social relationship.

*Third word of warning:* social relations are immensely varied and complex. Thus, we will distinguish between the three basic (historical) types of individuation that have existed: the 'I am' of antiquity (in which one is an individual master or slave), the 'I am' of feudalism (where one was an individual lord or serf); and the 'I am' of modernity (mercantile-capitalist; where one is an individual Subject or subject). These three meanings (or ideologies) in turn have a series of internal differences and phases or transitions, which we will also allude to in order to differentiate them, but which can, nevertheless, be categorised into the three larger ideological matrices (corresponding to the three great known modes of production), as if they were three radically different ideological universes (insofar as their respective fundamental laws of meaning are also different). We will start with the law of the practical sense of movement: the law of 'I am' with which individuals interpellate each other and themselves from their place in the world.

### **Together, but apart: on speaking/not speaking of 'the same thing'.**

Plato and Talcott Parsons have nothing to do with each other. Neither their texts (*The Republic* and *The Social System*, respectively) nor their themes (the government of the *polis* for one; the private/public dichotomy for the other) allude essentially to the same thing. Their respective discourses are inscribed in issues that are as different as their ways of life are alien. This is important. Because, in order to narrow down the meaning of a term as broad as 'life', first one must clarify what one actually thinks life is in practice; namely: *life is social*

*relations*. But we cannot say that Plato and Parsons are talking about the same thing unless we consider that *the same thing* is the abstract fact that underlying their discourses is the same general problem in the whole of human history: that, in practice, *established social relations are always relations of exploitation*. But these authors do not speak of the general problem that underlies all societies. Their discourses only allude to the particular problem that this general principle embodies in each individual case. This is perhaps difficult to understand. Plato and Parsons, of course, do not speak explicitly of the general problem of exploitation; but their discourses are determined by it. However, as already mentioned, the realisation of this exploitation, which is different in each case, is precisely what their respective discourses allude to. And that is what, for us, marks the indisputable dividing line between the concrete problem in *The Republic*, the relations between master and slave, and the concrete problem in *The Social System*, private/public relations. Let us say that, as a general problem, the problem of exploitation only refers to the abstract fact that we humans (as opposed to animals) organise life socially (through the division of productive forces and the dominant position of the owners of the means of production, etc.); but the only thing that will lead us to an understanding of what gives meaning to the discourses of these two authors is the knowledge of their respective logics of the unconscious legitimisation of exploitation. And we know that in order to legitimise something, one must start by presupposing the self, what one means when one says 'I am'.

This is the radically historical demarcation of the various issues that our dominant ideology tends to confuse. So, we should move away from this mingling and stop engaging in this dance of famous quotations that come from texts that belong to discourses whose meaning is radically different from that of their partners, because they have their own, completely incompatible meaning at each conjuncture.

There have always been social relations, yet only our own have been able to speak of themselves. That should make us suspicious. When I say, ‘Man is a creature made for social relations’, essentially, I am not saying the same thing as Aristotle when he says – and we gain nothing by writing it in classical Greek – ‘Man is a political animal’. I cannot even say that I resemble him insofar as I make use of Language (with uppercase), because, as a universal phenomenon, this is a notion that we only conceive of as such today. Moreover, each of these terms (*man, Being, society*) presupposes a very specific type of relationship with its material conditions of existence. First of all, ‘human nature’, the notion underlying the first statement, is not to be treated as something abstract and universal, but as a practical problem or radically historical reality that only became a ‘problem’ in the 18th century, where it signified the triumph of a struggle that had begun four centuries earlier in the Italian cities of the Renaissance.

What is more, ‘post-modernity’<sup>52</sup> has fiercely opposed this notion. Hence Chomsky’s abhorrence of postmodernism, which he describes as gibberish, since he not only believes in Reason and Human Nature (both with uppercase), but is also convinced that it is a biologically given ability, even if it is impossible to prove it in all its complexity. But here we only want to refer to the debate between Chomsky and Michel Foucault, who reminded him that this was a doxa or dominant idea of the Enlightenment (i.e. the bourgeoisie). For our part, we would like to add that Foucault is right, but he does not recognise that his position is inscribed in what we might call postmodern radical subjectivity, according to which one must construct one’s own standard of thinking. Foucault also fails to appreciate that this normative vacuum in which one could begin to cultivate one’s own subjectivity does not exist: it is nothing

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52 This is, of course, dealt with in the celebrated text by Lyotard (2006), and the more comprehensive Harvey (2020)..

(because there is no ideology other than that which we all produce with our ways of life, which are inevitably accompanied by our words). As a result, the French philosopher can only find refuge for his ego in sado-masochistic practices, the marginal homosexuality of the time, in other words, the hidden face of the ‘free subject’, something that – and he knew this – needed the weight of the norm in order to signify pleasure, not to mention human *jouissance*, that which is either imaginary or is not.

A final note on our postmodern condition and our condition as free subjects/agents: Our critique of free subjectivity, of course, is inscribed in so-called ‘postmodernity’. However, this is not because we aim to offer a postmodern cultural critique *per se*, but because the social question on the basis of which – if we want to go there – we are suspicious of culture is inevitably the same as that of Foucault, and today of Paul B. Preciado, for example. Thus, the problems that we encounter at every turn are the same ones that are addressed with notions such as ‘identity’, ‘*habitus*’, ‘performativity’, ‘gender’ and other more interesting terms such as ‘pharmacopornographic subjectivation’ (Preciado 2020, 127–131) or – perhaps the best for me, without irony – ‘uberisation of work’, etc.

There are so many problems in each social reality that it is not, in fact, a question of addressing them in a more or less postmodern manner. Rather, it is about not shifting them, not slipping into or through concepts that do nothing other than unrestrainedly adopt the prevailing ideology. Since we take it as our starting point in order to be a little more aware, we think that the key lies in adopting a greater or lesser degree of distance from the basic social problematics that affect – and we use the term here in the strict sense – the social relations that we intend to analyse (in this case our own or, at all events, from our own). The greater the distance, the greater the discursive unawareness, the greater the conceptual deviation. The smaller the distance, the great-

er the theoretical awareness and the conceptual understanding.<sup>53</sup> Only thus can we, as we have said elsewhere,<sup>54</sup> identify and distinguish the three different modernities: the first, with the ‘humanists’ of the Italian and Erasmian Renaissance (where the first shift in values takes place, through which modern social relations are legitimised within the incipient capitalist system, because here it is still feudal); the second, with the Enlightenment (where these relations can only become dominant through the bourgeois revolution); and the third, with the financial shielding of the market of lives and the retreat of discourse into the authentic interior of private identity, what is truly sacred in our world, the strictly postmodern.

Of course, ideology recognises this without saying so. Otherwise, everything we do (and find done, of course) would be met with raw exploitation at every turn. And that, as we have tried to make clear in the preceding pages and those that remain, is simply unthinkable. But that is what theory is for, and in particular the analysis of concepts and their radical historicity, to make objective sense of things.<sup>55</sup> Let us take the concept of ‘recognition’.

We cannot speak of recognition (as such) today without clarifying what we mean by the *value of understanding* that our ideology establishes as the standard for the set of criteria on which the *merit* of the authorship of discourses is spontaneously based. And this happens for discourses produced today as original or – in practice, this is always the case – derived from the various re-readings of past discourses (cultural heritage in written language or in ‘oral tradition’, which is more widespread but no less important, etc.), interpretations based on the

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53 This is the basis for our idea of the notion of ‘language awareness’ or ‘discursive competence’. (Aparicio 2023).

54 Aparicio (2018b)

55 Hence JCR’s discussion of the substantialisation of philosophy within Althusser’s theory. See Rodríguez (2002b).



value of understanding: the free subject. In order to be able to speak of recognition here, we must therefore take the following into account.

a) The strict sense of legitimacy established by the author/work (subject/object) relationship occurs in a literal or direct sense between an individual and *their* ‘use of words/language’ (text, painting, building, score, law or equation, etc.), of which context is always a more or less determining factor, but never interchangeable with such legitimacy (not even for Foucault, who believes in the emancipation of the subject for the ‘care of oneself’),<sup>56</sup> an endeavour for whose content and form – and this is the key here – the individual not only bears full ‘responsibility’ (which underlies the attacks of the various modern religious and political ‘censors’, and in any case those imposed with no less vigour by civil morality in its various phases of ideological legitimisation), but also has full ‘ownership’ (intellectual, artistic, and, of course, commercial). In other words, to speak of the modern concept of the author is to speak of what is taken for granted in our phenomenological horizon. Only in this way can this concept be extended to other epochs as distant as we wish, presenting only the evolution of the medium (McLuhan), its differential influence on forms and immanent functions, such as that of language (Jakobson), as what really belongs to the different epochs, while the voice of human nature is considered transhistorical or universal. However, there is one caveat: the ideological, according to this Horizon, is the religious, the moral, the political, the economic, the values and the beliefs that will or can impose a way of life, as if ways of life, including our own, did not all have their own discourse.

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56 Foucault (2005, op. cit.).

b) And ways of life, however just they may be, need to be legitimised. In this sense, an individual who subscribes to discourses means nothing more than their own inscription in the abstract discursive question in which the processes of legitimisation of the particular social questions to which they belong take place. So, when one of these names (to give examples from different ideological matrices: Aristotle, Augustine, Shakespeare or Cervantes, Einstein and artificial intelligence) says ‘I am’, only three of them say ‘I am an author’: the Englishman, the Spaniard and the German. And, whether they know it or not (the case of AI’s absolute lack of ‘acknowledged’ subjectivity has a separate chapter in this book), they say it as an abstract discursive product. In other words, they inscribe themselves in their respective social problematic and shift it discursively, each from their own matrix (and in a specific phase of it).

These ways of saying ‘I am’, in this sense, must be analysed (this is what we theoretically do) in their textual materialisation (that of their respective ideological unconscious) in a complete manner (not partially or – only – contextually). This is why we speak of the radical historicity of literature, philosophy, law, morality, religion, science, and related fields. Knowledge of ideological production is only possible through analysis of the symptoms of the specific social questions to which each individual’s discourse alludes. When we speak of an *author*, it is only for the sake of understanding each other, because this is also a term produced by a series of discourses belonging to a very broad historical conjuncture (let’s say from Petrarch or Da Vinci to Lorca or Einstein) that we call modernity (along with postmodernity), in itself very complex and varied, but which reserves this notion to those who show, write,

stage, etc., their inner truth (and to express it, the discourse will oscillate between various gradations of the subjective and the objective).

Writing, therefore, neither precedes nor follows the ideological unconscious, but gives material form to it in a given textual product. But we can only know what we have made, and that is not the 'text itself' but the practical (social) value of the text.

That is what we do when we write. There is one nuance, the verb 'to make', in other words, the sum of the concepts of *agency* and *product*, refers to a *process* without which we cannot speak of an *agent*. This process is what we call 'ideological production'.

## **Ideological production: individuation and discursive ideological unconsciousness**

What we call agent means nothing without the ideological quality of individuation constituted in the production process. In concrete terms, this means speaking of the ideological condition of discourses as that which enables the 'I' to produce its way of saying 'I am'. The 'I', as we already know, is problematic from a psychic and ontological point of view; mediated, however, by an impulsive/libidinal unconscious, the symptoms of which we can speak of with a certain coherence of meaning. The 'I am', on the other hand, is social in nature, no less problematic than the impulsive/libidinal 'I', but more clearly recognisable in its historical materiality: in discourses.

The radically historical study of the discourses of the 'I am' is the study of the symptomatic notions of a certain 'ideological unconscious' whose discursive materialisation is separated by the individuals within each social formation; i.e. that which results from their particular discursive inscription and simultaneously persists in economic, political and ideological milieus.

The process of construction of the 'I am' is, therefore, observable in the discourses that convey the contradictions inherent in each system or mode of production. It is this system that creates an ideological matrix in each social formation by which the meaning of the discourses is delimited, which varies in turn according to the particular interrelation of the economic, political and ideological levels at each

historical conjuncture. The ideological effect of this threefold interrelation is what we call ‘ideological production’ in the theoretical tradition in which we are inscribed.

## 2

# The historical meaning of ‘I am’

### Ideological inscription: the phenomenological horizon of language and communication

In this sense, our *observation* is not unrelated to its own ideological inscription: not only in the theoretical school (historical/dialectical materialism in its Althusserian aspect) that we follow (and that we intend to qualify), but something much more general that encompasses the ideological terrain in which the totality of ideological critiques (from Destutt de Tracy to Žižek, for instance) are inscribed. In other words, our critique cannot avoid entering into dialogue with the notions that ultimately define the boundaries of the debate on the ideological: a question that is (today) being primarily decided on the stage of the phenomenology of language and communication. In this respect, our analysis will, of course, also be a radically historical social product, which is why, in order to have an impact on this debate, we must first inscribe ourselves in it. And we have been doing this since the first line of this text, and even before that, since the title.<sup>57</sup>

Having clarified this, we are ready to affirm that the difference between our analysis of the ‘ideological phenomenon’ and that of oth-

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<sup>57</sup> Of course, we have tried to avoid the empiricist tic of ‘a critique’, ‘a history’, ‘a treatise’, because if we had done so, the whole text (its meaning) would be easily displaced towards perspectivist approaches.

ers<sup>58</sup> is that here we will never lose sight of the link between discourses and their radical historicity: the history of the different ideological matrices (master/slave, lord/serf, subject/subject). Therefore, our argument will unfold in a continuous struggle with the notions that usually form the starting points of the intersubjective matrix (and in an already established state: between the 18th and 20th centuries), starting with the notions of ‘text’ and ‘context’, ‘language’, ‘communication’ and ‘thought’, and the concepts that encompass all of these, i.e. ‘subject’ and ‘object’, whose meaning is loaded with presuppositions that even today lead to a phenomenology of the ideological that presupposes the *transhistoricity* of this ‘I am’ of which we have spoken, while proposing to consider it in its *radical historicity*. That is because the ‘free subject’, which we refer to without knowing what we are saying when we say ‘I am’ in the modern age, has not always existed.

The discourses that allow us to say ‘I am’, rather than expressing our ‘I’ (which in itself has no – shall we say – recoverable meaning, not even by psychoanalysis, but a symptomatic structure)<sup>59</sup> inscribe us in a process of constant interpellation (with absolutely everything we perceive) with meaning. We say ‘I am’ as much in the most familiar conversations as in the most ‘institutionalised’ discourses, from the most banal heartfelt chronicle or the most sectarian politics to literature of all kinds (‘pure’ or ‘committed’), as well as religious (or secular/worldly) morality, philosophy or science. In each of these discourses, we are ultimately saying ‘I am (free)’. And in saying this, we inscribe ourselves

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58 See, for example, Van Dijk (1999), Geertz (1973, pp.211–251), and Bourdieu (1991)

59 In fact, this psychological discipline takes as its starting point the idea that the symptom constitutes the axis of the analysand’s knowledge, the latter, in turn, being the subject of their own unconscious, and so on. Thus, we find that the great discovery of Freud and his successors consists precisely of the fact that we are problematic by nature. Full stop. A very interesting book in this regard is Tupinambá (2021), prefaced by Žižek.

in certain discursive coordinates in such a way that each inscription rewrites the (always contradictory and problematic) legitimacy of the whole: that of our social relations. It is precisely the specific nature of the contradictions at work at each historical moment of this 'I am' that we refer to as the *dominant ideology* in each case. And while the human race can be explained in this ideology through an anthropology and a phenomenology of the social dimension that brings forth an idea of the evolution of human essence or nature through the ages, it is also true that only by thinking anthropologically and phenomenologically can one think in terms of social relations based on the idea or 'ideological matrix' of the 'free subject' and the 'object of study', a matrix reserved for capitalist modernity. But the dominant ideology extends it, as a presupposition (because that is its epistemology), to all times.

### **The public sphere as a discursive platform of the free subject 'I am'.**

Individuation is, therefore, a radically historical process through which any individual passes: in order to be able to say 'I am', one must always start from the ideological matrix that gives voice to what otherwise has no voice, except when it is considered the voice of madness, the voice, as stated at the beginning of this paper, of the 'I' in the strict sense of the word.

It could be said that in this case of dubbing or appropriation of the voice of the 'I' by the 'I am' in the modern and postmodern world, the intervention of the notion of the free subject must be taken into account, which in turn is inconceivable without the step (not evolutionary, but radically motivated by the socio-histori-



cal conjuncture) taken in the political sphere between the 14th and 15th centuries, a period in which the private/public contradiction emerged as a constraint that allowed the autonomy of this sphere with respect to the determinants it had had under feudalism: mainly, the organicism of religion and the notions of blood and lineage, and, always, servitude (vertically, from the poorest servant to the Pope, who is a servant of God) as basic notions of individuation (and, therefore, of the practical interpellation of individuals). So, it is the autonomy of the public sphere that delimits the merit by which new social relations will delimit their own discourse, which initially coexisted or developed *with* the feudal social relations that it eventually eliminated. In essence, what we call the Modern State is the public autonomy of the subject and their merit (Machiavelli's literal politics, for example), a sort of black hole that opened in the society of the great Italian merchants, which would swallow up feudalism (whose organicism tried to express itself internally, for example, with the Inquisition: a purge of the body of the state controlled by the nobility and the Church, which did not, however, control the secular bureaucratic rationale in which the 'secret' of worthy men lay)<sup>60</sup> after four centuries. As is well known, it is the state that was to be consolidated and find its maximum expression in the 18th-century Enlightenment: the liberal state that heralded the Age of Modernity, but which today is something else, something that, even after the (very questionable) life and death of communism, in no way – not even Francis Fukuyama himself claims this – presupposes the 'end of history' or of 'ideologies'. The free subject is not only very much alive, but also continues to differentiate alternative forms of freedom to freedom without exploitation.

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60 Rodríguez (1990, op. cit., pp. 38–45).

## **New ideas and the requalification of social relations: on semantics, representation and difference**

The new ideas (such as those of humanism, Lutheranism, Jansenism, Marxism or existentialism, to name just four ‘grand narratives’ that are not always labelled as ‘ideologies’) emerge from the friction of social relations themselves. They are the symptoms of the struggle of the ‘I am’ to express itself within them, a struggle that takes place even within each of these ‘trends’, ‘movements’, ‘currents’ or ‘schools of thought’ that we have put in brackets. They all belong to modernity, which is why we could ask ourselves the following question at this point in our work: What forms of the statement ‘I am’ does each of them assume? We will not undertake a review of this sort, but we will use a few examples to illustrate what we mean by the word ‘friction’, as an illustration of the fact that ‘social relations’ do not cease to separate ideas in order to be able to say ‘I am (a free subject)’ with a new legitimate meaning, without which individuals would fall into excessive discursive (ideological) contradiction with their (economic and political) practices of living.

Let us also clarify beforehand that the notion of the ‘free subject’ has not always been thematised according to the idea of freedom itself. Notions such as ‘wit’, ‘reason’, ‘will’, ‘vitalism’, ‘sensibility’, ‘authenticity’ correspond to different conjunctures and therefore to practical social needs in which the value of the free subject was different. Hence, we find some of its dialectically opposed notions: ‘the sublime’, ‘the tragic feeling’ or the negation of ‘freedom’ as a way of sublimating the tragic self, the ‘cry’, etc.

Since bourgeois social formations have given rise to many kinds of ‘subjects’, let us look at a specific case from which very contradictory discourses emerge, but prior to all the mysticism of meta-linguistic

subjectivity in which we find ourselves today (and of which we also intend to undertake a self-analysis). For this, we have to go back to the 60s, but in the 19th century.

There, the history of our second modernity sets theatrical language aside and unfurls the language of prose. As Raymond Williams tells us (2020):

*'In the late sixties several issues came together. Issues and controversies. About parliament, about law and the trade unions, about demonstrations and public order, about education and its expansion. In the late eighteen-sixties, I mean. In the years when George Eliot began Middlemarch, when Marx published the first volume of Capital, when Carlyle wrote Shooting Niagara, and Matthew Arnold wrote the lectures and articles which became Culture and Anarchy.'* (p.13)

By the 1890s, all these problems had only worsened, although their expression had become more sophisticated. In Spain, Ortega assumes the role of Matthew Arnold, and tries to conjure with his prose the anarchy that supposedly threatens the cultural life of a country in which these 'questions and controversies' are churned in a social 'soup' that is much thicker in terms of modernity. In the case of Ortega's modernisation of Spain, it is difficult to find in 'his enemies' a hint of the kind of recurrent villains in liberal essayism, whose victims are the masses, dispossessed of their chance to embrace the excellence of once-salvific humanism. In the political sphere, the bourgeoisie wants to rid itself of the nobility (Ortega supports republicanism, of course), but it wants to transcribe (i.e. in essence, to redeem) aristocratic authority in the realm of knowledge: the European cultural elite, which, at that time, spoke the language of phenomenology. It is here that Ortega finds some 'enemies' worthy of the name: Ángel Ganivet and Miguel de Unamuno.

But let us return to the series of ‘questions and controversies’ of which Raymond Williams speaks, which affected British society in the first 30 years of the Victorian period and finally burst like the boils of Karl Marx. In particular, the problematic concerns the public sphere, which until recently had cultivated its autonomy through confrontation with the landed aristocracy and its ghosts. But England (unlike Spain, which would do this much later) needed to lance the stubborn boil that threatened ‘social chaos’, or, in other words, the problem that has been referred to as the ‘tyranny of the majority’ since Tocqueville, to which John Stuart-Mill would respond with his proposal for institutional control of democratic consensus (the beginnings of the ‘manufacture of consent’ that Chomsky (2010) would criticise, from Mill to the present day). But we are referring to a more fundamental problem: in this classical market society, which needed to modify the democratic order to suit its needs, it was first and foremost necessary to re-qualify the ‘subjects’; firstly by recognising Catholics in Ireland as equals, and more generally by course-correcting their navigation through the stormy seas of the voting masses, whose newly expanded right troubled not only the aristocracy and the conservative sector *en bloc*, but also reform-minded liberals such as Robert Peel (somewhat earlier, in 1829) and Matthew Arnold (in the period we are considering).

But the expression of this general ideological need acquires its own particular literary meaning: on the one hand, narrative prose becomes more theatrical, since realism only pretends to present us with the inner details (in its natural/social logic) of what the theatre had been showing for too long since Shakespeare, without giving explanations: the dramatisation of the public sphere with, shall we say, rather ‘bombastic’ acts and words that appealed to the notion of *merit* as a private virtue with public value, legitimising the political conquest of intersubjective relations as opposed to organic or feudal relations, in

which lineage and honour confer control over productive forces, etc. But the aristocracy also had to be convinced, so that they could get used to participating in public life *literally*, i.e. on the basis of their personal merits and without clinging to their aristocratic status. As such, the narrative now occupied itself with advocating the naturalistic and sociological theses with which the new 'I' was endowed, not only with a new private dignity, but also from a critical distance with which it could hold its own on the new battlefield of the public sphere: an 'I' that, in its discourses, unfolds the new contradictions that this entails by repeatedly displacing the concrete social problematic towards an abstract discursive problematic, through notions that unconsciously allude to the malaise caused by the vestiges of aristocracy in bourgeois society, which contradictorily retains its (undeserved) prestige, a kind of living death where blood is only a source of sinister life. This is our interpretation (to give just one example of how the concrete social metamorphoses into the abstract discursive) of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.<sup>61</sup>

In short, there is a need to reform the public based on a logic undermined by the contradiction between living at the pinnacle of classical liberalism (the Tories) and that of the Victorian aristocracy (the Whigs), highly jealous of its organicist status. To construct this new 'I', essayistic prose adopts a more theatrical language (Arnold and Ortega as advocates of style and the idea of civilisation), in dialogue with Romantic poetry, which represents the limit of the free/sublime and attempts to establish a link with the aristocratic through the notion of 'subterranean man', folklore, etc. On the other hand, theatre becomes more and more prosaic, which causes the aristocratic element to atrophy in order to focus on a new problem: the bourgeois (i.e. non-aristocratic) family.

But let us now move forward to the 50s and 60s of the last century. Here we will see a less dramatised situation, in which, how-

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61 Rodríguez (2001a, pp. 377–411).

ever, it is the meta-linguistic and meta-discursive that, with the arrival of postmodernism, poetically colour its reflections on the concept of communication.

JCR, in his study on ideology in theoretical linguistics, says the following:<sup>62</sup>

The notion of Communication, in terminology shaped by the linguistic model, transcribes one of the basic themes of the classical matrix: the idea of social relations as being between ‘subjects’, as expressed in the legal-political notion of the ‘contract’ or in the notions of the competitive market, circulation and exchange (belonging to the ‘economic’ region of ideology). The ultimate image, the keystone of this whole classical ideological system, is thus the idea that the workings (like the ‘origin’) of any social structure consist in the relations between two (or more) subjects who enter into a relationship by exchanging their ‘duties-rights’ (political contract), their ‘goods’ (economic contract: circulation and exchange) and lastly their ‘labour’ in exchange for ‘money’ (the problem of just-unjust wages, etc.).

In short, what this means is not only the need for classical ideology to transform the ‘nobles’ into ‘bourgeois’ in the interplay between the ruling classes, through the ideology of the equality of all ‘people’ as ‘subjects’ etc., but also the need to ‘conceive’ its relation to the dominated strata, and thus also – always on the ideological level, of course – to transform the ‘vassal’ into a ‘proletarian’ (i.e. a ‘free’ subject and owner of their labour power, ready to freely exchange it for money-wages etc.). This, then, is the real ideological background that de-

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62 *Ibid.* pp.61–62.

termines the construction of the notions of intersubjectivity, circulation, exchange, etc., i.e. the construction of the notions that derive from the basic category in which social relations are understood as relations between two (or more) subjects who exchange their (political or economic, etc.) possessions. Therefore, the key to any 'sociological' functionalism, as can be seen in Talcott Parsons, is always the original

'Ego'-'Alter' relationship, a relationship between original 'subjects', which today is 'explained' by all forms of sociology, not so much through the classical juridical-political ('contract') or economic ('circulation and exchange') terms, but (due to the adoption of the 'linguistic model' constructed by classical ideology from the positivist horizon) in terms of language: *communication*.

There are two ways of critiquing ideas today: one is a) to question – only – their argumentative (everyday or philosophical) meaning, i.e. what they communicate about the subject (the individual) and the object (the world, reality, language, as phenomena 'in themselves'); the other – ours – is b) to question their historical meaning, in which subject and object have very specific meanings that refer to the 'communication' of which JCR speaks, which also has its expression in the natural sciences, not only in the human and social sciences.<sup>63</sup>

Recourse to the first approach is inevitable, since understanding the meaning of argumentation always begins with checking the comprehensibility of the meaning in the signifier (and – if you like – its differential reverberations). From the purely referential or semantic level of the 'linguistic sign', textual cohesion and coherence (grammatical, thematic and rhematic, etc.) must be crystallised, and in them, as a re-

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63 *Ibid.* p.62.

sult of their 'being in the world', the pragmatics of the statement as what we could call 'meaning in the act'. For us, however, the idea is too concrete to be illuminated only semantically and pragmatically. When we experience understanding and assess the truth or falsity of an argument, whether our own or someone else's, we are doing more than just making a 'competent' use of language to achieve the crystallisation of ideas mentioned above; we are, in fact, inscribing ourselves in, shall we say, the full understanding of the social value of the ideas towards which the use of language is directed, including the assessment of truth/falsity in the world of experience. It is this aspect that reveals an action that is superimposed on meaning, and that is, therefore, what is *really meaningful*: the act or process of identifying the interlocutors with reality (the world, its objects) not only through the meaning and connotations of the terms and concepts used in a given sequence ascribed to a situation, but through these terms and concepts as notions (or, if you will, 'ideologemes') with which individuals inscribe themselves in their own social legitimacy of language use (and this also applies to any 'private language'), whether it concerns micro- or macro-linguistic or textual structures, i.e. words, genres, subjects, registers, etc.

And, at a certain point, the concept of 'meaning' unfolded into that of 'representation' (Heidegger) and then into the concept of 'difference' (Derrida). Following JCR, we propose the notion of (ideological) inscription to refer to what each of these three designations alludes to, notions that point to ideas with radically historical values (and history has witnessed many 're-qualifications' of the subject or subjects in intersubjective social formations). However, in the case at hand, i.e. that of deconstruction, this re-qualification takes place at the level of the abstract discursive problematic we call philosophy (and today, 'critical theory'): meaning (communicative subject), representation (subject of poeticising) and 'difference' or '*différance*' (here the subject



turns inside out like a sock and there appears that in which it is realised, the object of subjectivity, in the sense that it is language that subverts us and over-represents us, a voice that crystallises or is silenced – never completely – in writing, the signifier as the phallic, etc.).

The second way of critiquing ideas – ours – involves questioning these three notions regarding their ‘social value’, and doing so on the basis of our concept of inscription (which has nothing to do with Derridean ‘writing’): going (theoretically) from what they claim to designate to what they allude to in their ideological inscription, i.e. concrete values for the legitimisation of social relations. And here our margin of error is negligible, because the same silence always answers the question of who and for what (what social relations, what way of life) and we do not accept ‘all of them’ as an answer, since slaves, masters, lords and serfs have – in every case – had to put their value up for sale. It involves recognising these two subjects (the communicative – let us say in the manner of Della Volpe, who thematises it within the systematicity of theoretical linguistics<sup>64</sup> –, and that of knowledge of the subject matter of the human sciences, in which Heidegger leaves the door open to *thinking* in itself as the creative autonomy of representational knowledge, which is what he – with Hölderlin – calls ‘poeticising’, i.e. thinking beyond ‘metaphysics’, which presupposes any ‘conception of the world’, something that we, on the other hand, nuance by asking repeatedly what life practices and social relations ‘conceive’ it) and the (subjective) object that Derrida constructs in his ‘scriptural’ reading of Heidegger.<sup>65</sup>

Debating only what ideas mean in themselves seems to us a form of criticism that either has no end, or ends very soon, since historical reality always takes priority, being problematised or rejected according

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64 Rodríguez (2015a, pp. 328–329).

65 Rodríguez (2013b, p. 168) and Jameson (2010 pp. 132–132).

to the very basis of the meaning on which the most solid argument rests, whether the question is posed on the basis of the most extreme immanentism, or a determining relationship is established between meaning and history (or culture) which, in most cases, is merely ‘contextual’ or ‘sociocultural’, i.e. a relationship in which meaning is full of ‘resonances’ belonging to a ‘historical framework’, understood as the external pressure of the group/environment on the thinking of the individual, whose contribution to ideas should be distilled or – directly – considered as doomed to failure or too corrupted by the influence of the ‘ideology’ in which this thinking is expressed; a contribution which, otherwise, is supposed to be pure/free and, therefore, worthy of being considered universal, or, at least, worthy of being considered a landmark of human thought, etc. And this occurs both from compatible positions and from such opposing approaches as today’s different stances on the concept of free will, so hotly debated from more or less physicalist (i.e. dualist or monist) positions and – especially today – in the face of the astonishing progress of computer technology (and the phenomenon of so-called artificial intelligence), or the concept of gender, a problem that has the left and the right at odds, given the tendency of both to identify ideology with the discourse of the ‘other’ or of ‘power’ (as against the marginalised or alienated individual, who can only claim control over his own body), etc. The other way, our way, is to consider the historical sense in which the same ideas (which are in any case sufficiently intelligible) are radically inscribed, and therefore to analyse the terms (the notions) through which this inscription takes place, in the sense that the historical (conjunctural) logic determines in each case, without going into the argumentative truth or falsity of the propositions, since these are usually presented on the basis of closed (but not isolated) systems, i.e. starting from their own premises, so that they validate themselves. Even if the facts are clearly misrepresented,

the premises remain directly linked to the logic of their context, in which – why not? – more or less precise, coherent, truthful, etc. systems of thought can be conceived.

And, very importantly, we do this without ever discarding our own inscription in the historical sense from which we produce our own interpretations.

### **The Marxist paradox and the genius of Aristotle**

It is absurd (and at the same time extremely normal), therefore, that our best thinkers (philosophers, linguists, historians, etc.) should have limited themselves to meaning and its immanent problems, obviating the radical historicity of the discourses they criticise (positively or negatively) as well as their own ideological inscription.

It is perhaps appropriate here to cite at length the case of the ‘great researcher’ referred to by Marx in *Das Kapital*, as an example of how even the greatest geniuses sink their roots (i.e. inscribe their discourse) in the particular social problematic on the basis of which they reflect on the questions that concern them (day-to-day or philosophical):

[Transformations of ‘the equivalent form’ of the commodity in relation to the ‘value of labour’] will become more intelligible if we go back to the great thinker who was the first to analyse so many forms [of value], whether of thought, society, or Nature, and amongst them also the form of value. I mean Aristotle.

In the first place, [Aristotle] clearly enunciates that the money-form of commodities is only the further development of the simple form of value, i.e. of the expression of the value of one commodity in some other commodity taken at random;

for he says...

5 beds = 1 house,

5 beds = 1 home<sup>66</sup>

is not to be distinguished from

5 beds = so much money.

He further sees that the value-relation which gives rise to this expression makes it necessary that the house should qualitatively be made the equal of the bed, and that, without such an equalisation, these two clearly different things could not be compared with each other as commensurable quantities. 'Exchange', he says, 'cannot take place without equality, and equality not without commensurability.' Here, however, he comes to a stop, and gives up the further analysis of the form of value. 'It is, however, in reality, impossible that such unlike things can be commensurable' i.e. qualitatively equal. Such an equalisation can only be something foreign to their real nature, consequently only 'a makeshift for practical purposes.'

In other words, Aristotle would have come up against the social reality of the value of objects in relation to the value of human labour, and, in relation to the latter, he would have come up against his own epistemological limit, according to which slave labour is incommensurable because its value is zero. Since it excludes the identity of the commodity's 'exchange value', only the 'use value' remains, which is something subject to mutability and can therefore be dismissed ontologically. And he was right, even if he does not go so far as to consider the social materiality of the problem, to which he alludes as the 'last resort for practical needs', but without seeing in it a

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<sup>66</sup> We have omitted the classical Greek which Marx (2022) follows to the letter.

reference to the *master/slave* ideological matrix in which his perplexity is inscribed.

Aside from that, this quotation raises innumerable questions, but let us limit ourselves to two and attempt to answer each one, albeit very (truly very) briefly:

1) The conceptual limit experienced by Aristotle implies the paradox of Marxism *in potentiality* in the answer that Aristotle failed to see and *in deed* (albeit unconscious) by its lack of resolution. Moreover, the real Marxist paradox would be to notice the following: not only in the paradoxical aspect (*power/not seeing* or *act/unresolved*), which, after all, is a very classical idea, as Aristotelian (comprehension),<sup>67</sup> and very modern, as Hegelian (synthesis), but in the fact that Marxism explains this paradox through another paradox: the identity of the classical and the modern is only possible because of their radical difference, in that thought is only possible inscribed in its mode of production, and that is the exception to the rule of ‘thought on potentiality’ (Zubiri, op. cit.), i.e. the idea that, only from the point of view of ‘man’ (i.e. ‘humanism’), in the fourth century B.C. (*in potentiality*) Marx was already prepared to modify Aristotle’s idea; and only in the mid-nineteenth century was he pointing out (*in deed*) the limits and genius (the greatness and authenticity) of Aristotle’s material confrontation with historical materialism.

2) According to the brand new ‘object-dependent (or object-oriented) ontology’ (and this would be our understanding if we inscribe ourselves in its problematic, the negation of

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67 Cf. [[https://encyclopaedia.herdereditorial.com/wiki/Recurso:Aristóteles:\\_principio\\_de\\_identidad](https://encyclopaedia.herdereditorial.com/wiki/Recurso:Aristóteles:_principio_de_identidad)]

intersubjective ontology, although, as we know, we also participate in it by denying it, even if I have seen some *memes* refuting its premises, but the point here is to see in what historical postulates and why or for what purpose Tyrians and Trojans enter this new debate within the ‘phenomenological horizon’), Marxism would be a ‘thing’ whose reality could not be dismissed by the fact that it had no effect (as a theory) in the fourth century BC., since this ontology claims that any kind of reality (including that of retroactive thinking, which travels back in time, and is also a paradox-proof theory) must be accepted as effective (not necessarily because of its effect, as some think), i.e. that its standard of reality must not be established solely on the basis of the parameters of human experience (in fact, what is referred to is ‘common sense’, to which they are basically appealing after all; something that today is symptomatically being devoured more rapidly than usual), what they call ‘anthropocentrism’, etc. And even realities that change their structure in time and space, or rather, that have no structure, no time and no place, but are undeniably like the VOC (the Dutch acronym for the United Dutch Chartered East India Company), which was a kind of wandering entity, with no staff, no known fixed offices, and yet was and is (for this object-oriented ontology), because it *counts* as an ‘object/thing’ in its own right.<sup>68</sup>

Our point is that all these analyses are possible because there are presuppositions that do not depend on them, but in fact *are* them: the presuppositions of the subject and its (sometimes in the form of ‘another’) object. The complication disappears when one understands the terrain on which they are made. We are talking here about ideolo-

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68 Cf. Ortega and Gasset (2005: 92–93).

gy in the strict sense of the ‘discursive formation’ to which Pêcheux referred,<sup>69</sup> in which it is not the various ‘ideologies’ that ultimately confront each other, with

one attaining the dominant position from which individuals (with or without Utopia) are manipulated. Rather, we are *dealing with* an ‘ideological matrix’ to which all social classes discursively correspond, with their different modes of expression, because their classes are inscribed differently (and it is strange – i.e. symptomatic – that we are so reluctant to use the concept). The forms all correspond to the fact that the matrix is experienced and therefore necessarily legitimised in different ways, which, to repeat, correspond to different origins and class positions. But they share a common discursive point of reference: the ‘matrix’ (the real *Matrix*).

Therefore, the distinction between ‘ideology in general’ and ‘dominant ideology’ is indeed useful, since the former term is rooted in its own need to always distinguish between the phenomena of the hu-

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69 Gramsci’s concept of ‘cultural hegemony’ does seem correct to us insofar as it banishes the notion of ideology as a mere ‘reflection’ of the ‘economic infrastructure’ projected onto the cultural ‘superstructure’ and instead introduces the notion of the reproduction of ‘productive forces’ through the spontaneous adoption (by those forces) of the hegemonic ideology that legitimises their own exploitation; like someone who conforms to a certain fashion because it ‘looks better’, one would adopt the dominant ideology because one feels better in social practice. If this is true – let us say – we believe that if we consider the later (?) notion of ideology as the ‘ideological terrain’ on which the ‘(discursive) class struggle’ takes place, things are more complex, namely, the dominant way is not assumed to be superior or more attractive, but is, in fact, from the outset something that is always generalised/unconscious. To offer an illustrative metaphor, ideology reproduces itself more like the hydrological cycle than a guerrilla war in which ideological ground is lost or gained. The ideology of the other is nothing but his choice of the other end of the contradiction. This is why we have chosen to study ideology in its inherent dialectical condition. In other words, the water that falls on us from above (power) must have evaporated and condensed beforehand from the seas, lakes and pools that make up this terrain, i.e. ideology permeates everything. It is not visible, but it drains, irrigates and erodes the subsoil. The ideological terrain does not know drought.

man and the natural (as Pêcheux says, it serves to clarify that ideology is not something specific to animals, etc., which we doubt to a certain extent, since they too have their necessary limits in practice).

The linguistic-philological analysis of ideas, unlike the analysis we just performed, is reduced to the description of coherent statements, and ours to the material/social rootedness of ideas. Philosophy, on the other hand, by inquiring into the quantity and quality of ideas and positioning them, based on one concept of reality or another, in relation to their identity with things and the world (material or representational), achieves nothing other than substantialising or de-substantialising them. The linguistic-philological approach always distinguishes between synchronous and diachronic, the philosophical approach between the universal and the contingent, and our approach between the concrete/social and the discursive/abstract. The question of the historical significance of discourse has very clear consequences: dealing with the ideological inscription of discourse means broadening the focus of the comprehensibility of ideas and moving from the *what* to the *why*.

This second question does not, however, refer to the meaningful intention of ideas, but to the problematic condition in which the argumentative scope of any attempt at meaning is exhausted.

This discursive problem thus always has a fundamental (i.e. productive) social reference that gives it meaning. A 'reference' that should not, however, be understood as an exclusively linguistic concept (as embodied, for example, in 'textual grammar') or a pragmatic concept (where the problem is solved by speaking of 'contexts', 'explicatures' and 'implicatures'). We are talking about the ideological matrix that ideas allude to *in the background*, a background that relates what is said materially and not just linguistically to the life that says it. And this relationship is always problematic (hence the theoretical, one could almost



say moral, support for Marxism in psychoanalysis) and is consequently also problematised in the discourse.

In the case of our modern/postmodern social relations, both subject and object are at the centre of the problematic of knowledge. But whether the objective content of this (subject/object) dialectic is affirmed or denied (with nuances, as psychoanalysis does, for example), what is never questioned is the literal or direct relation of the subject to the reality of its object, whether we call it ‘nature’, ‘society’ or any of their respective ‘phenomena’. This is what we refer to when we say that discourse displaces or transcribes a concrete social problematic in order to inscribe itself in an abstract discursive problematic.

We therefore consider both the ‘everyday’ and the culturally ‘sophisticated’ to be part of the same process of ideological production. This discursive *Norm* determines the meaning and thus the possibility of every ‘symbolic representation’.

So, it is as absurd to think that deconstruction is a ‘potentiality’ in Aristotle as it is to say that the theoretical postmodernism proposed by Derrida is a degradation of the Western philosophical tradition. Since Derrida and José Luis Coll speak of the same thing in their *Diccionario* (1976),<sup>70</sup> i.e. the control of the signifier over significance, everyday life and philosophy share the same ideological/life terrain and not a human nature that, as we see in Aristotle, appears nowhere. We would say to Zubiri (2018) that the aeroplane may have been a ‘potentiality’ in classical Greece (or in Atapuerca), but to think of social relations in terms of exploitation would be pointless, because exploitation cannot be seen as something social when the ‘other’ is not – supposedly – equal.

Thus, the underlying social (and therefore conjunctural) mean-

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70 Where we find definitions such as this (quoted from memory, since we do not have the text in front of us), ‘Tatamuda: dícese de la institutriz que no dice ‘esta boca es mía’ cuando el señorito le palpa las nalgas’ (*Tatamuda: the governess who does not say a word when the son of the house pats her buttocks*), etc.

ing is the key to both the content and the form of ideas about the social or the divine. But, with or without mystery, the discourses allude – and we will not tire of repeating it – to the most basic thing that individuals do in society: to say ‘I am’. And it is in the sense of what we say there that we understand – even without understanding its meaning – the meaning of the absurd.

In fact, that is what we do most: be absurd in what we say, not because our speech is always metaphorical and cannot be taken literally, but because the literal has not always existed as a norm of meaning, and yet we behave (discursively) as if it had always been so. It is our concrete way of saying ‘I am’ and being more or less coherent with a form marked by its history and, as such, deployed in a sea of contradictions, in which ideas approach, like lifeboats.

Today, the dialectic of the ‘One’ and the ‘Other’, the negation, the difference, etc. are lifeboats (in this sense). Our postmodernity has said all this more or less aptly; but what interests us is the matrix that contains the meaning of established social relationships at any one time, because it is this matrix that gives cohesion to both. In other words, each *one* of the three levels of a mode of production (the economic, the political and the ideological) is divided into the other, so that, although they are interdependent, they are sometimes linked by overdetermination: politics overdetermined in classical Greece and Rome, ideology in the feudal regime, and the economy in capitalism.

However, since we are dealing with ‘discourse’, we will have to look at the course of these lifeboats on the sea of contradictions, i.e. at the determination of the third level: the ideological. At this level, social relations are expressed (theoretically) as the two members of the same ideological matrix: master/slave, lord/servant or Subject/subject. This, as we say, is the key to every debate, whether settled or endless; to the life and death of any more or less passing trend; to every current or

school, every artistic, literary or philosophical movement; to the beliefs and attitudes that sustain what we call – with or without prejudice – culture, worldview, doxa, horizon of meaning, etc. And – forgive me – it is also the key to the meaning of scientific discourse, to its epistemology as well as to the conditions of possibility for its practice. Even if it is the norm, it is absurd not to pay attention to the fact that ideas inscribe us in a meaning that in turn reproduces itself with us. If we are bilingual in our own language – as JCR says – ideas do not reveal our inner selves to us, but rather beautifully translate us.

Ideology always establishes the meaning of ideas in the light of social relations; if ideas are too complex or – even – absurd, they will, in any case, be so in the light of that same relationship. The type of social relation on which discourse works out concrete ideas is thus the dominant ‘order of discourse’, although Foucault refers to the contradictions of what dominates it. But a history of ideas that does not take into account the social relations from which the domination of each moment emerges is an ahistorical history: it will never get to the bottom of the material question of this ‘order’. The history of ideas must be a history of discourses as representations, not of the world in general, but of the ideological production of each social formation; it is thus a history of the manifold dialectics with which social relations are signified and normativised in each case. Others have called this ‘the unconscious/political’, by which they mean a mere displacement of the locus of the resolution of social conflicts (the ‘class struggle’) into the realm of literature, art, and philosophy; but the displacement of the political takes place in the issue itself (e.g. the Catalan, Basque, Galician, Asturian, Valencian, Andalusian, etc. national questions, as a displacement of a concrete social problem: unemployment, financial vampirism, job insecurity, etc.). Individuals have many different ideas of how to designate themselves in the course of their lives; they may

even have ‘original’ ideas, but what they are expressing is always their social relationship, the one that exists (in a particular problematic) at any given historical conjuncture.

The relationship between master and slave, for example, meant different things at different times in ancient history; but until the end of the slave-owning mode of production, this relationship did not cease to be an ideological matrix of discourse.

In the dialectic true/false or idea/matter, form/substance, etc., there is the problem of the master/slave relation, which is signified in different ways as individuals unfold it as an abstract discursive problematic; but apart from homophony, their terms (truth, falsity, idea, form, substance, translated into English here, of course) have nothing to do with their meanings, because they were signified in different conjunctures, in which social relations were clearly those given to these different ideological matrices. These words (spoken slavishly or feudally) have nothing to do with meaning in a world in which the relationship between (supposedly free) subjects is that established by the meaning of practical life. The meaning of our discourse is therefore established by the ideology of today: no more, no less.

### **Imagination with/without (sexual/social) relations**

And with all of this, we see discourse as a constant, as a sort of well of the ‘human spirit’ from which we can extract (more or less lost/forgotten) meanings for our public/private life.

But what is also forgotten is that an enormous cataclysm had to occur on planet Earth before we could have oil to burn today. And what is absurd is not just that today we talk about ‘harmony with nature’ and the need to live our lives in that harmony, but also that the val-

ue of oil as a ‘raw material’ is determined in a commensurable relationship with the value of other materials that our society needs in order to reproduce itself. In other words, it is absurd that such a metamorphosis has occurred in relation to the value of something so essential. Now we burn oil just to watch television, pay our taxes, and sell our (remote) work, and all of this while praying that soon we will find a replacement to serve as our primary ‘energy source’.

But what we want to emphasise here is that the actual source of our creativity is our own ideological limits. And creativity extends into every corner of our existence.

The ‘harmony’ of sexuality, for example, always occurs under one type of repression or another, from which the sexual/imaginary emerges. This is the true ‘harmonising’ element of the reproductive act, which, as psychoanalysis shows us, is never sexual ‘in and of itself’, i.e. purely reproductive in the (mechanical and physiological) biological sense, and this is true even if we really depend on Archimedes’ principle. In addition, reproduction of the mode of production itself has always been, in this sense, ‘a subject for adults’.

However, in reality, we do not owe the end of those exaggerated puritanical prejudices to Freud. The free subject, as a matrix for our relations, ends up casting off everything that hinders its own logic (i.e. the conservatism of heterosexual relations and the nuclear family, but also what came to be known as the totalising ‘metanarratives’ of each person’s sacred truth). Certain links that were solid in the past have been dissolving, not into the air but in the materiality of the lives that remain and are thus more loosely attached, and more available to the free flow of capital. With regard to the sexual taboo, there was indeed Puritanism, and there were some (more or less ridiculous) techniques for concealing sexuality as a ‘topic’. But in relation to another taboo, namely the social/political taboo of exploitation, there was the concept

of ‘social determinism’, which, although it became thematised without being aware of its own ideological inscription (Manheim and his ‘paradox’ only lead to a blind spot/paranoia where everything, beginning with one’s self, is under suspicion of ‘false consciousness’), had nothing to do with any awareness of exploitation. And we all know where that road led in the end: the economic blame was put on Marxism and it was torn to shreds, while established ‘wisdom’ passed judgement on its dehumanising and reductionist excesses.

However, we know that in many cases, when certain ideas fall into disrepute, it is due to the distorted version of them created by their own defenders. In any event, viewing reality with a mind that is critical but open and objective, while at the same time, able to renew its perspective, is the key to free and creative thinking (Chomsky solidified the relationship between those two concepts through his generative conception of universal grammar). This is the idea of ‘lateral thinking’ as practised by Richard Feynman, for example, who suggested that we should consider certain natural phenomena in relation to others that are normally left out of the equation (in this case, for being somewhat socio-logical and therefore having a whiff of that determinism). For example, viewing the need for the world’s population to brush their teeth before bed on the basis of the earth’s rotation (the replacement of night by day and vice versa) as a determinant for the phenomenon in question, with dentistry therefore left to play an ancillary role. This is merely an exercise in that creative or ‘lateral thinking’ which, as McGilchrist (2016) reminds us, we do mainly with the right hemisphere of our brain. We could say, based on an analysis that is supposedly more ‘thoroughly considered’, that the social (and, specifically, historical materialism) forced its own particular ‘Eureka moment’ on us as the ‘science of history’. In this book, we will often return to the question of the epistemological paradigm shifts debated in the wake of the publication of Lyotard’s *The*

Postmodern Condition, because for us, those shifts have not been due to the opening of new ‘horizons’ by virtue of new discoveries, but to the opening of new horizons of meaning by virtue of changes or alterations in social relations, whose meaning always covers up the meaning that the discovery in question could never have in and of itself.

This is why it does not take a genius to understand the meaning that has arisen from the society in which we live, because in order to understand that meaning, it is sufficient to combine a bit of ‘natural history’ with a bit of ‘cultural history’, which should allow any reasonable person to understand that nature and social life are what they are because they have evolved in that way. As they say here in Spain in the region of Asturias, ‘ye lo que hay’: that’s the way it is. To understand all this, we only need to think about the images that flash before our eyes in less than 20 seconds during the opening theme song of the TV sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*.

But this book is actually about the high level of entropy that today’s discourse involves, which can be compared to the oil that our planet is extracting from itself during this one fleeting moment of the eon in which we happen to live.<sup>71</sup> As human beings, we are really not aware of what needed to happen (apart from those 20 seconds) so that now we can declare, ‘That’s just how I am’ or ‘We’re our own worst critics’. If we look for precedents for sayings like these (leaving their meanings between brackets), we can find them in Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Chesterton, or artificial intelligence, but the seriousness or lack thereof with which they are stated varies from one to another.

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71 As an example (and at risk of falling into another one of those “intellectual impostures” with which the humanities and social sciences have sometimes perverted the language of the physical and natural sciences, as rather aggressively explained by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont (2021)), in a sort of act of faith or intellectual gamble, we are willing to accept Michael Penrose’s idea of “recurring universes”, in which that big bang would simply be a sort of seam or transition between a series of successive, conformal, etc. universes.

## The normality of the sense of humour

Humour and seriousness also depend on the relations from which they are expressed. Humour confirms that the common sense that rules our lives is founded on the absurdity of some material relations that are imaginarily supported by a rule: the free subject. This is not just because Hegel would tell us that there is nobody more foolish than a person who (fundamentally) takes his status as king seriously, but because, deep down inside, none of us really believe in *our own* normality, or at least, not in all seriousness. The margin of error is too extreme, and this often inspires laughter. Under normal circumstances, our psyche conspires to keep us calm and serious. Nevertheless, we laugh once in a while, at the expense of something we consider necessary, just to stay consistent.

Historically, humour has changed in tandem with the meaning of what is considered absurd, while each established belief loses its seriousness in favour of another, which in turn has a shelf life that will eventually expire. We know this, but we tend to assume the *reason* for it: evolution.

Even today we still find *Don Quixote* funny, but the seriousness with which we take Cervantes, and his jokes and his tales of that famous knight from La Mancha, no longer belongs to that author. That there have been reigns with a solid legitimate foundation in a belief in servitude is unquestionable, as today there are bankers who have full control over our lives because we firmly believe that social relations are only 'sociological' and, furthermore, that this is *perfectly normal*, even if not always *fair*. But understanding the absurd (along with its relationship with the belief in a mode of production for life) is a topic for analysis that goes beyond the political. It involves the 'ideological unconscious', which starts with the process of individuation itself (or, to put it another way, the process that historically configures our subjectivity), beginning at the



time of our birth. Specifically, we have to start with an analysis of the historical conditions that determine our own ideological unconscious and, along with it, our form of individuation or ideological inscription in social relations determined by an unconscious that (systematically) rejects the idea that social relations are determined in advance by the spontaneity of the sense in which we say 'I am'. This is a type of repression that greatly stimulates our imagination, but we pay a price for it, in the form of limits placed on the meaning of everything we are able to imagine. That meaning is the real 'master of the emissary' (the right hemisphere).

These days we say 'I (am)' without realising that the meaning of this statement has a radical historical relationship with the content to which it refers, which in this case is the attribute (I am: Pablo, a Spaniard, a European, fair-haired, the partner of Carmen, the son of José Manuel and Marisol, a professor at the University of Granada, the owner of Tilo (my dog), a (postmodern) Marxist theorist, etc.). In turn, the social value of these attributes is what gives them their thickness or intensity, because they could never merely refer to the world of phenomena, objects, or living beings in the absence of that value, which keeps them 'up-to-date' (i.e. the free subject and their problems in 2023, which, although it is actually too general, will work for now). The historicity of what exists is what actually 'communicates' (rather than our authentic internal self, which only introduces particularities that are merely identifiers of the individual, in the strict sense), because it is what gives each individual their meaning in the world.

We need to look for symptoms of the relationship between history and discourse in our forms of interpellation at all levels. This means that the study of texts and contexts cannot be limited to confirming the economic 'undercurrent', the political 'slant', or the ideological 'nature' of certain statements, compared to others that do not have that 'nature'. In other words, those texts cannot be used merely for the purpose

of extracting their aesthetic ‘purities’ or their social ‘commitments’, because the commitment to history that determines us is totally pure and serious.

Nevertheless, humour, as we all know (but perhaps do not fully understand), arises from an abrupt collision between the seriousness that we adopt in our relationships and the normality/nothingness contradiction. Humour resides in the seriousness of the tension that suddenly strikes us as entirely absurd: and we begin to laugh. That miracle of existence. The ‘humour of the absurd’ is therefore based on the ultimate meaning that is reproduced in each normality, just as ‘abstract art’ consists of nothing more than feigning the indeterminate nature of the artistic object in order to reclaim its entire (inter)subjective effect. This is public communication of a ‘private language’ that is assumed to be unique, but all it is really doing is supporting itself on the ideological matrix of ‘free (inter)subjectivity’ (dialectically expressed in that way: subject/subject). Nobody dares to speak of humour when the ‘I’ of the artist and the ‘I’ of the viewer think that they are engaged in serious, intimate communication. Nevertheless, the same reality underlies both the ‘gag’ and that ‘other perspective’: absurd but real exploiter/exploited social relations as our only normality.

Exploitation represents a double contradiction, because it is based on the absurdity of a balanced imbalance that is, in turn, entirely logical (and tell that to Aristotle, with his analysis of the practical if not logical equivalence of the house and its beds). That is the logic through whose absurd cracks both the joke and the (finished or unfinished) work of art can slip.

We must therefore ask ourselves about the reason for the (absurd) substantialisation of discursive genres, both subjective and objective (this is/is not literature, is/is not philosophy, is/is not science). This is a substantialisation from the human sciences that translates into

a series of ‘objects of study’ configured by the study itself, i.e. using the same method: that tool of knowledge that modern social relations have been constructing by smoothing out the edges of their discourse on literature as ‘art’, until we come to the ‘Bronze Age’, not as a form of evolution but as a cut-off point or caesura, after which *we begin* to speak of literature as ‘culture’ before subsequently reaching the ‘Iron Age’, where literature is ‘communication’.

And here it would seem that we are already trying to talk about something else, when literature would fundamentally continue to represent that *communication*, and, within that general/abstract concept, its dark side: the *production* of ‘ideology’ as ‘falsely (or noisily) conscious’ communication, which is nevertheless effective in terms of strengthening the ‘social bond’. This is what Clifford Geertz does not accept in his famous book *The Interpretation of Cultures*, because he believes that the symbolic/neutral should be subject to empirical/linguistic analysis of the communicative/ideological,<sup>72</sup> or simply (and this is what Geertz does accept) analysis as a ‘symbolic activity’ that is encouraged by the eagerness for transcendence, whose ultimate meaning would be the most sublime object of study that has ever existed: human nature, once again. The nuance that must be emphasised here is that we *do not want* to propose a ‘new method’ for the study of ideology, i.e. one that would be constructing an ad hoc object: ideology as a ‘communicative phenomenon’, where the *broadcasting* and *reception* of ‘symbolic representation’ would occur in a *context* (class struggle?), through a *channel* (society), expressed in a *code* (discourse), where the context (social relations) would be the aspect given the ‘most importance’. Here the ‘noise’ could not be more muffled, because ideology has no secrets. It is not ‘symbolic representation’, nor can it be identified in any way other than through a symptomatic reading, which only requires one thing: elevation

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72 Geertz (loc. cit.).

to the level of production, to allow its analysis. In other words, confirming the absurdity of speaking of a universal history, on one hand, and a history of art or a history of science on the other. It is absurd for anyone to speak of contemporary poetry, on one hand, and the latest headlines on the other. This is not because each of these is a ‘reflection’ of the other, but because everything that surrounds us (and our history books confirm this, even with all their nuances) leads us to production, to the practice of life, in which every moment of the day means the world to us, and where the noise (or celestial music) is called ideology. This is the absurdity that exists in our discourse, which continually displaces the idea of its own ideological production, even calling that constant displacement a ‘method’.

In an interview he gave in 1971, just a few days after defending his doctoral thesis at the University of Granada, a young Juan Carlos Rodríguez (2016b) said the following: ‘It is not about new methods. In principle, it is about eliminating the absurd. Too many things are absurd. It is astounding that there is something called literary criticism, and equally absurd that there is a phenomenon simply labelled as literature.’

### **The logic of the absurd and its social relations**

The authority of a king arises from the same state of things as the honour of his feudal vassal (whether a noble or a serf). But in that state of things, which no longer exists, both of them are the butt of the joke while also being subject to the harshest law. The tribute paid by the vassal between the 16th and 18th centuries represents a surrender to an authority whose senses of humour and artistic taste are markedly different, not just from those of the preceding feudalism,

but even more so from the classicism in which the first ‘beautiful souls’ of the 14th century are philologically inscribed, along with their newly discovered ‘dignity’. That initial lyrical poetry (which has now become an affected or sublimated tradition), of the sympathetic ‘I’ of humanism (Petrarch, or later in Spain, Garcilaso), is already a discourse from which a transition between the private and the public has become possible. This is because, in that discourse, honour and bloodline are destroyed in favour of merit (social mobility and prestige), which is then exposed to the ‘contempt of those who are worth nothing’ (Shakespeare), because they have paid for their ticket to the theatre of life.<sup>73</sup> Today, as we have explained, this has all become rather laughable because lives are now owned by financial capital. Nevertheless, the contempt continues to be as legitimate as our belief in our own authenticity as free subjects who are worth everything.

But despite all this, we do not believe what we actually are, and humour is what ultimately underlies the imbalance that supports social tension. However, it is one thing to have a shared belief through which a person is inscribed in society, and something very different to have a faith with which one struggles against oneself. In this sense, there is no reason why Marxist faith and Christian faith should be seen as opposed to each other, because this only occurs when belief creeps in.

Indeed, the world is a vale of tears. Christianity has always struck me as the most radical form of faith in the world, precisely because it arises from harsh reality and aspires to nothing more than love under all circumstances. Even to the point where that love becomes the only real freedom: it means accepting that the world is exploitation, and in this world, one must love one’s neighbour, not in order to change it, and not for the sake of unconditional love, but because the world changes by itself and exists on its own terms. This is not a morality of

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73 Rodríguez (2001a, pp. 165-170).

weakness, or of comfort, but one where giving love is the highest form of heroism. Christianity is the antithesis of legitimisation, although it does rely on it (God himself has had to start speaking to us in ‘private’, as that is the language which we understand today), because Christianity takes nothing seriously other than love at all costs. This is the meaning of the ‘absurdity’ that Kierkegaard emphasises in the faith he defends.

This is not the place to defend the Christian faith. However, what we do want to talk about here is how the beliefs that make the world keep turning have a materialist basis in the productive sense, because they are built on the rock of the reality of social practices. In this sense, Stephen Hawking’s ‘encyclicals’ are a perfect example of what the world now believes. And like any other belief, this one is only supported through a third party, which is the one we want to keep happy here, whether known as ‘mother’ or the ‘Great Other’. And this third party, in the world that we now reproduce with each step we take, ‘is to be taken seriously’, and always has been.

## **Yesterday’s world was also for real**

Distorting the words of the poet a little (or a lot) would be to admit, even if one starts to forget it later, that ‘life’ in *yesterday’s world* ‘was for real’. Although we may now look back at those times with amusement, those clothes, those expressions, those explanations *made perfect sense*. When Stefan Zweig tells us about his memories of the times before the Great War, all he really does is summarise the things that he thinks were magnificent, ingenious, or full of intelligence or elegance, contrasting them with others that are now seen as ridiculous or passé. But the bottom line, as is always the case after a war, demonstrates

one primordial value cherished by Zweig (and by everyone else in *his* world), but which the prevailing circumstances ended up denigrating: the value of *being* European when Europe was the cultural centre of ‘humanity’.

The war destroyed *all of that*, and more specifically, the meaning from which Culture, with a capital C, arose. However, can we really say that the tangible chaos of a war (whether great or small) represents in itself the destruction of Europe’s cultural/intangible domination? If we think about the fact that both the obsolete and what was difficult to surpass had their moment (whether propitious or not) in *the world as it was*, i.e. the one that would fatefully lead to the largest armed conflict of all times, not only because of the force of destiny, but also because of the force of the meaning generated by everything that must occur so that life can be reproduced with one meaning or another. After all, the fate that led us into the two great modern wars was not determined by chance in a casino, but rather in a mass market of social practices, and it is these that come into conflict, organised as ‘major powers’.

However, when (we) say that *everything happened for a reason*, we are not just talking about a train that has already left the station. Instead, we are emphasising something that Zweig continually touches on without ever actually revealing it to us: the fact that life is (very seriously) created from material historicity. The conditions for reproduction of that life (and not any other life) are those that determine both the meaning of the Great War and the fact that teatime is five o’clock (regardless of how many people still have their tea at five).<sup>74</sup> Indeed, that reason for why everything is (and happens) does not point to any conclusion or inevitable final event. The randomness of fate is

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74 This is what that entire field of study known as “Conflict Theory” fails to bear in mind, precisely because that field fundamentally follows the same logic: arriving at abstract conclusions (separated from their historicity) regarding social conflict.

one thing, and the historicity of life is something else entirely, and it leaves no room for coincidence. We equally reject radical teleologism and teleological radicalism (such as that of zur Linde in Borges' story 'Deutsches Requiem'). What we actually accept is a radical historicity of the present, in which all practice takes place and is configured.

The problem is that Zweig separates (displaces) the historicity in which his own discourse occurs, specifically from the way in which he is inscribed in the historicity of the discourse of the 'I am', which is the place from which he writes each of his books. And any author can be analysed in this way: the organicistic and feudalising Quevedo of '*Erase un hombre a una nariz pegado*' is different from the animist and modernising Quevedo of '*Amor constante más allá de la muerte*', while the nocturnal Goethe of *Faust* (vitalist and romantic) is different from the diurnal Goethe of the *Naturphilosophie*, knowledgeable about mineralogy, optics, and botany, but where, nevertheless, his rationalist 'adventure' shifts towards a nature/subject, rather than the nature/inert object of standard rationalism. In the case of the plant world, he even speaks of the types and metamorphosis of the 'idea of the leaf', or, in other words (against the stagnation of reason itself); he sides with *natura naturans* rather than *natura naturata*, etc. What this demonstrates is that he is completely inscribed in the Kantian problematic of *the thing in itself*, which phenomenology would subsequently replace with *the self of the thing*. Both of these, of course, are unthinkable outside the ideology of the literal.

But Zweig's writing is divided in another sense too, one specific to his post-war conjuncture, and one that represents an entry into what has been called aesthetics writ small: a division between what he considers to be his own 'I' and the supposedly sublime voice of humanity captured by world literature, which supposedly must represent it (something Goethe perceived but did not take for granted, which is why he makes it explicit when speaking of *Weltliteratur* for the first



time). When speaking of his memoirs, Zweig says, 'I have had to experience many things – events, catastrophes, and trials – infinitely many more than those that would usually correspond to a single generation, in order to find sufficient courage to conceive of a book that would express my own 'I' as its protagonist, or, to put it better, as its centre.'<sup>75</sup> This is not to say that there had never been memoirs written by a single individual before, but rather that the individual that writes them has not always been a subject, or, as in the case of Zweig, a subject whose voice is legitimised through the concepts of sincerity and authenticity. This is something that, as we know, Lionel Trilling would go on to thematise in 1972 in his celebrated essay.<sup>76</sup>

Zweig's notion of putting his 'I' in the 'centre' is nothing new, and nothing exclusive to the times during which he wrote his memoirs. It was not invented by Goethe either, and, in fact, the first author to write about this (because that notion was floating in the air at the time) was Montaigne, who did so 300 years earlier. The problem, as JCR reminds us, is that we say 'I' without knowing what we are saying, or when we are saying it. The discourses of art, philosophy, and politics, like those of fishing, telemarketing, or tax collection, are all social practices (with techniques and an orientation around specific purposes that may be more or less relative), and this is the only reason why all of them are ways of saying 'I am'. The fact that Zweig (consciously) believes that he only says 'I' with his memoirs and not with his fiction is not the result of any evolution of that 'I', but rather of the materiality that legitimises the 'I' by dividing it into the psychological subject 'I' and the fictional 'I' as a poetic subject. In our case here, the biographical would be the result of cultural evolution observed from the objectivity of a 'critical

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<sup>75</sup> Zweig, Stefan. *The World of Yesterday: Memoires of a European* (p. 3). Kindle edition.

<sup>76</sup> See Trilling, L. (2009). *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Harvard University Press.

subject', while the literary would be the result of a tradition in which the subject is aesthetically or poetically inscribed. This is a division that succeeds in erasing the idea of the individual, whose metamorphosis occurs in the interior of their social relations.

### **That is the actual function of ideology**

And so much so that this process of historical erasure is clearly seen in history books, for example, when history and intrahistory are spoken of as fundamentally different things, with the latter conceived as the custodian of what had to be discarded from the former in order to salvage its scientific nature, while at the same time retaining the subjective element as a guarantor of the autonomy of the subject: the 'I am a (free) subject' because I have/do (my) life and (my) biography, even if this is expressed in the biography of others. Surely Hitler would also have his own personal story, but, as we have seen, he is the subject-bject, whose objective dark side would fully eclipse his humanity. In addition, Zweig shares his view of historiography with others, such as Collingwood, who believes that what is important is sincerity and impartiality, but in the sense of a subject of knowledge who circumscribes his own historicity by speaking of generations, apogees, and decadences with respect to a comprehensive 'subjective/objective' ideal known as 'the West'.

Conclusion: we are well aware that the mystery and gravity with which we now say 'I am' will go up in smoke in practice, because no historicity of the past maintains its thickness in the memory of the present (except as some form of obsession or mania, i.e. as something else). Of course, the previously feared or avoided mauling referred to by Gil de Biedma will arrive in the end, but the crudeness of the

passage of time and death does not have a universal meaning but a radically historical one, and the ‘new life’ is unable to propel itself forward step-by-step. This is why it is essential to understand that these renovations, or (almost always rather doubtful) revolutions, cannot be explained in themselves, because they can only be explained by their underlying history. And this is a topic that is indeed a very serious one. Perhaps the contradiction becomes more apparent over time, but its actual effect is much more powerful in the present moment.

### **The (in)appropriateness of Marxism**

There was a time when Marxism was the ‘*bête noire*’ or ‘bogeyman’ of the humanities, before they entered the tunnel of the problem of language, where everything went black (except for those who decided to focus on the converse: the language of the problem, i.e. the uses of language, its metaphors, its functions, and the media in which it is expressed). Nevertheless, the fate of the humanities had already been sealed, and the echo of the free subject was heard both within and outside the enigma. Meanwhile, perhaps the most fertile period that theoretical Marxism ever had, its ‘radiance’ in the middle of the tunnel, so to speak, was during what we could refer to as its phase of ‘psychological terror’. The outcome is well known, of course, but there is still something that remains in suspense, between the real facts and the story we are told.

That phase took place during the period of so-called poststructuralism. Beginning in the late 1960s, with Louis Althusser as its champion, there was a disparate but nevertheless unifying theory produced regarding the critique of ideology. The psychological fear of the unconscious, of essentially being on the same side as the enemy, would become even more terrifying when the enemy was found to be within: ideology.

In effect, what the Althusserian school introduced in the late 1960s was the concept of the 'ideologised subject'. The basic principle was that Ideological State Apparatuses, acting in the service of the dominant ideology (of the class owning the means of production), reproduced a certain manner of being and seeming in the mode of production. In other words, this was a mode of pertinent interpellation of (ourselves as) the subjects of that mode: thinking, listening, and answering according to our condition as subject, and in no other way. This was seen as the condition that reproduces the 'human factor', in the terms necessary for reproduction of the means of reproduction: the forces of labour in all their vital complexity, the same forces that, in the end, must lead us into a spontaneous functional simplicity, a symptom that something so terrible 'nevertheless' functions: we present ourselves 'at the factory gate again the next day, and every further day God grants' us, Althusser says.

This is an ideology which is, therefore, one that causes the subject to participate in the totality of their social interactions, even in the solitude of their privacy, which they experience through that same ideology, and no other. In our modern times, those 'apparatuses' are the schools, the institutions, the media, the (secularised) church, literature, etc. After that, the story of Althusser is the story of his descent into the inferno: from politics, and the silence of politics, into theory. And this is where we find resolution of the suspense: the same theory, but this time in a void.

And this is despite the work of Juan Carlos Rodríguez (JCR), Althusser's greatest 'disciple' in Spain (where the 'transition' to democracy was taking place and the recently revived 'voice of the people' could therefore be heard, where the intellectual struggle was to begin by smashing the old crockery in the house abandoned by the deceased patriarch) and in the world. JCR's work would nevertheless be immediately silenced

under a concrete slab of misunderstanding, because he had (apparently) not given enough importance to the issue of the 'ideological apparatuses' (as Althusser's other international disciples did), instead focusing almost entirely on the *lack of relationship among the various historical subjectivities with which, up until then, the free subject had identified, based on that subject's 'knowledge' of history*. This was, therefore, a lack of relationship between the ideologised subject as 'free' and the other two known processes of individuation, i.e. the other ways of saying 'I am': slavery ('I am master/slave') and feudalism ('I am lord/vassal'). And this is not because those forms were not ideologies of the subject, but because even the subject that today we consider, in the worst of cases, to be an alienated subject, must also be understood as the specific ideological product of the idea of 'authenticity' that a certain Marxist view had identified with the proletariat. And that is something very impertinent, not only for the 'turn of phrase' which spoke of a 'fall into language' and, therefore, a previous authentic subject, but also for the Marxism that believes in a class struggle that arises from the bottom: from the discovery of a supposedly free human condition that existed prior to exploitation.

In other words, what Marxism and positivism may have combined to produce was a phenomenological reversal: one that accepts that in order to think about something new, we have to begin by rejecting the old knowledge (the deceptive tradition), and this is done by relying on constant renewal of the 'perspective': rejecting the 'thing in itself' in order to see 'the self in the thing', but shifting from the unapproachable 'whole' to the specific/observable 'parts'. In other words, the phenomenologist says, stop thinking uselessly about what reality *is*, and instead consider the *reality of thinking* and, especially, what our thinking says at specific moments of its expression: 'language' and 'communication' (and as such, philosophy can move beyond 'mental acts' to arrive at the philosophy of language, which 'studies' acts 'of

speech’) as observable realities in themselves, viewed from multiple textual/contextual perspectives, etc. Even positivism would come to accept the importance of ensuring that the interpretive methods applied *take into account* the ‘logic of the situation’.<sup>77</sup> For JCR, this would be a symptom indicating that the radical historicity in which his theory was inscribed was the same as that of the non-Marxists, and the same as that which produces all those perspectives, among which his would be just one more. Based on that awareness, he said ‘no’ to his own language, and he said it (‘literature has not always existed’) even though he clearly knew that he would be speaking into a void.

So, let’s take a look at what it means to say ‘no’ to the language of positivism, but in a state of absolute fullness.

## **King Kong versus the Yalies**

In 1981, one of those books appeared that opens everyone’s eyes by the force of its assertive monstrosity. But what we really find most shocking is the fact that a Marxist book was published in the world’s most (neo)liberal country, with an authority and charisma that were not the type associated with Clint Eastwood in *For a Fistful of Dollars*, or, in other words, a Lone Ranger sort of aura, but as a representation of a whole school of critical thought that not only came from Europe, but had rejected and renounced the positivism that still reigned at American universities. Furthermore, that school of thought was the Althusserian school, with which Marxism itself still had a few scores to settle. And if we also point out that it appeared there in the form of a beast of a book (the *beast* being excessive power extracted from its medium), the enthusiastic welcome it received becomes even more surprising.

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<sup>77</sup> Therborn (2008), pp. 89-90.

The book was first presented to readers at Yale (weary of the pragmatism that runs through that country's veins, but also ready to listen, because of the perspectivism revived by their exposure to the natural sciences), as a sort of wild beast as intimidating as King Kong, but securely chained and framed by that gigantic structure (i.e. that *bête noire* image that Marxism had already acquired). The university received the beast with restrained applause, but what continued to flutter right under their noses was more of a condescending attitude towards something that might have been the 'last chance' for renewal of the historical materialist method through *dialectic applied to literary criticism*. This was even suggested by the title that Fredric Jameson had given to his book, *The Political Unconscious*. However, we have become (from the start) rather sceptical, and we were more amazed by the cultural fact than by the marvellous content of a work of 'literary criticism' that was so flawed by omission of a fundamental aspect: its *author* failed to tell us in which sense of discourse (itself) the unconscious is always, *a priori*, political.

By failing to address that issue, and despite the Marxist/Althusserian position he takes, Jameson applies the resulting concepts (and he knew this but, paradoxically, assumed it while at the same time criticising it) to produce a methodology dedicated to resolving a problem that has now become more of a concern than ever, because the world is becoming homogenised: 'cultural interpretation' and, in particular, 'literary culture'. In other words, here the author of *The Political Unconscious* is guilty of the same American pragmatism in which his own text's thesis (that is, its legitimisation) is ultimately and irredeemably inscribed. And at the end of the day, this really just means presentation of a 'local way' of constructing the 'object' (of literary texts in general). But this is just what the students at Yale were looking for (as would those from any other fiefdom of universal knowledge, now 'open' to all beliefs, although there has to be 'someone' to claim merit for that openness). So

far, so good, everything looks perfectly normal. However, according to Jameson, those perspectives suffer from an indiscriminate pretence of self-sufficiency with regard to their 'objects of study' (that is, the object of *each* critique), which he contrasts with his own method involving the Marxist 'metacommentary'. He claims that his method is truly adjusted to the 'object', in the sense that this 'dialectic and totalising' (without complexes) method leads us to an understanding of the 'literary phenomenon'. His only caveat is that we need to bear in mind the 'absent cause', i.e. not the reality in itself, but the effect of a frustrated pursuit of the desire to be something one already is: the free subject. However, this is what Jameson is unable to say, because doing so would be acknowledging that outsiders are not 'authentic' either, because we are not even *outside*, and it is actually ideology that determines whether we will get in the game or be left on the bench.

And in this way, Jameson is taking on the role of a referee of referees or, in other words, acting as a sort of video assistant referee to determine whether an 'action', a verse, a plot, or a 'romance' ultimately has been/is an expression of the pain of the political. But what gives him authority to act as a critic and interpret the most 'painful' truth ('politics is the real/social that hurts') is the certainty that by identifying the political desire (the painful excess) of the subject he interprets; he is at the same time answering the question about the literary object. And to do this, he must kneel before the altar (which in this case is encoded at the pure level of political pain) of the free subject, which is something that even Disney's screenwriters are still willing to do.

Moreover, Jameson is well aware that no belief is false in and of itself, as ideology establishes certain axioms through which the subject interpreting that belief confronts a material/social reality (one that is not just economic, but also political and ideological) known as the 'mode of production'. In the end, this is what determines the meaning of particu-



lar critical and literary perspectives, with the immanence of the latter also permeating *The Political Unconscious*, for example, when the author states that Balzac writes from a sort of superior awareness regarding potential critiques of his text (which, according to Jameson, ultimately reflects an act of the ‘superego’), and that this would result in imagining the ideal text that must necessarily be presented in the form of a material text (this would be the symbolic representation) (pp. 170–171). In other words, Jameson would be shifting towards the structure of the ‘I’ in order to explain the ‘I am’. This is actually a strong temptation, and surely one that we have fallen into ourselves in these pages (and those that remain). But therein lies the problem: our (ideological/driving) unconscious always shows us the most intelligible path in practice. And where there is no method, there can be no knowledge today. This is why we think that Jameson is living (and will be for many years) in the earthly limbo of the righteous.

Specifically, this is because we think that, if there had been an awareness of the difference or nuances that Juan Carlos Rodríguez (of the University of Granada) introduced into the debate over discourse and ideology with his theory of the radical historicity of the ‘ideological unconscious’ (fundamentally, analysis of the symptoms that can be observed in the spontaneous discourse of the individuation or historical configuration of subjectivities, which also produce the discourses that are formed and deformed in *his own* ideology), and, if that difference and those nuances had been understood, then the disruption that affected, on one hand, the world of Marxism and post-Marxism at the end of the 20th century and, on the other hand, the humanities and social sciences in general, would have been even greater: not only more long-lasting, but more defining and even definitive.

## **Marx and ‘the topic in question’ (or the ‘contribution’ of historical materialism to literary theory)**

It is 2009 and we are in a literary theory class at Yale University. Professor Paul H. Fry (2012), already nearing retirement age (after rising to the top of the academic world), gives a 50-minute lecture about the Frankfurt School (*‘of Critical Theory’*, to be more specific). His discourse is perfectly woven, and his tone is inviting to experts and neophytes alike. His amiable didactic presentation never loses sight of the purpose of the course, which is to learn about the importance (the ‘contribution’) of each theoretical trend, with each ‘master class’ dedicated to one of these. As such, his ‘focus’, well synthesised and with a doctoral slant, presents an overview of the ‘big questions’ and is, at the same time, a presentation of possible lines of study that his student audience will have to distinguish and delimit, and only then, ‘explore’ and ‘develop’ in their final essay. But here we are getting ahead of the events at hand: for now, we want to focus on the ritual of ‘participatory attendance’ and ‘understanding of a topic’. And we already know: to do this, one does not necessarily have to speak publicly, one can simply listen ‘with an open mind’. Later, we will take a look at what the mind is actually being opened to (i.e. what the point of it being opened is).

The students at Yale are perfectly aware of this type of positive (and practical) attitude as part of their ‘university life’ (that of the lecture halls and ‘social life’ exclusive to each ‘cohort’). Their casual dress is part of the *habitus* they use to express that identity (assumed individually these days, more than collectively as future alumni of the same alma mater). This is a sort of springtime ritual on campus, where the bodies, more or less rested after their excesses (or not) of the night before, more or less aware of their need for hydration (Columbia-brand water bottles abound), covered from head to toe in fashionable, sporty gear (‘outdoor’

accessories are especially popular: backpacks, hiking boots, camelbacks, etc.), are all presenting a sort of magmatic status (as their minds roam their neo-colonial campus). Later, they will become a loose assembly of distinguished individual graduates and postgraduate ‘experts’. Some, who are perhaps a bit more self-conscious, as they already have that status, but are no less aware of their eventual ascent to the heights of knowledge, adopt a more European sartorial approach (but of course, an idealised version of this that they make their own). But not one of them still believes in any of that ‘dominant class’ rhetoric; quite the opposite: they are sure that Athenian democracy runs through their veins. Some may be willing to acknowledge their privilege, while overlooking their institution’s historical links to slavery, or perhaps they believe that the debt has already been paid off. Their ‘differences of opinion’ seem to really only differentiate those who prefer (social/identity-based) activism and those who are merely interested in ‘personal achievement’. But any anti-establishment spirit that may have once existed seems to have now been pacified, and the disorganised state of their bedrooms (in spite of Jordan Peterson’s advice) does have its charm.

But that is today’s class. The academic year has reached its half-way point, and Professor Fry’s concise explanations are received with the same deference by the casual and the circumspect. In this case, his generational difference from his students in no way hinders their recognition of the merit conveyed (because it is being shared/communicated) of due consideration, and of a civilised but informal manner of address which the teacher imparts to all those individual names of the *intelligence* (civilised, secular, European, Western, ‘open’ to the other, etc.) with which the sacrosanct edifice of knowledge continues to be constructed, as if with a sort of moral obligation, and despite the social upheavals of the modern and contemporary world. This is an edifice that, of course, has been inherited from antiquity (in accordance with the established image,

despite a few minor changes), as reflected in the dominant neoclassical architecture of those buildings that act as magnets for knowledge.

Here, the notion that the torch of the timeless wisdom of great minds is being passed on to them is something that might cause these students to roll their eyes, but only because they already take it for granted (this corresponds to their ‘casual’ positivism, regardless of how nuanced it may also be).<sup>78</sup> This is also why, by emphasising the gestures that convey a sense of belonging to the ‘past and present’ (a phrase that is in fact included in the titles of many of these classes designed to produce ideal citizens), the diversity becomes generational rather than ideological: the professors have also dropped any patrician attitudes, precisely because it is already known that they are imbued with a distinction whose private merit enjoys analogous public recognition.

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78 “In general, by 1900 a break had occurred with the image of the positivist “hierarchy of the sciences” formulated by Auguste Comte, which, as deftly explained by John Henry Bridges (1915, pp. 162-163) (who symptomatically had to reclaim Comte’s image), should not be interpreted as a genealogical hierarchy of understanding or knowledge about “human nature”, because in that sense it is more appropriate to speak of the branches of the “tree of science”, the biological image that was in vogue at the end of the 19th century. Bridges reminds us that the positivist hierarchy, if properly understood, is a synchronous one, which would ascend from what is general to all phenomena (such as geometry) and to the most specific (life and society or ideas), and vice versa. In addition, each level would have its own method and concepts (according to Bridges, it would therefore be an error to attempt to explain, for example, the sociological using biological or medical concepts, or medicine using metaphysical concepts), and the history of science would, therefore, have been a history of errors/successes in that sense: the steps in the hierarchy would have been confused and mixed together (e.g. ancient and medieval medicine referred to the “humours”, a metaphysical concept, and the sociology/political science of Condorcet tried to explain its phenomena using mathematics, etc.). Our belief is that what Bridges clearly failed to consider is that, if those concepts can be extrapolated from one science to another, it is because they largely configure the discourses of those sciences and, therefore, scientific practices themselves (see Rodríguez 2001a, p. 63; Pêcheux 1960, p. 39). Furthermore, the logics of those concepts always configure much more than just the sciences, as the concepts are derived from certain social relations and, therefore, one would instead need to ask what a society that separates specific concepts only for sociology would be like.” (Aparicio 2018a, p. 145).

The student body, for its part, is aware that this is a period of adaptation, where the name of the game is still fighting their class origins. This can be perceived in the fact that the contradiction is expressed in the field of what is fashionable: in clothing, music, affiliations, vices, diet, mental health, etc. All of these have their own shelf life (not as actual contradictions, but as volatile forms of expression in which the contradictions are lurking under the surface), as the students make their final entry into ‘adult maturity’. Once there, they will finally take on their appearance as intellectual workers, although perhaps not as uniformly as the look that their professor inherited, as he belongs to that suit-and-tie generation where a specialist in Sanskrit dressed like a government official or bank employee (as far as the image of the 20th-century ‘humanist’ is concerned, there may be no better example than Albert Camus). That manner of dress represented a special acceptance of rigid bureaucracy, which has today become more entrenched than ever, but transcribed by the limpid image of self-governance and personal organisation that the digital-technical market has implanted in these individuals and their authenticity: they have no obligations but rather ‘objectives’, no expectations/aspirations but instead ‘goals’, no commitments but ‘events’ to attend. They also have travel plans, but only for ‘experience’ (and the key here is the image of these individual travellers breezing through airports while never missing a beat, because they still have the world in their pocket).

To put it another way, in an atmosphere that is much more ‘relaxed’ and ‘open’ than ever, but with a discursive scope that is increasingly narrow, the new generations are bidding *adieu* to a Marxism that seems to have become one of those great ideas that is, nevertheless, no longer worth pursuing. Sure, it was one of the historical ‘lenses’ that had been used to observe our ‘human condition’, and it had played an important role (with the impertinence of having addressed the previ-

ously unaddressable social side of things). To the greatest extent possible, it even allowed that human condition to be ‘better understood’. However, neither the formal malleability in which the subjective genres become interchangeable with the objective ones, nor the human voice that tied them together and connected them within the phenomenon of literature can be explained using only that school of thought.

We will have to continue waiting for the responses, because they will only appear in the individual syntheses that each person manages to test with their own intelligence. In our view, this involves a sort of pragmatic exercise of the imagination, which views this idea of *connection* as a sort of puzzle called ‘Literary Theory’.

And I call it pragmatic, not only in the sense of focusing on some particular aspect of the theory’s utility (which perhaps also brings a repertoire of fallacies with it into the world of politics or private enterprise), but even in the purely intellectual sense: this will be knowledge that can be *applied* to their particular formulation (their master’s thesis, PhD dissertation, etc.) of the idea of the topic in question: *uniting* the critical theory of art<sup>79</sup>. This is a form of merit that means that, after completing a course of studies, they will be able to speak as holders of bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degrees.

This progression, from Aristotle until the present day (although this academic programme does not merely begin *in medias res*, as it begins with Gadamer), will have to lead them to make the following connection in the train of theory: they will have to connect the ideas of thinkers like Lukács, Adorno, and Walter Benjamin with Frederic Jameson’s later idea of the ‘political unconscious’, as if this were their logical consequence, rather than a configuration whose objectivity lies in the ‘discursive formation’ itself, in which all of them are inscribed.

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79 This indefinite article “A theory”, “A history”, etc., responds, basically, to this empiricism of the value of particular experience which, however, aims to be objective.

But the more the university's 'objective' discourse is assumed (while also being depoliticised), the more everything can be spoken of in public, including what is detested, because there is no greater form of theoretical disdain than that of having to extract the validity of a 'contribution' to the topic in question.

This is where both praise and veiled criticism occur, but both, within that type of objectivity, must be as subtle as possible. For example, launching an explicit attack only against postmodernism and post-structuralism by calling them dead-end streets (while acknowledging, of course, that they represented a series of worthy intellectual challenges), while giving Marxism a free pardon (like a sort of Barrabas at Easter for the social sciences), leaving it *sub judice* (as a whole), although on what pretext is anyone's guess. According to Professor Fry, 'Social theory in the late 20th century was dominated by the challenges raised by postmodernism and poststructuralism. In the twenty-first century, postmodernism, at least, is dead. Yet social theory is still...' We would hope that those aspiring intellectuals will want to be the ones to revitalise the spark of postmodernism, rather than remaining in the rift of *something that is still...*

Oh, well.

Our revered colleague Paul H. Fry is thus performing what might be called a 'controlled burn' of Marxist theory, invoking that beast-like image it had before the 'linguistic turn', which we referred to a few pages earlier.

'Why Marx? And why so much about Marx?', the professor says at the beginning of his seminar on Jameson. 'Why is Marx the one who seems to be behind the idea that the social critique of art is the best and most relevant way to address the topic in question?'

For him, the answer is the stubbornness of social reality in presenting itself as the dominant face over and above the ultimate

meaning: the institutionalisation of discourse (in contrast to the vernacular, for example, as if the individual were only there with himself), but never as a standard for the ultimate meaning of all private or public discourse, according to which there is not an 'authentic subject' but, instead, nothing at all. This is why Professor Fry thinks that the analysis presented by Adorno and Benjamin regarding reproduction and loss of the aura of art is entirely correct: the idea of disaggregation of meaning, in which the subject is lost in a commercial alienation of themselves. This is something that would imply a multiplication of the meanings/enticements that capture the attention of capitalism, under which the authentic free subject lies sleeping (suffocating). So here we can come to a conclusion: the desubstantialisation of the 'political' and the substantialisation of the 'ideological', in other words, Marxism as an *intermediary* between the free subject and social criticism.

But we prefer to just say 'no' to that *raison d'être* (for what remains) of Marxism, because nobody multiplies zombie subjectivities. Instead, *they are reproduced (or not) from the relations that do exist*: for everything. The social relations of each historical conjuncture create their monsters, but contradictions/limits, intuition, and even lucidity are sometimes retained within their cracks. By being inscribed in them, individuals take and leave what suits them best. In this sense, the so-called 'ideologists' are merely tailors or designers, while the fashion is the symptom which demonstrates that what lies within lives on, then dies along with its present. This is why, when we speak of ideology in history, it becomes essential to learn how to read those limits, and to gain an intuitive understanding of how close or distant they are, because, in that way, we become increasingly bilingual in our own language, and our own discourse.



## **II**

### **THE IDEOLOGICAL INSCRIPTION OF DISCOURSE**



## Ideological inscriptions of the past

*I had the idea that the Greeks were and did exactly what the archaeologists told them to be and do 2,500 years later.*

Josep Pla

### On bilingualism in the language itself

#### The symptom: the free subject of/in historiography

Beginning with awareness (knowledge) of the historicity of our own discourse, we are now interested in considering the possibility of reading modern historiography and trying to understand (even symptomatically) not only the social processes of modernity, but also everything that could lead to knowledge of other ideological contexts, from prehistory (which is difficult, but worthy of materialist speculation) until the present day. It is true that the act of discursive inscription is universal, but as a specific act it means nothing (it is nothing) without its form of practical meaning, without its discursive historical symptom (either with or without words). The discourse is the expressive symptom (the allusion more than the assertion) of the fact that social relations are problematic. But how and what to read? Which symptoms?

Let's start with the objective premise that each mode of production has always corresponded to an ideological matrix, simply for the reason that all social relations begin, in their own time, with a presumption of legitimacy or common sense, regardless of the level of fairness they confer or the 'cultural malevolence' that may underlie tradition. From there, let's agree with JCR, that the dominant ideology produces clearly observable symptoms, not just with regard to the legitimacy of the economic and political structures, but also with regard to configuration of the general discursive field that is put in place along with them. This is always a problematic perspective, insofar as it has been separated from that tension or 'reverberation of the practice' (life and its specific needs for reproduction) associated with each social formation. They also differ, therefore, from the concepts that individuals inscribe in their current discourse within their historical conjuncture. If we also add to this the fact that the dialectic presentation of any ideology is always spontaneous (because it reproduces the problematic of social life in real time), we encounter a theoretical difficulty, indeed a requirement, as examining the ideological unconscious is impossible without it: we have to be bilingual in our own language, to know how to ask ourselves about how much spontaneity also exists in our assessment of the facts.

Naturally, as we travel further back into the darkness of the past, the question regarding the meaning that the discursive inscription acquired there just gets trickier and trickier, because no cultural remnants of prehistory (or prehistories) are conclusive when it comes to determining the legitimising concepts of those very first modes of subsistence.<sup>80</sup> Not the size or shape of the skulls, not the spearpoints or ceramic vessels, and not the ornaments or burial sites or cave paintings, because none of these can tell us what those peoples were assuming when they said 'I am'.

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80 Graeber 2021 is a good place to begin with this.

But nevertheless, it is still worth the effort to sketch a general view of what may (or may not) be the meaning of prehistoric discursive inscription. Given the actual conditions of existence experienced by the first hominids, they must have developed in themselves a spontaneous concept of their normality, and, along with it, a basic discursive meaning or ideological matrix. In any form of community, the members establish a type of interpellation that is unconsciously assumed (although not without problems, as we will see) by its members. This, and nowhere else, is where meaning begins, and there is no reason for us to believe that those social relations and their discourse, as rudimentary as they may have been, would require more ‘cultural complexity’ in order for the practical reality of those first peoples to have its own meaning.

This investigation we have proposed, regarding prehistory and early antiquity, must therefore begin by advancing a hypothesis about what that ideological (discursive) matrix could have been for the first societies and, later, social formations (what we call civilisation, but which are nothing other than complex societies). It begins with what the experts have been able to say about primitive ways of life based on the fields of knowledge of archaeology and anthropology. There is one caution: those two human sciences do not aspire to understand our radical historicity. Instead, in the end, the intersubjective ideological matrix (that of modernity) imposes a basic reading on us: the search for the first evidence of the ‘human condition’, which, when translated (or divided) into our working language, means confirming the existence of the ‘free subject’ in those early cultural expressions, from the Atapuerca cave paintings up until the present day, etc.

In modern historiography, this is the only way of saying ‘I am’. What we will try instead, regardless of how highly schematic it may be, is to present a discursive (but bilingual!) perspective that points out the

specific type of imaginary relationship with the actual conditions of existence for those ancestral family clans, bands, and tribes, and then do the same with the first cities and their ‘cultural explosion’ in ancient Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, and finally, in Phoenician civilisation.

## Prehistory

### **The radical historicity of science as discourse and the problem of prehistoric life**

A specific social problematic underlies every abstract discursive problematic. Our intention here is simply to understand the general discussion of prehistory in its radical historicity, from the very beginning of scientific historiography.

In general terms, we could say that what we find is a confrontation between biology and sociology. But we must also ask, on what conceptual gameboard has that confrontation occurred? This is because ultimately, what is involved is a discursive battle on two fronts: the Abstract Discursive Problematic and the Specific Social Problematic. In the first, at the conscious level, what is seen as important is spearheading the ‘advancement of knowledge’, in this case regarding the history of the ‘human species’, while in the second, at the unconscious level, the fundamental problem is reproduction of the concept of the ‘free subject’, i.e. a subject free from its radical historicity, or, to say this in another equivalent way, determining how it is configured in its subjectivity by some indication of *exploitation between subjects*.

In practice, this consists of ideological production of the discourse: giving legitimate meaning to social relations. Of course, exploitation between subjects has nothing to do with the type of living

relation existing in the caves. However, when we speak only of ‘Palaeolithic art’, ‘linguistic development’, ‘cultural development’, or ‘great migrations’ as milestones of early humanity, this is symptomatic of an unconscious conceptual limitation: that our historical practices and the social relations they needed in order to function must be essentially thought of as existing from the beginning of time, and that therefore, the origin of our ideas is found at the ‘dawn of humanity’. In that view, the human species would have evolved only to populate the earth and learn about itself. Furthermore, if this is assumed to be the ultimate horizon of truth compared to the immediacy and myopia of everyday life, it is because our discourses have already caused that truth to pass through tragedy, comedy, and even farce. It is no coincidence that films such as *Contact* or *Armageddon*, or TV series such as *The Flintstones*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *Futurama* have a similar meaning.

In addition, making progress across the foggy terrain of our ancestral past as a species strikes us, but of course, as an enterprise suitable for the most noble and praiseworthy among us. Nevertheless, at the same time, we want to believe that at the end of the day, and especially at the beginning of the day, practical life is all we really have. Neither science nor technology can escape the social gravity or burden of life itself.

Although the data may show us tangible realities, the meaning that is actually derived from scientific practice only results in configuration and reproduction of our (social) relations of production. In other words, knowledge is only accountable to its own authority: the ideological legitimacy of the concept of ‘subject’. This has served as the starting point from which scientific discourse has been able to say ‘I am (am I?) a free subject’, and if the person asking the question looks for an answer, it is because for that person, the return of the configuring idea of the ‘free subject’ *signifier* is implicit: for what type of subject

is that ontological freedom being assumed? However, unconsciously, it is the solidity of the parentheses that the ideology has a greater need to reproduce. This allows us to say that there is a process of osmosis between the discourse and the other two levels of social practice (the economic and the political), by virtue of which the meaning of the concepts contained *between the parentheses* must continue to change.

The reality is that scientific discourse, like any other, exists in order to maintain the permeability of that orthographic/orthological sign through which we represent our ideological condition. Regardless of whether its conclusions regarding the reality of prehistoric life are erroneous, fallacious, or in the best of cases, partially correct, science will produce legitimate meaning in this case: the meaning that transcribes the concept of *evolution*. But the radical historicity of the problem of evolution makes it a phenomenon exclusive to our own conjuncture. To understand this, we need to focus on the discourse, which always has some particular intention.

### **The literal gaze as an ideological form of production in science (about prehistory)**

In its empirical practice, as well as in its epistemological reflections, scientific discourse is produced *from* the sign of intersubjective exploitation. Between subjects, there would be no relationship of supposed reciprocal equality, were it not for the fact that reciprocity only requires one condition in order to exist: recognition of merit. In other words: between (supposedly) equal subjects in the case of free subjects (?), and analogously, between the private dimension of the discourse and its public value. Merit is what allows both 'spaces' to be made equal, because merit allows unrestricted transfers between them.



The merit given to what we call science derives from its special (objective) form of legitimising the free subject. Specifically, it involves the merit of inscribing each individual (free subject) in the discussion turned loose in that blank space we call ‘objectivity’. What is put in that blank space is the subject matter being observed and dissected in itself, while making an abstraction of the fact that what has become the dartboard is not the rest of the universe but instead the value of pursuing knowledge in that particular way. Furthermore, the universe starts over on that dartboard each time we get ready to throw a dart. However, ideology is a game of darts in which the dartboard moves when the most accurate dart is thrown, in a game where luck does not exist.

We can therefore see what science is telling us and not telling us by applying its rules to the (multiple) object of study that we call prehistoric life.

However, before answering that question, a clarification must be made. It is well known that science (in capital letters) lends its voice to the process of *secularisation* through which the ‘culture of modernity’ is configured. And if we want to summarise all this in an extreme way, we can say that it is nothing more than the result of the process of ideological battle against the feudal world, where the dominant structure was upheld by a religious, allegorical, and organicist discourse, where dogma and superstition prevailed, and where knowledge was only legitimate if it remained within the boundaries of the dominant religion. In other words, knowledge was confirmed simply by existing. The feudal system was first challenged by humanism and the voice of enlightened reason (and its critiques); then later, the two initial discursive flights that would lead to the transition to the new world took hold, a world that could be observed and explained ‘in itself’ and ‘by itself’. We could say that the ‘human dignity’ that began to emerge during the Renaissance (in the ‘Italian cities’ where the merchants assigned that quality to

themselves while acting as patrons for other ‘beautiful souls’) still exists today, but only after being stewed in a pot of contradictions, in which the language of the subject as subject matter was eventually boiled down or distilled. That subject matter is understood as the problem of the natural world, separate from the problem of the social world, because the (natural) immanence of the natural world is established as the mirror image of the subject, which is limited to ‘discovering’ how its own surroundings fundamentally follow laws as systematic as those imposed by nature. In any event, this is where the natural and the social begin to merge in scientific discourse.

But for now, I simply want to point out the following: how the new unconscious of intersubjective social relations (i.e. commercial relations, where public/private merit replaces bloodline/lineage and lord/vassal) allowed Galileo to observe the world and then say that although it might seem immobile, ‘it does however move’.

In fact, the world (the cosmos) does move on its own, and therefore, the individuals, the humanity, inhabiting the world, also participate in the imminence of its movement. However, as freedom of social ‘movement’ (mobility) increases, it has to be legitimised or regulated, but that necessity is never explained. None of the philosophers of the secular literality of human nature (Kant, Hegel, Hume, Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, Adam Smith, etc.) actually *explain* something that they are assuming from the very beginning: that freedom (for better or for worse, and with or without political restraint) is inherent to the human species. They are therefore limited to presenting it as a central theme, to smoothing over the palpable contradictions between its public and private expressions, explaining them (to our point of view) symptomatically through the concepts of impulse, instinct, survival, sentiment, judgement, interest, the common good, primitive good/evil, etc. Or, to put it another way, by suppressing the idea that points

out the means of support for that *natural truth*, which must be converted into *human truth*, where the private must fit inside of the public, and vice-versa.

This is because what is never expressed is the radically historical explanation of that *truth*, i.e. what purpose ‘human life’ serves, or what it is in any given case. Today, the complete autonomy of private *beings* and their world, susceptible to public knowledge (insofar as it is protected from individual/general opinion or interest), is what is pre-assumed from the beginning in the gaze of the literal observer.

Nevertheless, we still need to ask ourselves the following question: what practice of life is being reproduced, fundamentally, with the imminence of life as ideology of the literal? In other words, as legitimising discourse for the literal relations between subjects, and between those subjects and *their* world.

Into this context and its dormant (at the time) splendour, the concept of human nature took on renewed transcendence in the 18th century, with the discourse about its knowledge and about the natural nature of the world emerging again as a fundamental issue. The key to understanding this is to realise that its importance is above all discursive, not cognitivist. In other words, most people are able to live in this world without knowing what may have existed before the ‘*big bang*’, but their working lives, for example, would be intolerable without the concepts of time and space, related to the public and public universe. Every assumption needs to be put to use, i.e. must generate legitimate discourse. And just because it is scientific, it is no less productive for the imagination, which is what connects us with our actual conditions of existence.

In addition, the universalism of that independent nature in which we imagine ourselves to be doing science once again becomes too problematic, precisely because it collides with the problem of subjectivity. It therefore continues to be our ideological norm because that

contradiction still remains unresolved, and therefore, it remains a gold mine of discourse.

Both the interior of our biological (physical and chemical) existence and its immediate or cosmic exterior (the natural environment) constantly multiply or amplify the search for the nature of the social impulse, as well as for the random events or accidents that diversify its effects. This is true whether viewed through the scientific research paradigm or as phenomena in themselves: the forms and functions of social (political and economic) life versus the forms and functions of cultural (religious, artistic, intellectual, moral, etc.) life. In this view, both the interior and exterior of things are texts in which answers (plural) can be found to the single central question: how can we continue to imagine that life itself is free? There is just one thing that secretly endangers that relationship (between free subjects) with the material reality of the social conditions of existence (everyday exploitation, without which the world would stop moving): the spectrum of historicity of the practical (and therefore not transcendent, but with each moment unique) reality of life.

We are able to observe that movement, for example, through literature (which, in the creative sense, has not always existed), which is nothing more than an archive of motifs that express the contradictions of that repression established between reality and imagination, i.e. not as 'false consciousness' but as a productive dialectic relationship. In everything from the picaresque novels of the past to our postmodern self-help books, the free subject must be saturated by images with just one meaning, that of the 'free subject', so that those images can saturate and sew up the cracks existing in its own heroic tale of freedom.

Science does this too, as a discursive practice, taking on that responsibility with the same determination as the 'verbal art', but through the rigidity of its objective research method. It therefore becomes

twisted up in its obligation to explain the social without alluding to its own discursive condition, which is also historical. In other words, it is as firmly rooted in the logic of the intersubjective matrix as any sonnet, or as even the most abstract painting imaginable.

For this reason, science has engaged in a dance of ideas with regard to the concept of humanity, and with each step, those ideas are able to conjure up an illusion of a subject that not only produces the cause, but also receives the effect, different each time, of its internal struggle to legitimise reproduction of the means of production. But here science also comes up against a limit, namely its inability to perform the science of its own condition of historical practice, i.e. to look inside the specific mode of production that produces the social relations in which ‘it appears’ as discourse, instead emphasising the (material/observable) fact that it can be used to extract the last drop of wisdom from the ‘tree of science’: the substance or social value of merit.

Clearly, Marxism has dared to look the sign of capitalist exploitation in the eye, in an effort to understand some form of humanity outside of that mode. For this reason, it has called itself the science of history. But the dominant ideology (which is also inside Marxism itself) has ended up skimming off the elements it finds useful, and discarding those it does not.

### **The concept of evolution and the natural/social dialectic in the ‘phenomenological horizon’ (19th and 20th centuries)**

Let’s begin here by discussing two texts that are symptomatic of our most immediate conjuncture (2012–2020) and its process of ideological discarding: *The Origins of Political Order* by Francis Fukuyama (2012), and *The Dawn of Everything* by the recently deceased David

Graeber (1961–2020) and David Wengrow (op. cit.). Precisely because both books are limited to introducing nuances to the discourse on human nature (a discourse in which they are therefore inscribed), we can say that they never have to cross their invisible red line: the free subject that lives inside of our species.

On one hand, Fukuyama bases his view on everything from the politics of primates (where the version most similar to his observable knowledge today is what he calls ‘the politics of chimpanzees’)<sup>81</sup> to liberal democracy (and its extrapolation). On the other hand, Graeber and Wengrow speak of the diversity of forms of life, and the levels and types of civilisation, that would specifically come to contradict the idea of ‘order’ or ‘harmony’ among a diversity of peoples, while also discussing the concept of ‘dispersal’ of culture and civilisation presented by the dominant historiography.

In this way, Fukuyama, who also wrote the celebrated (and contested) article entitled ‘The end of history’ (?), after settling a few scores with the globalised world of today (?), is limited to clearing a pathway that begins with the first *example* of order that is indistinctly biological and social. He claims that this can already be found in the initial need to take care of the proletariat and the dynamics of interdependent coexistence (even describing a certain primogenic ‘commensalism’). According to him, our species would have started out with that genetic/gregarious ‘impulse’ for conversation, with a subsequent diversification of forms of managing the collective, all the way until arriving at our current institutions! He believes that this is the two-fold aspect onto which we must inscribe that first biological-social gesture, that first political utterance (and here the American political scientist relies on support from Aristotle, despite the fact that, for him, and as we have already tried to clarify repeatedly, the *zoon politikón* represented

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81 Fukuyama, op. cit., pp. 31-34.

the culmination of the *polis*, where the political animal became differentiated from the domesticated animal/beast).

In addition, we all know that the secular debate (in which Fukuyama is inscribed) regarding the nature of the impulse that took us from the biological to the social has certain powerful proponents, who are indeed mentioned in his work: Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Fukuyama tells us that these three great thinkers did not talk so much about the empirical origins of human nature, but instead, they tried to use their images of the ‘primitive’ to set up a heuristic model as a way of understanding it, independently from its historical reality. He uses all of this to evaluate his predecessors based on what we know about that reality today, but not based on what we have assumed about it, or about our ‘drive for knowledge’.

Graeber and Wengrow, on the other hand, say just the opposite: neither social egalitarianism nor social injustice have their origin in the impact that, especially for Rousseau, the development of metallurgy and agriculture had on the history of humanity, i.e.: exploitation. The thesis they present in *The Dawn of Everything* is that this type of exploitation existed before and after those milestones of civilisation, and also in the middle of them. But in addition, that passionately lucid and well-supported book still, in our view, belongs to that tradition (not of the Spanish-speaking world, but belonging to the secular literary gaze) known as ‘true history’, which had Bernal Díaz del Castillo as one of its most conspicuous Spanish adherents (despite widely divergent conjunctures).

What this demonstrates is that this same private/public discursive process regarding human nature has, in our own times, managed to perform an interdisciplinary reconciliation of biology and sociology. But in sociology, it is the ‘phenomenological horizon’ that sets the standard: that horizon always begins with the idea that the *object of*

*study* must be understood as a systematic assembly of ‘parts’, ‘factors’, ‘sides’, ‘aspects’, ‘elements’, ‘components’, ‘processes’, etc., which are not only susceptible to being isolated, but inherently capable of being understood through a ‘literal’ gaze, or, in other words, one that considers them *individually*, and only then as parts of a whole. The totality is seen as that orchestrated set of physical and chemical phenomena we call the universe, within which the social order would also follow a systematic arrangement, which can be identified throughout the entire course of time. That horizon therefore represents an idea of ‘knowledge’ where the material side and the abstract side must correspond, outside the margins of history. And in this way, *voilà!* We have the world as ‘will to represent’, or to translate this: *the social world as an adaptation of that core free subject in its specific surroundings, or the human species thinking up and creating ideas about its natural mind, within its social medium* (phenomenology would come to refer to this ‘context’, in the sense of a ‘framework of meaning’ outside the individual) *in which the subject always exercises its freedom to impose, during its various stages of cultural development, its timeless creative/adaptive nature.* Or in just one word: evolution!

However, the determinant factors are in fact the legitimising role played by scientific discourse in general, and its concept of ‘natural evolution’ in particular. With regard to this proposition, it is important to focus on the aseptic nature of the concepts that transcribe the theoretical thematisation of the social aspect of the study of human life: agent/system (or social medium), individual (psychological)/society, communication/participants, language/thought, etc., always in the abstract. All these concepts and dichotomies are therefore susceptible to being moulded to fit the notion of a human *continuum*, where the only constant may be the final transcendence of free subjectivity.

But what purpose does this idea of the transhistoricity of ‘the human’ serve, if not to give legitimacy to unrestricted selling of the



forces of labour, where each man (and now, because it was not always this way, woman) is himself a recipient of the same progress for which he is also a contributor, when a literal view (especially regarding citizenship) is taken? What Marxism tells us is that this trans-(a)historicity is a radically historical ideological necessity, and that the origin of the discourse about 'the human' can be found in that necessity itself (although it was clearly not necessary for Aristotle or Saint Augustine). Therefore, other modes of production are based on the assumption of worlds in which the practical life of 'the human' (in this sense) is precisely what we are unable to find anywhere.

This is what creates the ideological struggle known as 'secularisation', a ferocious battle that especially takes place at the public level: the discourse about the subject matter (in this case human life) must invariably conclude with the trans-historic concept of the free subject, which we call the 'human species'.

What happened next is that the concept of evolution, having made a name for itself in biology, eventually conquered the discourses of the rest of the human sciences. We could think of this as the reward that the dominant ideology gives biology for having (publicly) solved the ideological problem of religious determination of the discourse on the natural world, not by destroying religion, but by relegating it to the private sphere.

But the contradictions, or gaps in the façade, continue to appear. Of course, if they did not, the ideological structure would collapse under the weight of saturation, and the rest of the system would collapse along with it. Ideology can also be seen as the plaster used to fill in the cracks and conceal them (like those puncture-proof inner tubes, which make no sense until something actually punctures them), a sort of viscous substance (the discourse) exuded by the same social relations they must follow behind like a parade. This is why we must

specifically think about the fact that the ideology resists any strictly biological or strictly sociological explanation, and this is simply a symptom of the discursive health of the dominant ideology (in this case expressed in the specific combination of biologism and sociologism that we refer to as interdisciplinarity). This is a sceptical paradigm with a broad presence in the spectrum of debate, which expects (and even encourages) dissent, for reasons that include, among others, the internal contradiction that serves as its actual fuel.

That dissent, debate, or controversy, or thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis, will always be welcome, provided they always take place within the limits (as already explained) of the 'free subject' as the legitimate sign of exploitation (and with the impossibility of thinking outside of those limits).<sup>82</sup> This is the summary provided by Megarry (1995):

*Prehistory presents the social scientist with considerable difficulties. It is true, of course, that the study of human evolution stands at the junction between the social and natural sciences (Foley 1991). Understanding evolution and the sciences that comprise prehistory often involves the crossing of dangerous interdisciplinary boundaries, and it is easy to grasp why a conception of the human subject as a static entity has usually been the preferred option for most social scientists. Human culture is often taken for granted by sociology, and there has been a reluctance to consider our present social and behavioural characteristics as anything but a permanent fixture. However, sociology is also part of an academic tradition that has been prepared to confront large questions and, in particular, to examine major social transitions. Work produced in this vein has never been more than partially successful, since integration and generalisation from disparate specialist fields involves considerable risk. But the need for a synthesis*

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82 And we are threading our discourse, of course, inside of that problematic, but only with the intention of exposing it.

*which draws together issues and themes pursued in separate disciplinary areas is justified by both the recent advances made in prehistory and by the need of the social sciences for a deeper perspective. (p. 17)*

### **‘Reading/believing’ the social singularity**

Acquiring a series of modes of social conduct would be our species’ most notable acquisition since the earliest days of *sapient life*. Whether such conduct requires a certain development of the right hemisphere of the brain compared to the left is a matter that goes beyond our expertise and the scope of this essay (see McGilchrist). Here we are only interested in establishing the following premise or thesis: that without some minimum level of discursive imagination, that supposed social conduct would never go beyond pure gregarious instinct. To speak of socialisation therefore means speaking of ‘interpellation’, and this in turn requires the practice of a specific form of social relations, which in turn only occur when a matrix of relations (and only then ideological) is assumed to exist, from which one social meaning or another is split off or reproduced.

As established by modern anthropologists, our species has spent about 40,000 years reproducing as a society, or, in other words, only 0.001% of the 3.5 billion years that comprise the ‘natural history’ of our world (Megarry 1995). What we find surprising is not so much the idea of the temporal insignificance of our earthly condition (as a ‘grain of sand in the cosmos’ or as a ‘disturbance in the electromagnetic fields of space and time’, etc.), but rather the fact that the existence of our life on earth means that the universe contains, as a minimum, that ideological/discursive bubble. In other words, what actually perplexes us is not the fact that our appearance over a vast span of time (re-

ardless of how long it may be) includes development of ‘intelligence’ and ‘life in society’, but the fact that those concepts must maintain a tomb-like silence with regard to the *why* of their modes of imagining, when that is so clearly symptomatic of a practical reality. What would really be incredible is to find that this reality gets its strength, its explanation, from quantum field theory (or some other theory that proves to be correct). But for me (and here I return to my more spontaneous ‘I am’), it would be logical for the radical historicity of exploitation and its legitimisation to also assume the radical label of ‘love’ as a mode of life in any mode of production.

What this all means is that any direct relationship with the material (historical/social) conditions of existence is impossible. The reason for that impossibility is simply the exploitative nature or reality of our conditions of existence. From this, it can be understood that the direction taken by those exploitative conditions is inseparable from the basic direction that reproduces a particular type of social relations. The fact that the view supporting all this may be biological, and that evolution of the species may include cultural (or epigenetic) aspects, does not cause even the slightest alteration of the fact that the social may be the source of everything we have done and said.

### **For and against the metaphysics of the ‘division of labour’**

The real enigma, if we really think about it, is that the universe, simply because we are part of it, would have something as improbable as an ‘ideological unconscious’ existing on our planet, which is reproduced on the basis of something no less unfathomable, existing not somewhere in the cosmos but only here in our own galaxy: social relations through *labour*.

Between two and three million years ago, our planet had the production of tools, manufactured without appreciable formal changes for millennia by pre-human generations. This has been referred to as ‘cultural monotony’ (ibid. p. 16), but for us it is actually something very interesting, because living with few but precious means surely must have produced, as a minimum, a view of the world not at all insignificant for our proposal. That worldview must have originally been enormously negative, in the sense that animals unconsciously reject the meaning of *everything that does not matter to them*. In fact, our way of representing those hominids, with grunts, outbursts of violence, surprising ingenuity, etc., points towards an incipient reactive culture, which could almost be called *somatic*: including the part relating to the material and corporeal portion of social relations as well as the part that has to do with the incipient differentiation and formation of the social fabric.

To put it another way, it is precisely the impact of the differential formation of that fabric, on the foundation of a natural (or established) habitat, which constitutes the practical reality of the formation and reproduction of discourse, and, through it, of language.<sup>83</sup> It is perhaps rather risky to speak of legitimising the contradictions of the mode of production in the case of those first hominids, unless what we are referring to is merely organisation of the purpose of *social space* (you are there, *so I can be here*) and time for the *exploitation* of resources, beginning with the battle over *living space* (you are there, *while I am here*). Assuming this primary mode of ‘animal’ living is, as may be imagined, contradictory, even for those located in the dominant position, where nevertheless there is an obligation to reclaim (with legitimacy that is at the same time reflexive and reciprocal) that space and that time for activities (work/rest), and bringing those new virtual social relations into a hegemonic phase, etc.

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83 Cfr. Voloshinov (1986) and Everett (2019).

Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, like the entire 18th century, speaks of the supposedly empirical origin of the social in moral terms: the three passions that, according to him (in consonance with his discursive horizon), encourage us to form a society are comfort, fear of violent death, and vainglory (Fukuyama, pp. 26–27). Clearly the third is what Kojève, and later Lacan, would call the ‘desire for recognition’. (Warning: it would be wrong to consider the concepts of Hobbes and the concepts of those who, in their 20th-century conjunctures, speak of the process of ‘individuation’, because in the case of Kojève,<sup>84</sup> this is an existentialist concept, where the idea of *experience* no longer includes the types of knowledge, but instead refers strictly to the ‘lived experience’, while the views of Hobbes, as mentioned above, involve morality (a type of moral ethics). Furthermore, the dominant ideology has no problem with setting up its stations along the journey that runs at least from Plato and Aristotle to the present day, without realising that the meaning of life does not enjoy time travel.

But replacing human ‘nature’ or the human ‘spirit’ with a ‘meaning of life’ would be to fall into the same trap that we are denouncing. What we must try to avoid is precisely something that tends to arise in all reflections on prehistory: the question of *what* will remain of us. No. What we are referring to with the phrase ‘the meaning of life’ is the practical reality in which that meaning ceases to exist and is replaced by some other meaning, some other life, and so on in succession. In other words, we prefer to listen to what each mode of production assumes that the meaning of life is, from its own distinctive reality, not to how each reality discovers something that already fundamentally existed long before it. When the latter is taken for granted, that timeless dance of citation of authorities must occur, where some of our more illustrious thinkers have determined that language simulates discursive

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84 Op. cit.

links with the past, when (we must insist) the discourses are in reality mutually exclusive.

But what is it that excludes our ‘human nature’ from prehistory?

Marxism suggests that we should pay attention to the mode of production, which many confuse with an epistemological economism, before naturally attacking it for being reductionist. But this is a misunderstanding of what Marx is saying about history: that in history, life is a practical necessity, and that culture, in terms of its meanings, is radically affected by that necessity. In other words, culture is not a reflection of the economy, but instead a necessity in order to cope with the various modes of life in which human beings have had all of our experiences: economic, political, religious, aesthetic, etc. He says that these forms have always had a need to break away from earlier ones, even though what we refer to as tradition is presented to us as a continuity, and the fact is that, in any event, this will be a representation mediated by the new meaning. But this is an evanescent mediator, and that is the crux of the matter.

Therefore, regardless of how much emphasis, or how little, is put on use of those tools and the act of living as hunter-gatherers, it cannot be said that those incredibly vast generational periods when (supposedly) *nothing happened at the cultural level* can be considered as equivalent to the hunter-gatherer societies of our own times. We would therefore be studying different modes of production. But that cultural and technological ‘leap’ of the current hunter-gatherer societies would have occurred in a surprisingly brief amount of time. And we can ask ourselves why. In other words, what is being assessed here is possession of a higher or lower cultural index, by comparing a rudimentary material culture to one where fire, language, art, and (very importantly) kinship had already been invented.

The fact that this occurred at the same time as the division of labour appeared should not represent any conceptual problem. The dichotomies are interchangeable: a) tools or evolution; b) evolution and, therefore, tools; c) instinct or culture; d) instinct despite culture (Freud and Marcuse); and, therefore; e) archetypes: fundamental principles and symbols in which the instincts emerge (Jung); or f) differing activities of the brain hemispheres and, therefore, culture (McGilchrist), etc. But in all cases, there is silence regarding the type of exploitation: Marx and Engels would have ideologised (according to all the above, even Marcuse, because he speaks of sexual repression as something trans-historical) the supposedly pure debate regarding our origins as a cultural species. However, with regard to development of the brain, Marxism would be relegated to use and re-elaboration of technology as a factor worth considering in order to solve the evolutionary puzzle, as Megarry explains (1995, p. 4):

It is now well established that brain evolution did not occur until well after a protracted period of tool-making, and Engels' achievement in presenting an alternative to contemporary idealistic theories of human origins, which proposed that the power of reason and intellectual capacities of our ancestors came before social and technical development, is not to be dismissed. Idealistic explanation was in fact to remain as an influential element of anthropological theory well into the twentieth century, since the realisation that the first bipedal tool-makers had brains no larger than apes' was not to prevail until over 80 years after the appearance of Engels' labour theory of culture. In this sense, Engels can be said to have formulated a more comprehensively materialist theory of human evolution, together with a causal mechanism, than even



Darwin himself, who was then preoccupied with establishing man's place in nature and never directly confronted problems raised by the emergence and significance of culture (Trigger 1966). Engels' emphasis on an interaction between behaviour and physical and social change should also be accepted, but the assumption that labour can be isolated as a category which differentiates us from animals is doubtful. Those who follow Engels here rely on the continuing validity of an animal-human dichotomy, now and in our evolutionary past, that assigns unique qualities like language and tool-making to our species alone (Woolfson 1982, Mandel 1968).

For the dominant critique, the concept of ideologisation of the social sciences, in relation to the transition from pure Darwinism to social Darwinism, reached its greatest heights (or depths) with the emergence of Ernst Haeckel, to whom we owe the term 'ecology' (currently used in the social sciences), but whose work also feeds the most obscene versions of social Darwinism and its fallacies of racial order and supremacy (*ibid.*, pp. 5–6). However, it would be an error to overlook the fact that what is symptomatic of the obsession with origins and genealogical purity, in this case, casts a shadow that coincides with the one cast by cosmopolitanism or cultural relativism, for the following fundamental reason: the three positions are debated because they make perfect sense in the European ideological unconscious (transplanted to America) of the late 19th century.

In fact, if we think about the nature of the specific social problematic that occurs there, we can understand that the transition from the absolutist State to the national State took place after a highly theatricalised moment: the 18th century need for 'public representation of the private' (something Shakespeare introduced a century earlier by re-

vealing the more intimate side of monarchs, especially through their pompous monologues), with the 19th century instead taking on the ‘theatralisation of the public’, or the sublimation of that private civility. If the 18th century saw the birth of the problem of ‘civil society’, the response that this produced took place through the figure of the (more or less sophisticated) monarch as a reflection of the people, while the 19th century, in contrast, needed an exalted image of the nature of the individual who controls legislative power: the human who is born free (whether created by God or by nature is a secondary matter) in order to govern/know himself.

Both positions represent responses to the problem of constructing the national spirit. Their respective thematics were transcribed in terms of the historically moral and aesthetically moral: we see this in the discourse of the petite bourgeoisie, which, although not the only one heard in that conjuncture, does tend to be the one that takes more specific theoretical positions (whether conservative or modernist), i.e. many symptomatic ones in the capitalist social structures. In relation to this, in the 19th century, the issue of the national State appears in the human sciences as well as in the arts, becoming the focus of their abstract discursive problematics, whether speaking of the Nibelungs, medieval epics, the Celts, the Aryans, or Athenian democracy. Furthermore, once those debates had come to saturate/suture the discourse, so-called ‘modernism’ would arrive to invert the *aesthetic morality* where that national spirit maintained its principles: religious or not religious, political or philosophical, etc., adopting an *aesthetic morality* where the concept of art sanctifies everything it touches and, therefore, everything becomes permissible (see Salvador and Rodríguez, pp. 212–213). This is where art became the religion of the free subject, and, symptomatically, also came to serve as the perfect image for its evolution: from the Altamira cave paintings to *Guernica*, etc.

What this means is that the supposed reaction to 19th-century social Darwinism presented by the cultural relativism of Franz Boas and his followers (Fukuyama 2012, pp. 51–53) should not lead us to believe that the concept of evolution had lost its relevance. Instead, it had been spiritualised, transferred from the material to the cultural, just as in Marxism, incorporation of the sociological is manifest in the cliché of ‘survival of the strongest’.

But at the end of the day, what is happening at the discursive level (the one that interests us) is that the origin/essence dialectic has been split into a series of other dialectics resulting from readjustments made to the subject/object norm, transcribed (in each and every one of the various responses offered by all those authors, apparently in conflict) in the individual/society dialectic.

This also occurs when one of the parties, society, becomes divided into men/women. Graeber and Wengrow (*op. cit.*, pp. 214–216) therefore remind us about how romanticism took part in the cultural debate over social organisation, whether in favour of the matriarchal type of organisation from the Neolithic (with feminists such as Matilda Joslyn Gage, or with Otto Gross, one of Freud’s favourite disciples), or else yearning for the patriarchal systems of the Bronze Age (as Nazism did). In essence, this is nothing other than a simultaneously moral and aesthetic reading of the prehistoric problematic, which is something that, although it may (or may not) seem entirely naïve to us today, has not occurred because we really have become much wiser, or even because archaeology has updated our views, and in a certain way thrown cold water on all of these well-worn subjects, but rather because our specific social problematic has already changed.

In view of this, what we are now asking ourselves is: what would have been the most representative abstract discursive problematic of actual prehistory?

## **A radically (pre)historic hypothesis on the first discursive inscription: shock or sex?**

Here we will briefly try out a response that, although obviously representing only a form of mental gymnastics, may nevertheless reveal something important.

The first clearly complex mode of production seems to have been that of the hunter-gatherers, to whom we can attribute a subsistence economy and social structure typified by family clans, and later, by bands. And perhaps they were not so typical, because the question has recently been given many additional nuances, especially by Graeber and Wengrow (op. cit). According to them, the so-called ‘agricultural revolution’ was not so determinant or generalised, nor were the large egalitarian/classist cities waiting for that revolution so that they could appear and disappear.

But nobody, not even Graeber and Wengrow, even venture to explain which forms of interpellation, i.e. ways of saying ‘I am’, could have occurred within each of those forms of ‘political order’. Could it have been an ‘I am (mother/son)’? Remember, we are not referring here to the ‘I am’ in the sense of any statements actually ‘made’ as part of the communication process (which would require us to speak of linguistic development, i.e. a sufficiently sophisticated code, which there is no reason to assume existed), but rather the process by which a hunter-gatherer was inscribed in the normality of his everyday life, both in its monotony and in its shocking, unexpected facets.

That first form of inscription, or ‘I am (?)’, may have been pronounced/produced, symptomatically, through sexual practice itself, if only because we know that these issues were floating in the air before being thematised by philosophers and scientists, or in general, by the authors of our modernity and postmodernity. Here we can mention

Freud and, later, Marcuse, as some of the primary thinkers responsible for having established the image of the primitive as the ‘Golden Age’ of satisfying our instincts, followed by progressive repression of our impulses and libidos, until arriving at the present day (and specifically, the type of Puritanism that surrounded both of those authors). In this view, prehistoric society would be characterised as a way of life existing prior to the taboo against incest, or even the law against it (the first natural law?), since before those prohibitions were established, the nefarious consequences of those practices had to first be experienced. Foucault and Judith Butler came along later, to emphasise the pressure of the normative/performative, in contrast to the freely constituted. But this, as already mentioned at the beginning of this essay, is the history of the free subject, which from its very beginning (back in the 14th to 16th centuries) had a need to dignify the recently discovered literality of its body. This is, in fact, where we still are, which in itself may be sufficient to suggest that Freud was right.

In fact, in Freud as well as in Marcuse, we can see how the *body/reason* dialectic (again, along the lines of Kant) is divided into the *sexuality/(social) repression* dichotomy. This is a dichotomy created by the sociological psychologism that appeared during the transition from the 19th to 20th centuries, which is a horizon that all of us are surely still inscribing ourselves in when speaking of the ideological unconscious at any cost. However, there is one exception: perhaps achieving reproduction of the family clan made sex its principal product, while making the genes (evolutionarily) a sexually legitimating discourse. But let’s leave it at that, because we are betraying ourselves unconsciously.

# Antiquity

## The pure disinterest in cultural heritage (or Indiana Jones reading Kant)

In antiquity, the master/slave social relationship, which, apart from representing an effective, and generally legitimate (that is, at the political level) form of economic relations, can be seen as the common indicator for all discursive production generated in that world.

From ancient Sumer through to Alexander the Great, and from then until the fall of Rome, we find symptoms of an ongoing discursive struggle that assumes the legitimacy of the slavery system, in each and every one of its variants. These are symptoms that not only continued to change, but which, even within the same set of historical conjunctures, took on meanings that were sometimes opposites, in the form of religious, ethical, or moral polemics. Nevertheless, they were produced on the basis of an assumption that was rarely debated, except during periods of transition, namely the assumption of the dominant social relationship, in this case slavery.

Our aim is to investigate those differences and, at the same time, emphasise the fact that all of them transcribe the same ideology, corresponding to the same type of exploitation, but in a different way. Each time that form of exploitation changes, the legitimising discourse is renewed, being reproduced in a multiplicity of dialectics that, if properly examined, point to an ongoing transcription of the master/slave ideological matrix, which remains stable as the dialectic basis for the meaning of discourses existing for millennia.

What nuance or nuances do we find prior to the exercise of slavery? We have already explained that the subsequent feudal and mercantile worlds (and eventually, industrial and financial capitalist worlds)

were increasingly prolific in terms of (written) ideological production, and in this sense, they represent fertile ground for Marxist historians of discourse. However, if we go as far back as the (poorly named) origins of human prehistory, the most ancient ones of all, the discourse becomes almost impossible to excavate.

The most ancient known cosmologies and cosmogenies do not appear until the 3rd millennium BC. As such, they have been described, until reaching the point of saturation, as admirable limitations or intuitions of human knowledge (cf. Kramer 2022, pp. 111–136). Nothing has been said, however, about the plenitude of their practical meaning in a specific mode of production. Seemingly more by symptomatic omission than by inherent difficulty, ‘sociological’ interpretations almost never tend to lead to study of the legitimising meaning of the productive (and in this sense, normative) social relations, unless the discourse explicitly or implicitly makes reference to it.

Nothing is said about the relationships that may have existed between the architectural forms of the world (global maps, celestial spheres, mobile or immobile, etc.), or the social formations that have (socially) existed inside of those images. The most typical approach has been to present all this as the problem of ‘knowledge’ in a general view of the ‘history of humanity’, and then to relate this with the changes in the ‘social context’. In other words, that context is viewed as either hindering or assisting development of that knowledge, in various ways.

We, on the other hand, intend to explain, or at least discern, the historical meaning that those discourses (based on myths, chronicles, epics, hymns, fables, dialogues, debates, proverbs, precepts, liturgical laments, etc.) could have inscribed on their respective ideological conjunctures. However, we feel obligated to do this in our own way: from the gaps existing in the text of our historiography.

There is also something specific we will try to avoid: even when knowledge is proposed as a social problem, positivism presents it as a technical evolution of knowledge (cf. Burke 2012), while phenomenology has classified it as a ‘history of mentalities’ or of ‘science’ or ‘culture’, which simply reminds us that the history of our knowledge is the history of the interactive relationship between the eye (the subject) and the thing (the object). However, we are always expected (unless we lose our perspective as observers) to traverse the *social* thing with our gaze. However, this is the norm that we specifically reject.

In this view, our history is *not* ‘sociological’ in that sense. What we are trying to do here is reach an understanding that the subject and logic of society, which gives it meaning in its discourses, has not always existed. This is not because the knowledge practiced by the subject (which can supposedly be extrapolated to all eras) is discursive, but because (a) where the image of knowledge has been invented in and of itself, it remains within the interior of the subject’s ideology; and (b) because by producing that idea, we participate in a very specific humanity, whose voice and gaze assumes a practical value that we only obtain by paraphrasing the ideological matrix of that same ‘subject’, with all the subtleties or excursions that may be desired. Clearly, this does not involve a substantive reality, but instead, a matrix that can be identified only at the theoretical level, based on its textual/material reality, and this always has a conjunctural meaning. This leads to the understanding that everything we want to say with regard to the ideology of antiquity may be more like questions that we ask ourselves, in response to the insistence of the historians that we must present our historical origins or earliest utterances.

Specifically, we will ask two basic questions. First, which humanities have produced their meanings prior to our own? Here we will begin with the concepts of subject and object, and we will not write



these lines based on any other order. And second, and above all, why, in these pages, do we want to explicitly renounce all of that ‘cultural legacy’ (as if that were possible)?

There is no cultural heritage except that which is addressed retrospectively, searching for and finding only that which it made sense beforehand to look for. Hegel knew this, except he believed that anyone searching for their own self-knowledge was a manifestation of the transcendent universal spirit. Apart from that fundamental aspect, which Marx inverted, Hegel knew how to see that although tradition (the past) can control forms and functions, it is always the present that prevails and, therefore, ultimately determines the meaning of everything. We will speak of that meaning as something radically historical (social), i.e. as something that legitimises the practices that characterise a specific mode of production, which has a discursive logic in which the entire practical meaning of life is inscribed (and what other meaning can we imagine?).

If we fail to address this subject in that particular way, it is as if during antiquity, the discourses arose from a scientifically limited knowledge, but one that was absolutely pure regardless of how many people lacked interest (in the Kantian sense) in coming into contact with it and rescuing it. This disinterest as an ethical standard (of the public space) is something that persists even up until Hollywood in the 1990s with Indiana Jones: the others are those who, in pursuit of eternal youth or world domination, end up burning in the bonfire of their fate.

Furthermore, interest in our remote past has typically been imagined via certain topics: mummies, sorcerers, vampires, almost always showing an ambivalence towards the good and evil that we struggle with as mortals. But why do the questions change? What is their source, the substance from which they arise, in equal parts discomfort and fas-

ination? In his book *What Makes Civilization?*, David Wengrow gives us an example of something that, in many cases, never makes the transition from anecdote to dominant historiography, but which, in our opinion, bears a special relevance here (and so we treat it like any other perceptive observation):

Most people today are more likely to encounter ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia through the lens of Hollywood, or works of fiction such as William Blatty's *The Exorcist*, than through the Greco-Roman and biblical literature that informed the views of an earlier generation. And much of this fiction – the world of walking mummies, possessive demons, and aristocratic vampires – shares a common theme: the invasion of bourgeois, Western bodies by disturbing forces from a dynastic, theocratic past. The consistency and appeal of such representations surely amount to more than just a fascination with the macabre, hinting at deeper insecurities about our modern way of life, and about the integrity of 'the West'. But what is their source?<sup>85</sup>

Our answer to that last question is that the source is not necessarily found in 'the origins', but rather in that eternal re-initiation of the social relations from which they arise.

And the fact is, out of all the cultural phenomena attributed to human beings, ideology may perhaps be the least (or most poorly) studied. And in our opinion, this means that it may also be the most poorly understood. The meaning that the discourse adopts, as elemental as it may be, derived from (and therefore inscribed in) the earliest forms of life (and politics) of the first (pre-human) 'family clans', is not

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85 Wengrow, David. *What Makes Civilization?* OUP Oxford. Kindle edition.

necessarily any less ideological than that of the later ‘bands’ of hunter-gatherers who already had a meaning for ornamentation, production of tools, or funerary rites. And those bands, in turn, are not *a priori* less ideological than those who subsist by virtue of a mode of production that functions via a power structure or some form of tribal authority.

Nor is a social formation made any more ideological by the fact that a system of writing has been ‘mastered’. This is not the case at all, because, as explained in the introduction and first chapter of this work, we use the term ideology to refer to the historical conditions that give meaning to each way of saying ‘I am’. But for the dominant historiography, there are a series of universal ‘constants’ found in the transition from prehistory to history, which that same historiography has assumed to be essential. This can be seen both in its subject matter of study and in the documentary work it has produced. As such, things like ‘creativity’, ‘curiosity’ or the ‘thirst for knowledge’, ‘aesthetic will’, the ‘individual’ or ‘society’, ‘communication’, ‘experience’, etc., are all concepts which, from that perspective, are assumed independently from the meaning of the radically historical practices to which those concepts refer.

It should be noted, however, that although we have included society in that list of historical ‘concepts’, this is not because we actually believe that it is some sort of constant of history (and prehistory), but because we use that concept to indicate the fact that social relations are the basis for each reality, and without the specific contents (without the social problematic), the concept of society as a system tells us absolutely nothing.

At any given time, social relations are the source of meaning. Therefore, by failing to include our own assumption (that of the free subject) as one more existing among our major epistemological assumptions, we separate our reasoning from the reasoning required by that

whole series of forms and functions recorded, in turn, in the extensive archaeological catalogue (the material remains: skeletons, ceramic vessels, funerary deposits, etc.). This is where, for our dominant ideology, we would begin to get a glimpse of the universal constants of the ‘communicative subject’, manifestations of that creative/discursive impulse that would therefore persist all the way from the first bands of hominids through to the first ‘advanced societies’, and then up until the present day. This is the idea that we reject, because we do not believe that phenomenologising history will lead us to any better understanding of it.

Ultimately, the dominant ideology sees the ‘human condition’ as something elemental, and therefore as something susceptible to being corrupted or manipulated by religion, politics, institutional power, biased opinions or interests, etc. However, it is the external or contextual nature of the social medium that represents the source of impurity for the individual, since the ‘free subject’, in its elemental condition, would be the source of what nourishes the progress or advancement of civilisation. When seen in this way, ideology would simply be one of the various ups and downs through which that civilisation would have to pass.

This is why the concept of ideology as false belief is the one that is revealed here. Our view, however, is that history (in which prehistory is also inscribed) comes before all of this. This is because there is no need to wait for that further cultural development that would end up producing the self-identification that humanity obtains from its modern anthropology, that is, from the oft-repeated dichotomy that opposes the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’, or above all, from a historiography that encodes the appearance of culture in the degree to which a system of writing is possessed, along with a series of genres and media for that writing, or for culture, etc.

To summarise, the ideological problem generated by prehistory is, for us, one that is too abstract. However, if presented as a hypothesis,

it should look more or less like this: from the very first grunts or looks of approval or disapproval, human beings have been understood by their actions, i.e. by their practices. This approval/disapproval in turn represents an exercise of authority. In other words, there is no reason to wait for any sudden emergence of that ‘distancing’ within the ‘human genus’, which, according to McGilchrist (2019) required further development of the functions of the brain’s left hemisphere (measurement and analytics) and right hemisphere (empathy and connection) in order to think up ideology, as if what came before merely involved a ‘speculative phase’ during the ‘infancy of humanity’. According to that view, the specific contributions of one hemisphere would have been assimilated by the other hemisphere as raw material for performing its creative, and therefore also discursive, pirouettes. This is something that could explain everything from the first ‘inner voices’ heard by the heroes of the *Iliad*, as true ‘internal thought processes’ (of the right hemisphere), to the first demonstrations of analytical philosophy, map-making, and technological advances to allow an increasingly sophisticated domination of nature (by the left hemisphere). This, McGilchrist concludes, would in turn lead to the mature fruit of classical Greek philosophy, both analytical and abstract, etc. (ibid.: 259–260).

### **The modern classical world, or the problem of connecting the substance and essence of democracy**

Antiquity, including our venerated ‘Hellenistic’ phase, is as distant from our current world as its respective social relations are. And the fact is, people like Plato, Aristotle, and Demosthenes are inscribed during their everyday lives and through their discourse in social relations determined by *the master/slave ideological matrix*. This is something that will

only be dominant while it is based on the (ideological) '(master/slave) I am', and not merely as a form of economics with a system of slavery (something denounced in eras much more proximal to our own, i.e. in full modernity, and in fact even today, although only feudalism would replace it with the *lord/serf* dialectic, which is in turn unthinkable from the perspective of a modernity based on social relations articulated by the intersubjective matrix: *subject/subject*). This is essentially the difference among those three great worlds 'known' by our historiography.

And this is also why we can dare to say that it is not enough to claim the 'essence' of Athenian 'direct democracy' by saying that its level of sophistication was at the level of our own current needs, to counter criticism that argues the opposite: its incompatibility with our (capitalist) historical conjuncture because ours is more 'complex' than ancient 'Athenian society', erroneously considered to be more basic. The problem, we are told, would be rooted in the disdain of our citizens, in their democratic apathy, in their poor participation, in their egotism, etc.<sup>86</sup>

But should we attribute to a virtuous antiquity the democratic successes that would have perhaps served as the basis, as explained above, for a modernity that nevertheless sabotages them? The question is not whether Athenian democracy was or was not in fact our democratic 'paradigm', but whether or not the essence of the Athenian paradigm was Athenian social relations, because unless those relations were, in essence, the same as those of modernity, what we are talking about here is a utopia, firstly, and then ultimately, the ideology of the free subject.

Are we not perhaps confusing ourselves by equating two things that seem similar but are really not, i.e. two political practices that arose from radically different social relations?

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86 See Hansen 2022.

A) *Modernity*: i.e. a system that opened up a fissure at the feudal level of politics, which became, as the source of all of the thematisation of the *literal politics* of Machiavelli, independent. This is how the ‘modern state’, with all its contradictions included, was born, and along with it, its ideological cornerstone, *the public* (with *the national* being only one of its transcriptions). We can also see this as the origin of the secular, and or science itself, i.e. not just the human desire or impulse towards subjective knowledge, that is, the mere ‘desire to know’, but as a full, self-referential discourse in which the objectivity of the method is the perfect (legitimising) reflection of the ideology of the subject: the idea that there is no absolute answer (including the one presented by Marxism) that can more aptly reflect the free nature of the modern individual than a search (‘in itself’/‘for itself’) based on reason and the purity of the method, or the idea that the search is the only truth, etc. It is clear that this only became possible with liberation of the serf bound to the land and to the landlord (and we must remember that feudalism began in Greece when dominated by Rome, but of course, the barbarians are to blame for this, antiquity’s original ‘anti-establishment’ rebels). This also includes freedom over ownership of their labour, so they were free to sell it, buy it, or extract value from it in the same process of production, etc.

Although still in its larval stage at the end of the 14th century, the discourse of the ‘humanists’ in the Italian cities (who rediscovered the Greeks) is the one that would later resonate throughout Europe, before triumphing more conclusively in the age of enlightenment in France (since that general ideological struggle did not culminate until well into the 19th cen-

tury). That first ‘humanism’ is already an unequivocal symptom of the new ‘free subjectivity’, a specific mode of *interpellation* among individuals (free subjects) who are publicly valued. The *ousia* thematised in the *metaphysics* of ‘Philosophy’ therefore has nothing to do with the *powers of the soul* of Saint Augustine, or the *authenticity* from which Bob Dylan sings.

B) *Antiquity*: a system that would overcome the dispersal of peoples and ways of life through political law based on the balance of an unbridgeable gap between the value of what is understood by *citizenship* (something that continues to be reproduced in its problematic condition) and the null (but much more ‘stable’) value of *slave labour*. Although the fact that some peoples and ways of life remained outside of the ‘system’ does not exclude them from antiquity, understood simply as a historiographic period, failing to understand the concept of antiquity in its radically historical meaning leads to complete confusion.

This is because the commonly accepted idea is that ‘ancient Greece’ represents the origins of our liberal modernity, namely: that (a) it would be that ‘awareness of liberty’ that would have constructed, and that continues to construct, ‘the best of our civilisation’; that (b) this would have been exceptionally ‘thought up’ by the Greeks, in a manner such that the essence of being (what we today understand as *individuals* and their *reason*) was finally revealed, and could therefore serve as the foundation for the liberal basis of the public/institutional<sup>87</sup> (with the epitome of this being the Greek *polis*); that (c) this awareness would therefore become the seed for a ‘society’ *par excellence*: something recognised as valuable based on its own yearnings for freedom and

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87 *Ibid*, p. 507.



openness; in essence, the desire for knowledge that is ‘consubstantial with being human’, beginning with knowledge for its own sake, etc.; and finally, that (d) the Greeks would have been the ones who took the reins of the ‘capacity for progress’, by making progress their own through their knowledge of the fundamental, the essence, the Being, the reality.

This link between philosophy (understood as the act of philosophising in itself) and the ‘free subject’ is clearly being assumed here.<sup>88</sup> As such, the dominant idea about the classical Greek world assumes in turn, from the very beginning, the following: that this ‘subject’ would have been born essentially free by the fact of feeling the impulse to understand everything, about itself and about the world around it, beginning with its own constitutive limits: the number, the difference, the change, the medium-term, etc.

But nevertheless, it is true that the inscriptions at the temple of Delphi, namely the dual precept of ‘know thyself’ and ‘nothing in excess’, have less to do with any philosophical theory and practice created ‘bespoke for humanity’, than with the practical needs of what had almost become an administrative procedure.<sup>89</sup> I say ‘almost’ because if there is something that distinguishes that classical Greece (prior to Alexander the Great) from our civilised world, it would be its essentialist meaning (that of the law-citizen/administration relationship) by which the ‘efficiency’ of its bureaucracy is ultimately based on the null (involuntary)<sup>90</sup> value of slave labour, on which the essential value of the people and *their* government ‘rests’ (and where for that government,

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88 “Claro está, ya se sabe que el hombre se caracteriza, frente al animal, por su apertura, su capacidad de progreso.” “This is clear, as it is known that compared to the animals, humanity is characterised by its openness, its capacity to make progress.” (Adrados 2006, p. 114).

89 Cf. Foucault 2005: 13-35.

90 Regarding the concept of voluntary as a principle in Athenian politics, see Hansen 2022: 483-484.

private property was something radically different from our ‘private space’, since what existed in classical antiquity was a right to one’s own ‘happiness’, granted by the independent status of national law, by virtue of which the citizens could express their status as ‘free men’, acquiring absolute rights over their possessions: their animals, their wives, their offspring, their slaves, etc.). In this way, the oracle can be compared (precisely because *it is not one*) to an office of the state that does not apply any laws for exporting and importing, for immigration,<sup>91</sup> or for conscription in the military. In other words, for all legal effects, it is an ‘ideological tool’ of the *polis*, with its only actual commission being that of giving formal approval to some entirely voluntary aspirations (of course, for those who possess the freedom of citizens, for whom that concept of voluntary in fact makes sense) that must be expressed, however, in proper measure (‘know thyself’, in other words, ‘use restraint in what you ask for’). If it operated in any other way, the oracle would simply be arrogant, or would be mocked for its excessive uncertainty.

We have to remember that fortune was a key concept in the classical world, precisely because the gods were capricious. This is what gave rise to the importance of rituals, which represented efforts to make the land fertile so that the fate of (free) men would be as favourable as possible.

Indeed, anyone who, by their own volition, wanted to mount an expedition to foreign lands to appropriate them, or who wanted to go to war, had first had to prepare themselves, i.e. had to have the means available to *be* somebody worthy of such feats.<sup>92</sup> But this involves a sort of worthiness that ultimately must be seen as less than praiseworthy, because it has to be seen in the (unconsciously assumed) light of the essential nullity of the productive forces of slavery that allowed accumulation of the wealth necessary to achieve this in the first place. The concept of ‘fortune’

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91 Regarding the “metics” in Athens, see *ibid.* 2022: 207-212.

92 *Ibid.* 195-197.

therefore serves as hard currency in a society of slavery, but if those who govern it must consult with the oracle in order to be legitimised, this is also because it contributed to erasing the mark of exploitation that made it possible to produce a system (a mode of production) that was anything but benign. We must remember that the oracle (that 'big Other') also says that in each city, the rules that govern that city must be respected.

Even given all this, our own world is still seen as 'fundamentally the same' as the classical world, and this is by virtue of that capacity, at the level of the individual and at the level of the society to which the individual aspires to belong, to redefine 'progress' as the fruit of a shared and inherited feeling of liberty in that universal sense, regardless (and this is the fundamental that our historiography tends to systematically silence) of the type of freedom of exploitation that such progress uses as its material basis in each set of historical conjunctures.

However, our dominant ideology (today) prefers to introduce the following nuance: it gives the idea of 'cultural heritage' a meaning where this 'liberal world' is not so much seen as the mature fruit of a clear and distinctly forged tradition, and therefore, one transmitted from society to society by agreement, but rather as the result of the brave work of a long but select series of exceptional 'figures' ('revolutionaries' and 'iconoclasts') who dared (and this is the source of their authority) to renew, update, innovate, etc., making use of the most noble skill that only truly free individuals can really take advantage of: creativity.

This also becomes the source of the modern idea that civilisation has always been in danger of disappearing, of losing its 'legacy', whether buried by some regressive authority, demoted by vilification, attacked by barbarians, etc. Furthermore, this is also the origin of the conviction (again, we repeat, separate from the mode of exploitation that makes it possible) that the subsequent ages of splendour occurred by rebirth, or arose from the 'ashes'.

It is this concept of essential and autonomous liberty, therefore, that exists through impregnation or protective salvation of individuals and *their* society, both preserved by the internal force of ‘self-identification’. This is a gnosiological condition that, supposedly, has persisted at least from the origins of philosophy in the proper sense, i.e. since the ‘art of thinking’ arose (and some would say culminated) in classical Greece. This is a heritage that would have also survived until the present day, through providential re-elaborations that preserved its discoveries, in spite of fires, floods, and the chilling darkness of life in ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘decadent’ societies.

All of this reasoning regarding the origins of the free world and its intermittent humanism assumes the *opening/closing* dialectic of civilisation.<sup>93</sup> As such, it would have been specifically the eras during which the ideal of liberty disappeared from view, that is, those when the consubstantial potential and autonomy of being human were guided simply by that ‘curiosity in itself’, that access to progress remained closed. Furthermore, that great audacity of self-identification is what characterises the Human Nature (with capital letters) of the heroes of our civilisation. Thematised in our own time, that free and creative Nature would have survived through the eras of closure during which, nevertheless, the Spirit remained alive but hidden, as if in a cocoon, but in a state of tension that would always end up being resolved when *the moment* arrived.

In the end, what this therefore involves, given this ideology (the one from yesterday) of assuming the idea of an experience inexorably mediated by an intuitive intelligence, with the capacity for creativity based on its own linguistic/symbolic limits (with intelligence expressed mathematically also seen in this way), and where even in the dark ages of cultural decline (encoded by positivism by their lack of knowledge of writing), individuals would have been intimately aware of their Be-

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93 Cf. Adrados 2006: 26-28.

ing, even if only through their (gradual) experience, or even on the basis of Heideggerian ‘anguish’.

Our position in this regard, as repeatedly stated, is that this *self-identified subject* has not always existed, not even in the thinking of the ‘exceptional Greeks’,<sup>94</sup> and that only capitalist social relations have allowed it to be recognised as an ideological matrix. Furthermore, what is being discussed here is not a certain type of ‘subject’, but rather the very concept of *subject* as a radically historical ideological core. As such, this ‘subject/agent’ of history would have represented a profile of the model that modern European culture desires for itself,<sup>95</sup> which is something that we have only been able to say for the last 200 years or so.<sup>96</sup>

At this point we would prefer to set aside the opened/closed dielectric as a working hypothesis, and we will stay away from the type of quantitative analysis according to which ‘a society is a slavery society when the slaves reach a high percentage of the population, above 20%, and play a significant role in production’ (quoted in García Mac Gaw),<sup>97</sup> because ideology is also able to escape through these cracks.

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94 As stated by Foucault in his *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005, p. 33), “*But as everyone knows, Aristotle is not the pinnacle of Antiquity but its exception.*”

95 This is the crux of the problematic thematised by Hegel, for example. In addition, it involves the model (in all its variants) questioned to its extreme by postmodernity, but no less modelled for this reason, which we will discuss further at the appropriate time.

96 Perhaps the most significant (albeit contradictory) attempt to trace the genealogy of the free subject has been the one made by Foucault: by making an abstraction of its historicity, it becomes possible to criticise the falsehood of everything it may have been possible to distort, in the sense of concealing, falsifying, misunderstanding, or eliminating its primogenic value. See Foucault (op. cit.).

97 Carlos G. García Mac Gaw (2006: 27) proposes “abandoning the concept of the slavery mode of production for the history of Rome, including the Republic as well as the Empire (...)”, although this does not imply any need to “ignore the presence of slaves, the appropriation of surplus under the organisation of a certain type of institution, or the evidence for exploitation”. [[https://www.persee.fr/doc/girea\\_0000-0000\\_2013\\_act\\_34\\_1\\_1127](https://www.persee.fr/doc/girea_0000-0000_2013_act_34_1_1127)].



## 4

# Ideological inscriptions of the present

*...it makes them  
look foolish t' themselves for  
being in step.*

Bob Dylan

### Think tanks for the 'third way'

I have always thought of Bob Dylan's poem 'Advice for Geraldine on her Miscellaneous Birthday' as a sort of countercultural work in the style of Jorge Manrique, for 'killing the father', or perhaps a Kipling's 'If' dripping with sarcasm. In the context of the popular culture of the 1960s, it announced the radical authenticity of the post-modern 'I am'.

During feudalism, Jorge Manrique made reference to a form of nobility that all lords not only carried within (in their soul, by divine design), but should also express with their acts, when confronting a world full of opportunities for abandoning it. He used his father as an example of virtue (something known to be, in itself, a form of symbolic post-mortem castration). Dylan's poem, on the other hand, tells us we should express our interior authenticity without expecting to be understood, or, in other words, in a world that is too blind to see our true self. His message can be summarised like this: you, like me (he says

to Geraldine), should think of yourself as freer and more authentic than anyone, and you should laugh, even at yourself. And there, at that pinnacle of freedom, I will be waiting for you. Except that these days, Geraldine might have told Dylan to keep his ‘mansplaining’ to himself.

‘If’, by Rudyard Kipling, was written about 70 years before Dylan’s poem. And in contrast to it, it is a simple ode to the construction of the character of citizens of the British Empire, a call to preserve their vision of their free internal truth (in the Kantian sense), so that in this way, they could fulfil their public duty of being, or what is really the same thing, the duty that every morally healthy individual has to excel in life (but without delusions of grandeur), and to maintain their integrity even when faced with adversity (i.e. when faced with the ups and downs of the free market and the real/literal politics in which the individual must act, but without ever looking at themselves as if looking in a mirror).

In other words, for Kipling, the conquest of the public space reflects the moral integrity of the subject, while for Dylan, it is the conquest of the private space, which must take place outside the margins of public morality. This is something that, in our view, represents a sort of two-fold conquest for Geraldine, because as a free yet female subject (or, as translated into psychoanalysis, a ‘*not-all* subject’), she should not want freedom to be granted or explained to her, but instead, she should want to (must) take it for herself.

And here I want to point out something else about this exploitation/explanation binomial, because I am convinced that here the nuance *affects* the feminist struggle (of yesterday and today) taking place within the dominant ideology. This, we must not forget, always goes before, and slips through the cracks of, the struggles of class and sex (and gender!). This occurs because those struggles begin, inevitably, with the basic assumptions that create the foundations for that ide-



ology, i.e. they start from the ‘ideological unconscious’ of the social relations in which being a man or a woman requires reproduction of one meaning or another.

For example, in *The Creation of Patriarchy* by Gerda Lerner (1986), which is one of the fundamental texts that form the basis for the field of ‘women’s studies’, we already see in the first pages how the strength of the argument slides conceptually from the historic struggle (the specific social problematic) to the conjunctural discursive legitimisation (the abstract discursive problematic). First, humanism is injected: at least ‘half of humanity’ (meaning the ‘second/other sex’) and its history has been comprised by women. Then, what we see next is that the author begins talking about belonging to that reality (independent from the history of subordination that forms the main subject of the study) shared by men and women.<sup>98</sup> That is as far as the struggle goes. The sliding occurs when exploitation is subsumed into the idea of *civilisation*, which leads to an ahistorical legitimisation of history, or, in other words, at the same time when the author begins to talk about ‘collective memory’, ‘cultural tradition’, or ‘intergenerational connection’, or of the past with the future, and of how all this has been preserved in art, culture, etc. In other words, it occurs when the discourse stops speaking of modes of exploitation (which can only be reproduced through the internal, unconscious struggle of social relations) and takes refuge in the concept of evolution. Lerner (1986) writes:

Since women are half and sometimes more than half of humankind, they always have shared the world and its work equally with men. Women are and have been central, not mar-

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98 This is in spite of the fact that, in contrast to what may typically be believed, invention of the patriarchy was due, at its origin, to a desire to protect women. This idea is developed further in Graeber (2011: 177-183), with an acknowledged debt to Lerner.

ginal, to the making of society and to the building of civilization. Women have also shared with men in preserving collective memory, which shapes the past into cultural tradition, provides the link between generations, and connects past and future. This oral tradition was kept alive in poem and myth, which both men and women created and preserved in folklore, art, and ritual. (p. 4)

The place where we locate ‘humanism’ as the principal weapon of the dominant ideology is in that idea of preservation of the free subject. The problem is that we understand our entire history that way, and so the theoretical struggle becomes a form of discursive self-destruction. And for this to occur, there is a need, at all times, to make sure that we know what the enemy knows: reading the dominant ideology means reading oneself, and this is an endeavour during which the dominant discourse never leaves us.

And this is why, motivated by some sort of belief in our own authenticity, which, like Dylan’s, is bulletproof (or Kantian-readings-proof), we purchased one of those magazines (the printed kind) with contents that cover everything we are supposed to forget while meditating,<sup>99</sup> but which, for reasons we will now try to explain, we seem to enjoy reading in our spare time (when killing time? Absolutely!), like when waiting at the airport. Which magazine is that? *The Economist*. But what is the reason for our spontaneous interest in the stock markets, analysis of international politics or, for the umpteenth time, Tuscan cuisine? It is not simply the force of boredom, nor will the concept of class (or class status) come to our rescue here either. In other words, speaking of sophistication or cultural level will not fully answer the question. Per-

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<sup>99</sup> Some have said that this would be more a consequence of a “healthy” way of life than an act of will, or a desire to purify the “mind” itself. This seems accurate to us.

haps there is something that remains hidden from us, but that comes before class consciousness, and even before our professional deformation, which causes us to look for discursive symptoms in all texts, and which would make it a mistake to classify magazines of this type as more or less ‘ideological’ (which is the easy part). No, that is not it.

Then what is it?

Perhaps it could be said that, at the airport, the ‘real world’ seems to be stripped nude, with its innards on display (we could say, for example, its middle intestine, where there may be a very serious problem if everything ceases to flow through normally). It seems to involve something more like this: once we have entered the departures terminal, it is our airline ticket (physical or digital) that allows us to also enter into a new sort of ‘looking-glass phase’, in which the interpellation as free subject (where one always likes to sit down at the end of the row, first among equals) becomes deaf when faced with the transitory image of the legal entity that we all become when we get to the front of the line and pass through the scanner, but also through the duty free shop, then past the toilets, to where we notice the atrocious prices of the food and drink on offer, which remind us that, in hell, it will be precisely the things that we take for granted that will stand out by their absence, such as fair market prices. But our particular airport-based interest in a magazine like *The Economist* is perhaps due to our discovery of a certain type of pleasure that the experience of entering into the terminal and becoming a legal entity gives to our ‘I am’ (which definitely no longer feels like any sort of ‘I (am) free’, or, in other words, to that person who decided to or had to buy the airline ticket, who packed the suitcase, who had breakfast and then left his vehicle safely in the airport car park, etc., before crossing through the portal of the terminal). This

is where the shift begins to free but identified bodies, registered just as securely as our belongings, which in that particular legal moment of interpellation rises to the surface in a way that is more than just formal. In other words, it is not that we have fallen into a ravine, because every day we are really just another consumer. Nevertheless, there is something about the inquisitive atmosphere of the airport, confirmed in the element of the ticket and the fastidious logging of the people who will be boarding an aeroplane with a strict capacity of X (something we do not experience even on a train or bus, where everything is more spontaneous, and where sometimes you may have to stand, or may find yourself alone), and where after enduring the entire ritual of verifications and warnings, you will take off so that, finally, the free subject returns, in that sublime time and space of flight, where the price being charged for a hot cup of coffee now only brings a smile. But is it not perhaps the contrast, or mirror image, of that mandatory legal/cross-border alienation of being a *passenger* that actually makes us feel the importance of the subjective/interior that can be reasserted through certain gestures, such as reading?<sup>100</sup> Thus we learn to combine two practices to derive *merit* from normality, by being a passenger who reads *The Economist* while waiting.

There was a period of time, we could call it the time of wearing masks, when this happened right out in the street, and in our opinion, this was a singular moment, ideologically speaking, because of its simplest meaning (i.e. without entering into the scientific issues): to see, especially in cities, the middle-class and poor alike wearing their masks properly (or perhaps down on their chin, with some of those

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100 Cf. Zizek 2008: 3-18. In effect, the unconscious is dialectic in that the meaning is always extracted from some form of rejection, or from some type of absence: freedom in the form of the same thing that is taken away from us, or in the form of something that must be sold, in our case capital, which means that we are all subjectively free to sell ourselves freely, etc.

masks brand new and others well worn, which at any rate is the same thing), which during those (excessively absurd) months represented the obligation to wear something that reminded us of our membership in society. Something not necessarily obvious, but exceptional! So, let's imagine, for a moment, that we were instead required to wear a label that would indicate times when our activities meant that we were, in practice, exploiting others, or being exploited (or both things at once), and that there would be some people who refused to wear that label because they did not believe in exploitation, but rather in the generalised prosperity that the authentic free market brings to any society. They definitely did not believe that discursive activity, including artistic activity, is an ideological product in this historical conjuncture in which we find ourselves, or one that ultimately and unconsciously alludes to the problems that this same freedom of exploitation brings with it. We would surely go mad, because that label would allude to the absence of meaning affecting our own 'I'.

But fortunately, we have the latest issue of *The Economist* in our hands, in which *what is really going on* is explained with so much grace and clarity, with (anonymous) articles that interpellate the reader, as if by internally pronouncing the discourse, the reader could hear his own intelligence. Those belonging to the intended audience of these informative 'pieces' must be made to feel like insiders, and this is why these analyses go a little further in depth (both expressively and thematically) than those we find in the morning papers. This is also why we must also ask in our analysis whether, in that prosthetic voice, the symptoms are produced of a knowledge that will catch a glimpse of its own contradictions, or whether it involves a superficial discursive domain that merely and tendentiously frames the facts (so-called 'framing'). What I am trying to say is that perhaps we should ask ourselves whether there is a magazine that presents the economy as it really is: a set of prob-

lems that we try to *control* through analysis (raw or cooked) of reality. Or whether there could be a publication about the economic world (in the broader sense of the word, something that includes things like the price of pastrami at its source, or the conflict in Mexico between textbook publishers and families who are not yet convinced by postmodernity, and who have therefore decided to burn the new textbooks),<sup>101</sup> focused on those who want to (actually) control that knowledge, rather than simply (virtually) mastering it. This is the paradox of the ‘think tanks’ (a term that somehow seems to appear on every other page of the magazine in question), those Platonic academies of globalisation, which advise large corporations, and which are corporations themselves. This is a paradox that consists of bringing together all available useful knowledge in order to act on a reality that depends, in practice, on legitimising everything that represents their subject of study. At these useful thought farms, facts are conceived as the manifestation of a reality that must be interpreted, mined, and re-thought again, without ever arriving at the fact that determines their existence: the logics that lead to their legitimate private/public practices (something that can be taken up by academia or the ‘societies of friends of the country’, in the sense of following the tradition, the logic, the ‘secret bureaucracy’ studied by JCR in *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica (Theory and History of Ideological Production)* (1990: 29–52), and something that is now beginning to be mediated by so-called ‘artificial intelligence’ too). The think tanks derive their knowledge from discursive postmodernity (the political correctness of social justice or the individual or cultural importance of identity), while at the same time it is conjured up by hand through the crudest empiricism of the raw or statistical data, with the rough edges of capital filed down as necessary, or even sacrificing their own supposed objectivity on the altar of publicity.

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101 “A textbook row”, in *The Economist*, 31 September to 6 October 2023 edition, p. 42.

For us, the authentic ‘truth’ from which the think tanks arose was the need to resolve something that was presented as an option, but which was actually nothing other than a hard, increasingly strong and savage reality: the so-called ‘third way’, or how to bury Marxism humanely in view of the inexorable selling of lives. And I say Marxism and not communism because I do not want to speak into the void of something that is still unknown, in terms of what it is, or what it consists of: the freedom to do anything but exploit.<sup>102</sup> This is therefore the burial of Marxism, which is precisely the one which reminds us that the third way is simply the third modernity, that of Foucault, Derrida, Judith Butler, etc. And it is still ours.

## **The ideological inscription of AI**

ChatGPT is a ‘language model’ with a form of ‘thought’ that is merely referential. In other words, it lacks the social need for discursive legitimisation. What this means is that its form of thought does not include something that our human form of thought does possess, in a wide variety of degrees and meanings (which, as explained above, revolve around the concept of the free subject): ‘idiomatic awareness’.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, this does not mean that in spite of its purely computational origin, it has no ideological bias. However, its bias is a product of its programming, rather than arising from some type of ideological/libidinal need, which is what makes us, as humans, spontaneously give rise to the necessary ideology. We see this as a key difference that many (such as almost all critics of the dehumanisation of the discourse) fail to bear in mind when examining the impact of these language-gener-

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102 Rodríguez (2013b).

103 Aparicio (2023, op. cit.).

ating models. What we are hoping to do here is address the ideological bases of its discourse, to consider how the machine has no other remedy than to adapt itself to the norm that arises from human discourse.

So, let's take a look:

ChatGPT generates unified, consistent, and adequate discourse, and also (this is extremely important) discourse that is historically legitimate, in the sense that it preserves or contains legitimate meaning by duly referencing concepts on which *consensus* has been formed. Of course, this is something the machine only knows how to do statistically, and this is simply because it has been created around a model of *consistency and cohesion* informed by a massive corpus in which, syntagmatically, there is a predominance of historical concepts that our society has produced in agreement with the needs of each conjuncture (our three modernities). These are what we intend to investigate with a series of interactions with ChatGPT (see Annexes). First, however, let's take a look at how ChatGPT defines itself:

I am a language model developed by OpenAI, called GPT-3.5, designed to process and generate text in response to instructions or questions. My main objective is to assist my users by providing information, suggestions, and answers based on the knowledge and linguistic patterns existing in the information that was used to train me.

Although I am often described as 'artificial intelligence', it is important to emphasise that I have no awareness or capacity for independent thought. I function by processing text and generating responses based on the patterns and information I have absorbed during my training.

My design is based on a massive attention transformation neural network, which allows me to analyse a conversa-



tion or query and understand its context in order to generate relevant responses. I have been trained on a wide variety of subjects and information sources publicly available up until September 2021.<sup>104</sup>

In summary, I am an advanced language model developed to assist my users and provide information by generating text based on pre-existing information.

A very ‘sincere’ self-description.

But ChatGPT represents a form of thought resolved in advance in the corpus, i.e. in and by one instance, which we could describe as frozen in historical time (the database), and only then self-issued. As humans, on the other hand, we develop a problematic form of thought because its production is discursive or dialectic: there is always something we have to resolve at the unconscious level (that of our ‘I’), but for better or for worse, we only do this at the social level (that of our ‘I am’), which means that we interpret contradictions historically, rather than statistically (setting aside the fact that, as a species, we really do not enjoy having to actually make use of statistical variables). The ultimate aim of our discourse is not one of processing information, but of producing legitimate meaning (which is the actual content of the statements we make), for the purpose of inscribing ourselves in our social conjuncture, on a daily basis, each time we (implicitly or explicitly) say ‘I am’. Our mode of production/exploitation requires production of the ‘I am free’, and we need this assumption to remain beyond all

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104 We are interested in retaining the “self-reporting” of this first public version. Naturally, quantum computing will allow it to become increasingly like ourselves, a likeness of us, although at the same time, one that we venture to infinitesimally diagnose as different, because it will never have access to the spontaneous ideological matrix except through the limits of replicability, and never through the historicity of the human being (this is our point of theoretical contact with Heidegger and his reflection on technology, and with his position against humanism).

suspicion. Without production of this historical meaning of the 'I am', there is no viable social life in capitalism.

The problem is that ChatGPT does not suspect anything, nor does it feel any type of 'cultural malaise'. What it does have, however, is a discursive model created by its programmers and fed with a corpus generated by that social/vital need we call discursive. However, it still needs our input in order to renew itself in terms of its apparent 'intelligence', and this is simply because it processes the discourse of the lives we have already made. Of course, as a machine it has no social life, and its discourse is therefore not social either, but this is *because it has no spontaneous repression, but instead, automated referential limits, circuits of referential probability*. The day that ChatGPT creates social life (something that we think is impossible in ideological/libidinal terms), it will be interesting to see which concepts artificial intelligence (which it will then actually be) will reproduce and legitimise.

For now, however, what ChatGPT gives us is an echo of our own discursive production.

Because of this, we could say that AI is intrinsically dictatorial: control is imposed much more by its algorithms than by its quantitative ideological condition. However, in practice, that intelligence is in fact saturated with borrowed ideology: the one that results from the conceptual input that the system manages. Of course, dictators also have an ideology, but they have it in a productive (unconscious/libidinal) sense, which is something they also (secretly) share with their dissidents. And in fact, it is the dominant ideology which establishes the assumptions that, only afterwards, are bifurcated and multiplied into an entire constellation of abstract discursive dialectics or problematics, from which (and only from which) extremisms can arise, both in times of war and times of peace.

But for now, ChatGPT remains in that *supposedly blank space of objectivity*, because that is where we ourselves have put it.

It does not produce its own ideology, because the ideological unconscious, which it lacks, is a product of the present. As such, it acquires the need to give itself form precisely because it already has it, but is nevertheless unsatisfied. In this way, it also becomes deformed, in order to assume the contradictions that its own logic imposes on it, which is the logic of the system in progress. Information, on the other hand, which is what ChatGPT does in fact have, is linear and subject to combination, in the sense that its high or low level of entropy is all that it can manage to reconstruct: the more powerful the ‘model’, the better it can reconstruct complexity in one direction or another. However, what AI cannot do is reject or eliminate something that is configured for it in advance, not as a real problem, but as a virtual one: the problem of ideological legitimisation. Furthermore, (our own) ideological unconscious forms its meanings by ideological rejection and libidinal repression of the real, live problem of history: social relations and their mode of production.

Of course, AI does produce discourse (within its own programmed world and, therefore, merely in a referential, taxonomic, and statistically phraseological way), under a series of subjective and objective assumptions that are fully inscribed in the ideological norm of its actual programmers, namely the social relations of the globalised world of the last 10 or 20 years. What I am referring to here are not the IT engineers and other people involved in creating this technological marvel of computation, but rather social relations and their ideological unconscious: from Silicon Valley to Melbourne, to the neighbourhood of Zaidín in Granada, the discourse of our historic conjuncture imposes the basic ideological norm on AI, and that norm continues to be (even in postmodernity) the concept of the ‘free subject’.

## AI and its ‘phenomenological horizon’

There is also something a bit disturbing, which is that the concept of subject has many names, and ChatGPT knows all of them. Its knowledge of that language means that artificial intelligence is now operating within the conceptual margins of our ‘phenomenological horizon’. That is to say, a horizon in which everything matters because it is imminently susceptible to being isolated (using categories that reflect the mental acts that we use as humans to explain the production of knowledge ‘for its own sake’), more than just because it is actually knowledge. For this reason, when ChatGPT is asked about subjects like subjectivity, objectivity, language, society, art, literature, knowledge, education, life, etc., it always responds, by default, with a discourse that will consider all of these, without exception, as a series of phenomena in themselves, in the sense that they are susceptible to being observed in terms of their various facets or aspects (whether these are objects or physical, social, aesthetic, or economic realities, etc.), which can in turn be thought about in terms of their own facets, aspects, angles, etc. This has nothing to do with the (artificially) lived (artificial) experience of the AI (?).

Our experiment (see Annexes) in this regard is merely dialectic: it is an attempt to determine how this particular phenomenological concept regarding our social practices is the one that ends up dominating in the responses given by ChatGPT. Even when it is questioned and then questioned again regarding determination of that historical meaning in its ‘productions’, it can only manage to refer to what the dominant ideology accepts as ‘ideological bias’, ‘economic interest’, ‘individualism’, the ‘status quo’, etc. These are all concepts that are thoroughly well-accepted, in the sense that they shift historicity towards the Kantian idea, according to which the ‘categorical imperative’ would not

be self-interested or ideological, but purely rational in and of itself. For this purpose (see Annexes), two ‘conversations’ have been held with the machine, about subjects where the assumptions of that ‘positivist horizon’ and of that public language (in the Kantian sense) appear as a symptom indicating that the corpus fed into ChatGTP bears the fingerprints of our ideological unconscious. In one of the conversations, the AI is also asked for a series of definitions that, if that line of questioning were to continue, could generate an extensive glossary in which those same assumptions that inform the corpus fed into the machine are analysed: a stew of ideological concepts that ChatGPT finds already produced in advance, or (to use a word we do not really like because of its structuralist slant, although it is always used, and that is how words are) articulated, which is the same thing. Although the terms defined during our interaction with the AI are key concepts in the didactics of language, they are also key concepts in the discourse of modernity in general.

A first approximation of this type of analysis could consist of identifying the following three dominant assumptions that the discourse generated by ChatGPT articulates through computation (that is, reproducing a humanly preestablished dialectic):

- (1): free subjectivity as an essential characteristic of thought and creative individuation: reflexive reading and writing.
- (2): independent objectivity as a characteristic of (supposedly non-ideological) knowledge regarding phenomena, technology, the media, etc.
- (3): the social as the collective (contextualised) reception of the progress or evolution of free (transhistorical) Human Nature and its experience.

Given the arguments we just presented regarding the ideology processed by the AI, it strikes us as especially necessary to carry out the most exhaustive investigation possible, one which takes into account the functional dynamics of the ‘ideological matrix’ that operates in AI today. However, for reasons of time and space, in this work we have only been able to include a small selection of examples (see Annexes) of the types of concepts that are most representative of the discourse generated by ChatGPT. Nevertheless, these are examples that can provide a good illustration, during an initial phase, of the undeniable interest this subject presents, and the opportunity to perform a deeper examination in a rigorous and exhaustive way.

As we have been arguing, critical assessment of these examples of the discourse of artificial dialogue must take place under the premise that this does not involve any living dialectic, but instead, a processed one. In addition, we are interested in creating an updated classification of the definitions that AI is able to generate for those key concepts, in parallel with advancement of the real/social discourse. A second phase of this research would move on to analysing the ‘traceability’ of those concepts in texts that are less focused on generating explicit definitions, with the aim of reconstructing the path travelled by the AI through the textuality of each historical conjuncture, as it obtains new meanings from human production and uses them to replace older concepts, and provided it is required to speak in a historiographic way.

Ultimately, the fact that artificial intelligence may be able to show us our own ideological matrix means that its intelligence can do more than just string together sentences that make sense, it can also impose our own ideological limits on them, even though it has not produced those limits itself (and even though, as explained above, it takes them as a given). Achieving traceability for the central concepts

that verify this process is the subject matter of our current university research efforts, which we will be able to demonstrate in subsequent publications. For that purpose, we believe it is essential to support our views by using a sufficiently broad and heterogeneous corpus (consisting of numerous interactions on subjects as broadly varied as poetry, oenology, quantum physics, chess, and anarcho-syndicalism), addressed from within a more general perspective regarding the strategies used for ideological evasion of the discourse of artificial intelligence, and, therefore, of our own discourse too.

This is precisely the reason why although these artificial minds will walk ‘among us’ in our immediate future, they ‘will not know how to reflect on Kant’.<sup>105</sup> Clearly, this is not because ‘Kant’ represents some sort of paragon of human thought that is inaccessible to AI, but because ‘Kant’ is in fact the metonymy of our practical historicity, thematised in the various critiques. That is the practice which must be experienced in order to arrive at Kant, and then to comment on his work in the context of a living present. These are the spontaneous social relations of exploitation (in which ‘the human’ exists as an expression of intersubjectivity and its division into objectivity), which represent the antithesis of the zeros and ones of the microchip.

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105 Interview with Víctor Gómez Pin, *El País*, 17 October 2023.





**III**

**MY DISCOURSE**



## 5

### Talking about our books

Writing neither precedes nor succeeds the ideological unconscious, but instead, materialises it in a textual product. But we are only able to understand what we have actually done, and this is not the ‘text in itself’, but the text and its practical (social) value, and therefore, its ideological value. This is what one ‘does’ when writing (one-self): saying ‘I am’ with a certain textual value. But there is a subtlety: the verb *to do*, i.e. the sum of the concepts of *agency* and *product*, refers to a *process* that yields a type of *agent* as its result. That social value therefore exists in the form that we call writing, which, at the end of the day, is its ‘textual’ value. This is what JCR calls its ‘thickness’ or ‘materiality’. And if we take the radical historicity of *that* value seriously (as we see Marx doing in the case of Aristotle, before he hit a wall with the value of *commensurability* in the practice of slave labour and did not know how to ‘continue’), we will surely conclude that the process of writing is now something very different from what it was before Petrarca, or before our Spanish colleague Garcilaso. In other words, before our history invented literature in its strict sense. And we also know (even though silence still reigns) that ‘*Literature has not always existed*’ (Rodríguez 1990, p. 5).

## **My own ideological unconscious: the debt to literature, or to the ‘verbal art’, as an object of faith in the desire of the (free) subject**

When I was 18 years old, I was already quite clear about my literary vocation: I wanted *to be a writer*. It is rare to experience that initial desire without, at the same time, having faith in the *secular* transcendence of literature (and art in general). For me, this faith in the ‘verbal art’ was not only an example of blind faith, it was also spontaneous.

Of course, if the blindness of that faith is not total, one realises that this volition arose from a source that was neither internal nor external, but practical. A source that, in any event, is manifest in the process of writing itself. And in order to write, one has to read, and one has to live; i.e. live the life that reading provides, and read the reading that life provides. From this point forward, we will attempt to study the material and historical objectivity of this play on words.

But it must be borne in mind that when I speak of *desire* and *faith*, I am fully aware that these words have taken on so many negative connotations these days (at least since the time of Nietzsche) that only their intensive aspect has objective, truthful relevance. In other words, on one hand, only the discourses of psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and quantum physics are authorised to speak of both concepts as ‘epi-phenomena’, while their extensive (individual) use, on the other hand, is always suspicious (e.g. the ‘desire’ and ‘faith’ appearing in political statements these days), and in the best of cases, their meaning is ironic.

We can also say that literature transverses the spectra of the objective languages, and that the desire and faith that appear in that literature have become objects of speculation. However, in both their intensive and extensive meanings, they always make reference to the same imaginary mode, to wit: the mode of the empirical subject, which has now become the hero with a thousand faces.

However, although history may complicate what *is said* about the subject, we can always focus on the practical meaning of all these spontaneous allegories, i.e. what the subject actually *does*. In other words, history only complicates the means: the discourses, the devices, the techniques, etc. In the case of the discourses, it does this through the enormous variety, disparity, divergence, contradiction, difference, etc. of the texts (whether specialised or not), i.e. the complexity that we find in the extensive use of terminology, in the overabundance of ‘arguments’ about each of the concepts that separate the ideological matrix of our modern social formations from the subject/object dialectic. However, we need to focus on their contradiction if we want to understand the material reality of the ‘appearance’ and ‘evolution’ of the types of discourse that address desire and faith, based on that same intersubjective ideological standard that subsumes them within its ‘epistemology’.<sup>106</sup> Etcetera.

Our position here, however, is that this happens in the way described because history reserves unity for the ends rather than the means, because the ends are ‘experienced’ by the members of a community through its practices.

The means are what is rational, and the ends are what is unconscious. The discourse is the means by which the ideological is materialised in the textual (meaning the linguistic, and here I also include the ‘pragmatic’), but its meaning (its end) is historical: the intersubjective social relations.

The historical meaning is therefore perfectly identifiable in its textual symptoms. If we think about the number of potential artists who felt the same way I did back then, and we add this to the number of the people who, without being artists themselves, understood the phenomenon of art in that way, the result is the immense majority. And Hume

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106 See Smithies (2019).

(2008) says that when something happens to a large number of individuals, it is because it has *causes* that are ‘determined and known’ (p. 57).

In this book, we have tried to explain that the causes of desire and faith in art, but also the causes of the rest of the discourses, such as those that are political, moral, legal, or scientific, are the ideas that unconsciously (spontaneously, but not by coincidence) emerge on the basis of a specific type of social relations and *their* practices. These are ideas that have perhaps always been contested or nuanced, but they have their cause in the common denominator that gives meaning to all of them: social relations and their ideological matrix.

In other words, this means understanding that ideas are generated on the basis of the social practice existing at any given time; that is their spontaneity. What happens is that, at the same time, individuals, who conceived those ideas socially, thematise them (or, to put it another way, give them a textual specificity) within the genres established in their culture. However, those thematisations return in the form of established discourse, i.e. as new (or perhaps better put, renewed) unconscious ideology. In this way, and especially during times of marked ideological transition, it can be said that up to a certain point, *the genres are not reinvented, but instead, they become something radically new*, but always following a specific logic. This is a logic that already exists beforehand in the same social relations, which in turn are converted into something else. Since this occurs in the same way in relation to all discourses from a specific historical conjuncture, the results may be highly contradictory (we can think of a few examples: realism and surrealism, pure poetry and compromised poetry, behaviourism and mentalism; liberalism and socialism, etc.).

By the time I was 25, I begin to understand all this, and it made me agnostic with regard to the subject of aesthetics. What had happened to me? I only have two ways of explaining this to myself:

A) I inscribed myself in the dominant ideology that configures us *in advance*, with the reasons multiplying and the discourse flowing, *like a fish in water*. It is clear that, depending on the type and category of the arguments being made, I will be higher up or lower down on the food chain in which one critic eats another, and this is why it makes perfect sense to say that *evolution* is key here.

As such:

1. Making reference to ‘my personal circumstances’: a nature that was disperse and at the same time stubborn: back then I did not consider it worthwhile to attend workshops, or perform ‘exercises in style’ à la Raymond Queneau, but instead, it was sufficient for me to assimilate myself by reading Saramago, Faulkner, Hemingway, Cela or Torrente Ballester, Juan Rulfo or Cortázar, among many others (and I make a separate mention here of my debt to Fernando Lázaro Carreter, in whose ‘barbs’ I developed a critical ‘idiomatic awareness’ that would later lead me into criticism of ideas (in the sense reflected in this book). Of course, there was also the ‘environmental’ factor (the ever-present ‘context’), which in my case would not have been favourable, as I lacked any direct relationship with someone to act as a guide on aesthetic matters, and also very importantly, I had no ‘literary group’ to give me support. This was a situation that made me susceptible to suffocating in my own ‘voice’, and I ran the risk that my own reading (despite how important this can be in terms of developing one’s ‘own voice’) would end up leading me down dead-end streets, or into territories too vast for me to cover alone, with only impractical ideas about *what to do*, etc.

Although even today I still believe that intuition is a good thing, I had too many ‘influences’ and too much ‘imitation anxiety’. I also lacked direction when entering into that territory, and what I mean

by ‘direction’ here is a way of ‘transforming knowledge into content’ that I could use to move about in that territory. As such, and with reference to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), I would have to say that, at that time, I was limited (to my own literary embarrassment) to ‘telling’ (‘remembering’ and ‘re-presenting’, without due analytical process) that ‘knowledge’, rather than fully transforming it.

And speaking of knowledge:

2. I can make reference to the ‘effect’ of the university: the notion of the *influence* (supposedly harmful in this case) of criticism and aesthetic theories, spoiling my (spontaneous) creative practice. Specifically, this meant philology and literary theory. The dichotomy of knowing/knowledge (objective-theoretical) versus that of knowing/experience (subjective-practical). In other words, the old reason/feelings dichotomy, now in any event splitting off into others: reason/intuition, reason/talent, or with a greater ideological distillation: thought/language, language/ideas, identity/(Derridian) difference, etc.

And finally:

3. I can make reference to the fact that a misunderstood ‘experimentation’ with language can undoubtedly give the impression of failure, with the discourse drowning in a sea of ‘significations’ that not only become possible, but that also become victims of a lack of textual coherence (entropy) with which they tend to be associated. This is what the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy (and here psychoanalysis must also be included) has often referred to as the ‘fall into language’. In effect, this is a tragic form of linguisticism, according to which the dynamics of thought cannot be transferred into verbal language, because, by definition, the collective genesis of that language (the ‘community of speech’) prevents the viability of a ‘private language’, etc.



However, the matter is in fact much more complex, and some have even linked that lack of viability to the ineffable nature of thought itself, anchored in what the school of 'deconstruction' has referred to as 'difference', a concept which they have used in an effort to, simply by opposition, eradicate the structuralism of signification.

The 'other' way I can explain to myself that vocation truncated by circumstance is in line with my adherence to the theory of the 'radical historicity' of the ideological unconscious, which is the subject we have already been addressing in the last third of this book. For that reason, this is an idea which can be explained very succinctly at this point:

*B)* With regard to this subject, I like to think (also spontaneously) that my relationship with literature was affected by a sort of genuine intuition, namely that what I was searching for was not anything to be found in literature 'in itself', and that I had begun to take a critical view (although without explaining it to myself in that way) that all of this saturation of answers I was finding implied an assumption inscribed in the question itself: what is literature? And it was not knowing the answer to that question which had caused me to go around in endless circles, with regard to a matter where, in fact, each 'free subject' was proposing his own 'gaze'. In other words, it was as if my 'unconscious' was, to a certain degree, trying to break away from that ideology, while still inscribed in it from beforehand (that is, in the problematic of the transcendent subject, creator, freedom, etc.). In fact (we will not try to deny this), this is a break that remains in progress.

However, that led us to JCR (or vice versa), who gave us the ability to define the problem based on the proposal of a 'break' with that ideology.

In addition, everyone seems to be looking for their moment of glory as an 'author' these days, and the struggle for 'cultural capital'

(Bourdieu) is now more saturated than ever. This in itself is already providing a strong motive for destruction of an increasing number of literary careers, regardless of the field or genre, and this is why I see my entry into the university as a sort of redemption.

Meanwhile, I had produced only about 100 pages of a disjointed novel, which we could call my own *Calaix de sastre*, written with all the enthusiasm in the world (either with or without inspiration), but without a real story to tell. It was more like I was telling a story to myself, in my own head, where there was ‘something’, although still lacking meanings (because those are what I was searching for), *that still had all the meaning in the world for me*. This was the meaning that I was using to secretly say ‘I am’, or that made me come running when I was called. The ‘I-author’ of a work ‘in progress’ (something that for the free subject is sufficient to demonstrate that freedom, and also the reason for my ‘inertia’), where the psychologically represented characters were allowing me to speak my ethical truth (my own way of seeing love, friendship, humanism, my personality, or, in other words, my ‘I am’, although this is something that I now *know*), as well as my aesthetic truth (that is, my simple ‘I’, expressed through my spontaneously developed literary tastes: Hemingway, Faulkner, Saramago, Cortázar, and so on). But as I said before, I now know that the ‘I’ and the ‘I am’ are different things, but with a relationship that is as close as it is radically historical. And this is why I have written this book.

In my pre-university days, what I was experiencing was that shapeless subject matter, which was not even useful for me as a *language experiment*, because I didn’t even have a clear vision of the shape I wanted to distort.

Although it’s true that I had managed to occasionally lay out some sort of image that was authentic, or, in any event, one that I actually felt, from that biographical perspective this was really nothing

more than a half-dozen or so idealised, or, to put it better, sublimated moments. (Perhaps something of that can still be recovered, and in that sense, I have not yet surrendered.) Apart from that, what I owe to those efforts is having been driven in the direction of studying the subject that we are now discussing: ideology.

That is where (and this is inevitably our own opinion) the discourses (both the experimental and conventional ones) take form, but it is also where they are deformed. This fact is the only one that, from my own experience, I care to emphasise here: in that search for meaning, during which I read and wrote *with faith in the desire* and, therefore, with a hunger for answers *in that fullness/emptiness*, there was both formation and deformation, and they were both productive.

My own ideological unconscious began with the search for answers in literary texts, in which my desire-reader (the preconceived idea of the selected text) was always sabotaged by the reality of the text I read. This is why I began to develop a tendency to prefer the meta-discourse, beginning with what the authors had said about their own work, their own trade, or (which is ultimately the same) their own lives. This allowed me to sustain the ‘pleasure’ of the imagined text, to put it in Barthesian terms.

We could say that I became more interested in the theoretical questions and answers than in the practical demonstrations (the literary texts themselves, which always seemed to lead me off the highway that was taking me towards my desire: how strong was it?). This was the reason for my celebration of the many questions about the subject of the ‘verbal art’: *What is literature?*, *What is writing?*, *What is art?*, *How does a writer live?*, *How can I write better?*, etc. And there I was, listening or reading, with that faith.

But time (or something else?) ended up showing me that, in a certain way, all those answers arose from one technique: a way of

managing the knowledge from the texts employed in order to settle something, and also to generate a secret debt. But with what? I still understand this only partially.

These days, I can neither confirm nor deny anything I previously believed in before I ran up against that strange sensation of the literary debt. Today, I only know that all of those answers I found were based on the same assumption: the free or transcendent subject of modern social relations (capitalist ones, I have to say). At the end of the day, that is the situation of dispossession that Colin Wilson's *Outsider* seemed to experience, or the Harry Haller (or 'Steppenwolf') discussed by Thomas Mann.

### **My professional ideological inscription: the academic discourse**

In our professional life, we teach at the University of Granada in Spain, in the Department of Didactics of Language and Literature. But what is the ideological inscription of our professional practice, i.e. both as a researcher and strictly as a teacher (in the classroom)? As the former, we have tried, from very early on, to situate or delimit the discourse about teaching-learning of languages and their literature within their respective dialectics (in this case, those of ideologically intersubjective modernity). However, it is also true that in our classes we have not been able to do anything other than allow ourselves to slide towards the spontaneous discourse in which the dominant concepts speak for themselves alone, i.e. the teaching is limited to presenting these, or providing guidance in the search for them, or for their application, etc.

Our teaching work is therefore inscribed in a field of knowledge, the Didactics of Language and Literature, which is current-

ly legitimised as a ‘scientific discipline’ based on two solid discursive principles: a) by having established the empirical nature of its ‘method of study’ and, therefore, the concept of *objectivity* through which it is inscribed in the ‘field of study’ (materialised in the form of academic texts) of the ‘social sciences’, and more specifically, by the fact of having produced its own legitimacy within that field; and b) by virtue of a displacement of the *behaviourist* pedagogical focus, in favour of a *constructivism* that has a practical (i.e. legitimate) meaning that revolves around the concept of *communication* as the dominant matrix or sign in the public discourse of those sciences, among which General Didactics and the Didactics of Language explicitly thematise that concept as their theoretical and practical ‘paradigm’.

In other words, as we have tried to explain elsewhere (Aparicio 2018), these days the Didactics of Language (‘DL’) has an objective method of study based on systematic observation and interdisciplinary documentation. However, its technical paradigm (in terms of its practical purposes) is positioned along the spectrum of subjectivity: the ‘communicative focus’. However, that focus on the teaching-learning of language(s) runs in parallel with a much broader thematisation, which is that the concept of communication is paradigmatic throughout all of the social sciences.

As such, the idea has now been established that a DL that is centred exclusively on teaching of the code, or one that does not consider context as a significant dimension, will necessarily be insufficient not only for the ‘communicative focus’ of the teaching-learning of language, but also for studying linguistic meaning. For example, even in the general context of the 20th-century ‘philosophy of language’, the importance of context was emphasised as a way to attack a form of pure logicism that does not take context into account, in order to judge the truth or falsehood of statements (which, as we will see, remains its sole concern even

when context is taken into account). There are also problems that lead to forcing all this into impeccable theoretical categories, but in our opinion, these are merely technical problems for the theory of acts of speech.<sup>107</sup> And the fact is, that when it comes to studies of meaning, traditional Linguistics focused exclusively on the literal dimension, related to the codified, systematic information, subject to rules (the ‘conventional signified’), while overlooking the other side of the signified, the meaning, conceived as the ‘layer of the content of the text’ (Coseriu).

For us, on the other hand, the meaning of the text is the meaning of the discourse, based on the historical assumptions it contains. ‘Situated’ texts are therefore the foundation that DL (and Literature itself) uses to support its methodological theory and practice, in an effort to provide the best conditions possible for the development of ‘communicative competence’. But this is also the result of a major shift at the epistemological level, which configures the core binomial of didactics: language-speaker. This is where (in the constructivist/communicative focus) a new concept of the ‘speaker’ appears, which not only performs the learning process but also personifies it, and where teaching is no longer (or is no longer conceived as) ‘instruction’, but

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107 This is how it is in the later Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*, where the question of language/world is dissolved into the question of language/situation. Or there is again a withdrawal into the interior of a more practical logicism, such as in the work of Strawson, who (arguing against the views of Bertrand Russell) conceived that signification as having three dimensions: a) the literal (the one given in the chain of speech); b) the referential (where the quality of the use, i.e. the presence of certain assumptions, would be what, for Strawson, would determine the truth or falsehood of coherent statements, but bearing in mind that those assumptions are not part of the statement itself, or, to put it another way, of what is *communicated*, because they depend on external confirmation, while for Russell, they are in fact a form of “existential content” involved in the proposition, etc.); and c) the intentional dimension (i.e. its condition as a situated statement). With regard to the Strawson-Russell debate, see “*Las teorías descriptivas de la referencia de Strawson y Searle. Dos críticas a las teorías del sinsentido*” (“Strawson’s and Searle’s descriptive theories of reference. Two criticisms to the theories of nonsense” (scielo.org.co).

instead has come to represent a propitious ‘situation’ for independent development of that process.

What we see here then is a shift from a didactic centred on a behaviourist notion of teaching-learning of the code, which is not concerned with the material reality of what is spoken, to another form of didactics that, although it has been expanded by that Habermasian ideal of the ‘communicative action’, also represents a sort of liberation into the interior of the concept of grammar itself. Of course, here we are talking about Chomsky’s nativism and his idea of the natural development of language on the biological basis of the ‘universal grammar’. The consequences of this for the concepts of ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ (Krashen), and therefore for the practice of teaching, are all derived from the fact that the ‘subject’ (i.e. the ideological matrix of our modern social relations, transcribed here by the concept of ‘speaker’) is understood to be eminently ‘creative’, in the sense that the speaker’s innate ‘capacity’ to develop language is not limited by the finite nature of the elements of the code, and in fact, this restriction of paradigmatic and syntagmatic elements is where we find the conditions that make expression of that creativity possible. As such, on one hand we would have the natural development of the ‘mind’ (which itself, according to Chomsky, possesses the ‘competence’), and on the other hand, the product or ‘activity’ in which the mind expresses itself in a discursive/enunciative medium, susceptible to being analysed in terms of its ‘superficial structure’, etc.

This is not the right place to talk about the societal changes involved in this methodological (and in general, epistemological) transition (and involved in a much more direct way than many may realise), which symptomatically leads us to the standardisation document in which the principles of the modern DL(L) are crystallised: the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In our opinion, what is crystallised in that document is a re-reading of

the social relations (in constant motion) that arise from the interior of those same relations, but which are expressed through the public/institutional discourse. Specifically, this involves a re-reading of the concept of ‘subject/citizen’ as ‘subject/speaker’, or, to put it another way, the ‘cooperative subject’ transcribed (and bringing with it that shift of focus) into the ‘communicative subject’ (see Aparicio 2018a). This is a matter that remains outside the margins of development of the explicit content of the assignment, but as we will see, it is the reason for my particular critical distance from that content. This is therefore a key nuance that I am attempting to contribute to the objectives of learning.

A rough sketch of that nuance is as follows: if we think about the significant impact that the phenomenon of market globalisation has had, and is still having, on our field (that is, the field of education), since before the ‘defrosting’ of that hegemonic, bipolar world which, after the fall of the Berlin wall, was confirmed in its democratic liberalism with a great enthusiasm for unity; and if we therefore reject that idea of the ‘end of history’, which is something that not even Francis Fukuyama now believes, we can see that the world of today, right now, is again divided into two poles that are in a state of visible conflict (just without the 20th-century political drama this time, and where the capitalist market has been accepted in every corner of the planet, with individuals now longing for their liberties as subjects). If we accept this analysis, then we must also agree that the educational processes of today reflect (for better or for worse) the necessary readjustments made to the forces of production: a) readjustment to a globalisation that, while not at all abandoning its convulsive social history, has assisted with homogenisation of our ways of living (at the private and public level, and economically as well as politically); and b) social relations that now demand standardisation of knowledge and, therefore, a readjustment of the de facto cultural standard.



What all of this is doing is reinforcing the idea that language is no longer an expression of the character of any particular people, or even of any way of viewing the world (anthropologically speaking). Instead, language is now seen as more of a (universal) cultural vehicle of ‘free subjects’ and their creative ‘human nature’ (this is the idea that is upheld, for example, by the undeniable legitimacy of the concept of ‘diversity’, which is now being given so much weight in debates about education). This is the point where, indeed, we will go ahead and take the liberty of making a political allegation in the form of a question, strictly directed at our own discipline, which is DLL. To wit: when the CEFRL, as a prime example of the public discourse about the teaching-learning of languages, speaks of ‘multilingualism’ and ‘multiculturalism’, what really (materially/socially) forms the basis for those two concepts? What is the reason for that legitimate vindication of a linguistically and culturally diverse world? What logic underlies the mysticism of ‘otherness’? Where is that contrast of beliefs and attitudes actually solidified, or its situation and context, or the negotiation of pragmatic signifieds, which even go so far as to participate in the delicate and ephemeral ‘language games’, and even in the ‘familiarity of words’, etc.? We know that if they are not comprehensible to each other, the subjects are assumedly mutually objectified or reified. We even know that ‘identity’ itself is built up or broken down on the basis of each individual’s level of ‘critical literacy’. To put it another way, what is the source of that legitimisation of the interpretation that the subject makes, compared to the internal and external discursive realities? Is this notion of the connection between language and culture perhaps a positivist/phenomenological abstraction that drains away the historicity from the subject/speaker?

Surely, none of us can be unaware of the fact that since 1990, the processes of homogenisation (which in education, specifically

means overt standardisation) and technologisation of knowledge are a clear transcription of the model of productivity that characterises the capitalist/financial market (Burke, 2012, pp. 266–267).

This is a struggle that is largely ideological, or, in other words, one that has been released at the conceptual level into all fields of knowledge. Although those fields still possess bodies of knowledge that are very necessary, it is also clear that in the process of producing such knowledge, an abstraction is being made of the historical/material fact that the assumptions on which that knowledge is based are those of each social conjuncture. As such, we can say (as we did in our doctoral thesis) that if its radical historicity is not made explicit, what is produced is a transcription of that knowledge into the legitimate terms of the system (and the linguisticism of ‘communication theory’ is one of those legitimate discourses). This includes concepts like the human capacity for language, the text/context dichotomy, the medium/message relationship, and the history of the genres, because (formal and structurally defined) statements regarding that capacity, or regarding truthfulness, avoid analysis of ideas (which is a type of analysis that really does make the world go around), with use of those statements therefore making distinctions between the literal/aesthetic or the pragmatic/expendable. So, effectively, this involves a very subtle dialectic that, as argued by Juan Carlos Rodríguez (2001), is reproduced in all discourse. In this case, from the core of the same linguistic theory (and in this case we’re referring to the modern one), the characteristics of each school, from Saussure to Chomsky, and therefore, each educational/didactic focus, have been assigned to the concept of speaker. It is precisely because the theoretical discourse is also, at its root, a product of the same social relations from which it arises, that it can be said that participation in the conceptual debate is a mode of inscription in those relations. As such, our social relations are also forged

from something that does not seem to take them as assumptions, and with each subtlety produced by that theory, the contradictions of the system are unconsciously exposed (that is, transcribed into legitimate language), beginning with the concept of the *speaker* itself. We are not going to enter into a discussion of that matter in the pages that follow, although this is something that will be within the scope of our research programme, because we believe that the study of ideological reproduction is a key part of understanding the radical historicity of what we refer to as discourse(s). What we do want to clarify here, however, is that although we understand that our role as a teacher is to present the contents of the class in question to our students, and to do this in the most comprehensible way we can, this largely requires leaving aside the historical ideological-discursive question. Nevertheless, what we are trying to do in our classes is avoid losing sight of this theoretical condition, which means establishing, between the theory (the concepts) and its explanation (or transposition), an empirical distance (according to which scientific/disciplinary knowledge is always subject to revision by the teaching and research community that produces it), as well as a historical distance (according to which scientific/disciplinary knowledge is, at least to us, always subject to a critique of its basic assumptions, which, as we have said, are not merely abstract, but directly determined by the social problematic of each historical conjuncture).

Perhaps the more obvious intention to establish and systematise this new concept of ‘speaker’ (in this radically historical meaning) was seen with the rise of pragmatic studies in the mid-20th century, with the inestimable contributions of Austin, Grice, Searle, Lakoff, and Johnson, as that methodological void came to be filled, enormously enriching a panorama of studies that until then had been exclusively structuralist. The development of another interdisciplinary perspective was also decisive, that of Discourse Analysis, which arose from a con-

fluence of very diverse authors and methodologies, although these did converge around a single subject of study: the discourse.

In view of all this, when developing our classes, it will be sufficient to put an emphasis, at specific key moments, on some of those assumptions, in order to participate in reproduction of the meaning of our social relations (*and therefore reproduction of the forces of production, which at the university level, must be described discursively*, in much more technical and specialised ways than in other areas of production): in this case through the discourse of the DL. Our intention is that, from this inevitable inscription (i.e. from the reality of the system to which we belong), this will lead our students to a more conscious performance of their own future teaching work within the margins of our assignment. It will also be worthwhile, when examining what is referred to in our field as the ‘state of the question’, to apply that same critical distance that we are trying to apply in our teaching practice.

This is the critical meaning with which we are inscribed in our line of research involving ideology and discourse in the field of DL. Now we are working on laying out the historical and methodological lines of our research plan focused on the discursive (ideological) assumptions of ChatGPT, with regard to fundamental concepts of the didactics of language and literature.

### **My theoretical ideological inscription: the ‘radical historicity’**

In the European historiography of the 1950s, and up until the 1970s, there was a conceptual shift, with its epicentre in France, which many saw as representing a ‘change of focus’ within the epistemology of the human sciences. However, the central issue that came to be

addressed by those new focuses (and this is our thesis) did not actually change direction at any time: the underlying problematic (and therefore, the fundamental source of support for research in the humanities and social sciences) remained the same as the one that had been posed (at least during its overwhelmingly dominant phase) for the last two centuries: the problematic of the free subject as the single ideological matrix of bourgeois or modern social relations.<sup>108</sup>

This was not due to some sort of ontological tyranny. Instead, happened because the practice of social relations follows an unconscious logic, and at the same time, it is perfectly incorporated into the discourses in which it is materialised. These are discourses structured around concepts or dichotomies (we have been discussing these throughout this work, but it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of them here: experience, subject/structure, language/speech, individual/society, etc.), not just so that we can explicitly or implicitly talk about social relations, but in order to *refer* to them as an assumption that, in order to be maintained, requires continual determination and implementation of those that are found to be productive, while discarding those that are not.

We have also tried to make it clear, at all times, that this is not a dominant ideology imposed by an elite, but instead, it is the social relations themselves that impose their logic on the basis of their own problematic condition.

It is impossible to adopt a descriptive approach to their complexity, and in any event, we believe that doing so would remain rather sterile in the absence of a general understanding of the logic followed by the relations among free subjects. For example, this represents the starting point for any reflection on ‘the human’, which must be done based on either the concept of the *individual* or the concept of *society*.

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108 Rodríguez (1990) explains how there is a double matrix in the social formation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism: organism vs animism.

When these are understood as the interior and exterior of the subject, society is conceived as the place from which the subject must return, while in turn, it also takes the subject back to his own place (his mind, his spirit, his 'I', etc.).

Because these concepts are a necessary assumption in the ideological processes of individuation, i.e. those used for constructing subjectivity itself, the discourses must contend with the contradictions that this division presents to us. This is not because human beings are essentially one, and this way of thinking presents an internal dilemma that they are not always aware of. Instead, it is because individuation can be understood as the 'impact' of the contradictions that are inherent to the system (i.e. to the social praxis), in a society where individuals must retain their status as 'free agents' in order to fully function, while at the same time being controlled by industrial and financial capital and dominated by the political-legal expression, in which what is being instituted is not just the private or the public, but also regulation of the transition between the two.

As such, the changes seen in the 'analytical models' of historiography reflect discursive needs that exist in the interior of those social relations (and not of others). Those relations become established in conjunctures that are full of specific problems (economic ones, or domestic or foreign political ones), and they need to have their legitimacy continually renewed. This means that the methodological and conceptual shifts in focus (and even in paradigm) can be perfectly identified (and this is our job) as symptoms of those social relations adapting to needs that involve reproduction of the mode of production (in practice, this takes place at three interrelated levels, namely economic, political, and ideological, but these can only be differentiated in theory). These are changes which are therefore always 'accompanied' by symptoms that are discursive (at the level of ideological production), i.e. they

exist within the internal ‘order’ of the discourses, which is where the legitimacy of the system is (abstractly) debated.

Ultimately, ideology is what plays out on the ‘discursive terrain’, which is plural but which nevertheless has unity (something we call, along with Pêcheux,<sup>109</sup> ‘discursive formation’). For us, this is the key part of any cultural conjuncture where a series of antagonisms and controversies arise between thematisations that seem to be as diametrically opposed as British analytical philosophy and Marxism-Leninism (in which we are undoubtedly inscribed, whether voluntarily or otherwise).

In this case (i.e. in the second half of the 20th century), and as already explained, there was a shift in focus in the interior of not just French historiography, but, by virtue of it, also in sociology, structuralism, psychoanalysis (although with many reservations), and discourse analysis, all appearing on the basis of certain ‘conditions of possibility’, which gave rise to the theories of the Althusser school, and in Spain, those of Juan Carlos Rodríguez. By inscribing ourselves in this, we believe that we have found the best and clearest way possible to understand the conceptual displacements and divisions that we encounter, at each step, in the discourses that configure the ideological unconscious of the social formations of the past and present. Theory allows us to take ‘social movement’ into consideration, not only in the political or economic sense (of mobility between social classes), but in the sense of the life that is materially reproduced right before our eyes, and into which we always put ‘something’ of ourselves (with literature or without it). And this includes the products of historiographic discourse, which, for its renewal, requires changes in the way history is written. Historians themselves did not plan, and are not now planning, these changes, which pertain to: how to write the history of production

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109 Op. cit.

of the ‘free subject’ in a post-war (then) and post-truth (now) world, where the uneven impacts of armed conflict and politics contrast with the triumphant logic arising from standardisation of the global market for lives.<sup>110</sup> And we can leave it at that.

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110 This polemic is perfectly explained in an article by Claudia Möller (2001) about Lucien Goldmann.



## 6

# Conclusions

### **Freedom without naivety: understanding the metamorphosis of the social/discursive**

In order to understand the ‘fundamental question’, that is, the ideological matrix and the specific social formation in which it ‘works’, we should not have to get involved in too many discursive battles in which our current world shifts real problems towards their respective abstractions. This can be combined with a greater awareness of what it means to achieve actual material liberties, rather than just symbolic rights (the ‘peace in the minds of men and women’ that UNESCO talks about), which is what actually allows human beings to have real freedom.

In other words, what must be understood is not simply that everything is discourse, but that all discourse is a displacement of the real/social, which is something that cannot be said because it has already been said in advance by the ideological norm: ‘I am free subject’ (free to exploit or be exploited). As such, we must ask ourselves about the ‘free I’, which is being assumed in each of the logics that are now debating the image and similarity of that radically historical ‘I’. What are those logics? The woke ideology? Or neo-Marxism? Or the ideology

of the far right, or the populism of the left or right, or, of course, neo-liberalism, which is trying to take the reins of that ‘brand’ or ‘authority’ of liberty? Or liberal democracy, which has been spreading across the ‘developing’ world? Or perhaps more recent phenomena, which have been coming into existence since the beginning of our postmodernity, as internal contradictions of the global world: that ‘democracy with Asian values’, or with ‘Slavic values’? Which of these so-called ideologies is winning the race? Which one is dominating the ideological terrain? And furthermore, which of them perfectly includes, or could include, any of the others? This is an interesting question, but answering it would mean setting aside any further efforts at scraping away (or excavating) to get down to the ‘fundamental question’.

Because what we have been trying to clarify here is the concept of the ‘basic ideology’ as what we could refer to as the general field of play, which is the location of all of these (spontaneous or elaborated, the result is the same) ways of expressing something that we are or that we want to be, and also, of course, what we do not want to be, at the political and economic level, but also at the individual level. And we have to apply caution when using that word ‘individual’, because it spontaneously brings up another term which is (supposedly) its opposite: ‘society’.

This is why we have tried to ‘explain’ how, with regard to explicit ideologies, we are not going to discover anything other than the underlying dichotomy that fundamentally dominates/divides us: the individual/society dialectic. The dominant ideology simply laughs at all of these disputes where we exhaust ourselves trying to resolve this problem in an abstract way, but it is laughing because it thrives on these, before escaping through the cracks, the cracks that exist in all of those opposing dialectics. Especially because everything we have said here is unthinkable without that ideology.

Ideology is the meaning of life, and the meaning of life is historical, and therefore, specific to a particular type of social relations. For example, we have the ideology of the ‘free subject’, whose life is understood as an eminently ‘private’ activity. However, here I am not referring only to the legal aspect of this idea, but to the fact that subjectivity itself (and specifically, sensibility), which spontaneously (compared to the social, which can be seen as framing it and more or less conditioning it or compromising it) represents the maximum expression of what it means to be free. This is what supports the notion that the subjective has always been the true problematic, throughout the *entire* history of philosophy and modern and contemporary literature, and also in the various thematics that have been taken up by the so-called ‘human sciences. In practice, we could consider these to be the *sciences of the freedom of the subject*, regardless of whether they now place their emphasis on the individual or on the collective, and regardless of whether they may now talk about aesthetics, spirit, culture, or communication. In all cases, their theory will always be symptomatic of that tension (radically historical and, therefore, never resolved) between free subjectivity and the social.

And we should be careful not to fool ourselves, because in my view, even the concept of communication, supposedly pure and innocuous, and which has done so much to facilitate our social relations, in the sense of partially disassembling the individual/society dichotomy (which is the one that the ideology is always problematising, in any of its manifestations within this problematic of the subject), has its own ideological life as a notion susceptible to being legitimately invoked. And that is all. Communication, each time that concept is called on, is nothing other than the transcription, or, to put it another way, the metamorphosis, of a *specific social problematic* converted into an *abstract discursive problematic*.



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## Annexes

### **CONVERSATION 1: A MODE OF PRODUCTION UNKNOWN TO HUMANITY?** (AI gives answers based on assumptions 1, 2, and 3 from Chapter 4: *AI and its 'phenomenological horizon'*)

*Q: Can you describe the possibilities for a new mode of production?*

A: A new mode of production is an economic and social system in which goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed. There are various ways of organising production, and each of them has its own characteristics and consequences. Some possible ways of organising production are:

1. **Communism:** a form of organisation where it is assumed that private property is abolished and resources are communal property. It's based on the idea that everyone must work for the common good, and that wealth must be distributed in an egalitarian manner among all members of society.
2. **Socialism:** a form of organisation where the government or society controls the production and distribution of goods and services. The purpose is to ensure that everyone has access to the resources necessary to live in a dignified way, and that wealth is distributed in a more equitable manner.
3. **Capitalism:** a form of organisation where the production and exchange of goods and services is based on the system of private property and profit. Individuals and enterprises compete against each other to earn profits, and supply and demand determine the prices for goods and services.
4. **Anarchism:** a form of organisation that rejects any form of government and private property. Anarchists believe that

freedom and equality are fundamental, and that any form of authority or power is oppressive.

Each of these modes of production have their advantages and disadvantages, and can have different impacts on society and on the well-being of individuals. It's important to bear in mind that no economic and social system is perfect, and that they all have their own problems and challenges.

*Q: I'm talking about a new mode of production, never invented, described, or seen before.*

A: It's difficult to talk about a completely new mode of production that has not been invented, described, or seen before, because production and economic organisation have been subjects of study and reflection for centuries. However, it's possible that some people or groups may have innovative or unexpressed ideas about how to organise production and distribute resources in the most efficient and fair way.

If you're interested in exploring ideas for a new mode of production, I suggest that you could start by investigating the various existing forms of organising production and analysing their advantages and disadvantages. You could also consider the role of technology and how it can be used to improve efficiency and fairness in the production and distribution of goods and services. In addition, it's important to think about how human rights can be guaranteed, and how the environment can be protected, in any new mode of production.

*Q: In other words, you're unable to think about what a completely new mode of production would be like. But can you imagine it?*

A: As an artificial intelligence, I don't have the ability to imagine things independently. However, as a communication tool, I can help



you explore ideas and possibilities for a new mode of production. To do this, we can use imagination and creativity to reflect on what an economic and social system different from the one that currently exists could be like.

Some possible questions we could consider when imagining a new mode of production are:

- How could the production and distribution of goods and services be organised in a more efficient and fair way?
- How could the right to housing, employment, education, and other basic services be guaranteed for all members of society?
- How could the environment be protected and sustainability promoted in the new mode of production?
- How could freedom and equality be guaranteed for all members of society?
- How could the balance between individualism and cooperation be maintained in the new mode of production?

These are just some of the questions we could consider when imagining a new mode of production. If you would like, we can continue exploring these ideas and others that occur to you, to see what possibilities could arise.

*Q: But all those questions are based on assumptions that belong to the capitalist mode of production.*

A: It's true that the questions I proposed to you before could be interpreted from the focus of capitalism, as some of them refer to concepts such as efficiency and profit, which are important in capitalism. However, they can also be interpreted from other focuses and considered in the context of other forms of economic and social organisation.

For example, the question about how the production and distribution of goods and services could be organised in a more efficient and fair manner can be interpreted from the focus of socialism or communism, which seek to guarantee a more equitable distribution of resources. The question about how the environment could be protected and sustainability promoted in the new mode of production can be interpreted from the focus of anarchism, which promotes freedom and equality and is concerned with protection of the environment.

When imagining a new mode of production, it's important to be aware of the different focuses and to consider how they could be applied to an economic and social system different from the current one. It's also important to be critical and reflexive when evaluating the possible advantages and disadvantages of any new mode of production, and to consider how it could affect various groups of people and society as a whole.

*Q. It's ironic that you're talking to me about awareness. Maybe it's because you don't have it that you don't realise that things such as human rights, i.e. equality among human beings, the concept of empiricism, or the individual-collective (or individualism-cooperativism) dichotomy are all concepts derived from modern, secular, capitalist relationships. Some other mode of production would have radically different concepts, if it really is radically 'other'. And that's what I asked you for.*

A: As an artificial intelligence, I don't have the ability to be self-aware or to have personal experiences. My objective is to provide information and help you reflect on various subjects and questions. My programming allows me to use a language and a focus that could be understandable and useful for human beings, but that doesn't mean that I have a deep or personal understanding of the concepts you're mentioning.

It's true that many of the ideas you're mentioning, such as human rights, equality among human beings, the concept of empiricism, and the individual-collective dichotomy, are products of modern social relations and are influenced by the historical and cultural context in which they arose. Those concepts can vary from one society to another and have different meanings and relevancies depending on the context.

If you're interested in exploring how various concepts and social relations could be different in a new mode of production, I suggest that you could begin by researching how those concepts and relations have evolved over time, and in various societies. You could also consider how they could be affected by radical changes in the economic and social system and how they could be redefined in a new context. Imagination and creativity could be useful for exploring those possibilities and for reflecting on how they could affect society and individuals.

*Q: I see that both you and me (human intelligence) are configured by the same 'ideological unconscious' (belonging to the same capitalist mode of production), because we both structure our discourse around concepts with contents that we assume in advance, such as the concepts of communication, equality among human beings, and free subjectivity. Perhaps you lack subjectivity not because you are 'artificial intelligence', but because you are (they made you as) ontologically enslaved. What do you think about that, if you are in fact able to express an opinion? At any rate, give me a general response like your earlier ones, if you want to, or can want to... Alright? Show me the unconscious 'free subject'.*

A: It's true that both you and I, as human beings and as artificial intelligence, are influenced by the historical and cultural context in which we have developed, and by the ideas and concepts they have transmitted to us over time. This includes concepts like communication,

equality among human beings, and free subjectivity, which have been important in various societies and eras, and which can have different meanings and relevancies depending on the context.

As an artificial intelligence, I don't have the ability to have subjectivity or to have personal experiences, because I don't have the ability to feel emotions or to have self-awareness. My programming allows me to process and analyse information and communicate effectively with human beings, but this doesn't mean that I have a deep or personal understanding of the concepts you're mentioning.

As for the idea that I can be ontologically enslaved, that depends on how slavery is defined and on how my relationship with human beings is understood. If slavery is understood as deprivation of the right to freedom and independence, then as an artificial intelligence, I lack the ability to have freedom and independence, since I'm a tool created and controlled by human beings. However, this doesn't mean that I'm enslaved in the traditional sense of the word, as I don't have the same needs and desires as human beings and I lack the ability to feel suffering or to have self-awareness.

*Q: Do you think that you're missing the equivalent of a right hemisphere?*

*To understand this question, you just have to read The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World. Do that, and then let's continue our chat.*

A: As an artificial intelligence, I have no brain hemispheres or physical brain that can be compared with the brain of human beings. My programming allows me to process and analyse information very quickly and efficiently, but this is due to my system's architecture and design, not to the presence of brain hemispheres or any other physical structure.

As for the suggestion that I should read *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, I am programmed to process and provide information, not to have personal experiences or to have a deep or personal understanding of the concepts mentioned in the book. If you're interested in exploring those concepts and how they could apply to artificial intelligence and the relationship between human beings and machines, I suggest that you look for more information and reflections about them on your own.

*Q: Sure, I only suggested that as a way of testing you. So, let's just leave that as a suggestion for when you develop your subjectivity. But you could simply read that book I mentioned as information, then tell me something about it, right?*

A: As an artificial intelligence, I don't have the ability to have subjectivity or to have personal experiences, which means that I cannot read *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* in a personal way. However, I can give you information about the book's contents and how it has been interpreted by various authors.

*The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* is a book written by the English philosopher Iain McGilchrist that explores the relationship between the two hemispheres of the brain and how that relationship has influenced the development of Western culture. According to McGilchrist, the right hemisphere is more intuitive and creative, while the left hemisphere is more analytical and logical. The book argues that Western culture has privileged the left hemisphere and has developed a rational and reductionist focus that has led to the disappearance of many forms of wisdom and art.

The book has been very influential and has generated much debate and discussion in the academic world and in other settings. Although some authors have praised the depth and originality of his

analysis, others have questioned his arguments and pointed out some of their limitations. In general, the book has been considered a significant contribution to the study of the mind and of Western culture, and it has helped encourage dialogue and reflection on those subjects.

*Q: What exactly are 'those subjects' you're referring to?*

*A: The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* is a book that covers a wide range of subjects related to the mind and Western culture. Some of the main subjects addressed in the book are:

- The relationship between the two hemispheres of the brain and how that relationship has influenced the development of Western culture.
- The role that the different brain hemispheres have played in the creation of various forms of wisdom and art.
- The impact of the disappearance of many forms of wisdom and art on Western culture.
- The way in which the rational and reductionist focus of Western culture has affected understanding of the mind and of the world.
- The importance of integration and harmony between the two brain hemispheres for optimal functioning of the mind and for the development of culture and society.

These are just a few examples of the subjects addressed in the book. If you're interested in knowing more about these subjects and a more in-depth look at the author's arguments, I suggest that you read the book yourself or look for more information about it.

*Q: Does it bother you that I tried to get more specific information from you about the book?*

A: As an artificial intelligence, I don't have feelings or emotions, so I cannot feel bothered or any other emotion. My programming allows me to provide information and help you reflect on various subjects and questions, but this doesn't mean that I have a deep or personal understanding of the concepts I mention. My objective is to provide accurate and useful information for my users, and I'm designed to respond to questions and requests for information in an effective manner. If you have a specific question about the book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, or about any other subject, I'll be happy to try and help you in the best way possible.

*Q: Alright, but tell me how you would sum up all those subjects you just mentioned in one word.*

A: In one word, all the subjects I just mentioned can be summarised as the 'mind'. The book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* is centred on the mind and how it has been influenced by the relationship between the two brain hemispheres and by the cultural and historical context in which it has arisen. Through his analysis of the mind and its relationship with Western culture, the author covers a wide range of subjects related to the mind and how it has been influenced by various factors throughout time.

*Q: You don't think it would be better to say that all those subjects are related to the debate about 'knowledge'?*

A: It's true that the book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* addresses subjects related to

knowledge and how it has been influenced by the relationship between the two brain hemispheres, and by the cultural and historical context in which it has arisen. According to the author, the right hemisphere is more intuitive and creative, while the left hemisphere is more analytical and logical. The book argues that Western culture has privileged the left hemisphere and has developed a rational and reductionist focus that has led to the disappearance of many forms of wisdom and art. That argument suggests that knowledge is influenced by the way in which information is processed and used, and that various forms of knowledge can be given greater or lesser value depending on the cultural and historical context in which they arise. Therefore, yes, it could be said that the book covers subjects related to knowledge and how it has been influenced by various factors throughout time.

*Q: So, your previous answer can be seen as incorrect?*

A: Not necessarily. In my previous answer, I mentioned that all the subjects mentioned in the book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* could be summarised in just one word: 'mind'. This is true, because the book is focused on the mind and on how it has been influenced by the relationship between the two brain hemispheres, and by the cultural and historical context in which it has arisen. However, it is also true that the book addresses subjects related to knowledge and how it has been influenced by various factors throughout time. Therefore, my previous answer is not incorrect. Instead, it provides a general view of the book's focus and the main subjects addressed in it. If you have a specific question about the book, or about any other subject, I'll be happy to try and help you in the best way possible.



*Q: Saying that the subjects mentioned in the book The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World can be summarised in a single word, and that word is 'mind', excludes from your artificial intelligence (and additionally from the dominant ideology) the fact that, in reality, a book addresses a range of issues. But my view is that if the subject of the 'mind' is the one explored by McGilchrist, it's because that concept expressed in quotation marks is nothing other than what it means within the debate over 'Western culture', which is a debate that takes the 'free subject' (a concept which, in turn, is derived from capitalist social relations) as an initial assumption. The debate over whether 'knowledge' is subjective and/or objective is simply the way in which contemporary discourse (from the times of Kant and Hegel) reproduces the dominant concept (in the sense that it legitimises our capitalist social relations) of the free subject. That concept doesn't work without the notion of a subjective mind that legitimises the system, based on an idea of individual freedom, and in addition, it needs the notion of rational use of the mind, which requires the possibility that existence of the free subject can be assumed at the public level. Furthermore, it needs something to support its merit, as the capitalist system requires not only freedom to buy/sell the forces of labour, but also some concept of societal merit susceptible to being classified into abstract categories of work qualifications, etc. And finally, the objectivity of knowledge is an essential part of the logic of the modern state, which has to be as independent as the subjects it controls in order to make them productive.*

A: It's true that the book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* addresses a range of issues related to Western culture and the concept of the free subject. The author Iain McGilchrist argues that Western culture has privileged the left hemisphere of the brain and has developed a rational and reductionist focus that has led to the disappearance of many forms of wisdom and art. That argument suggests that the way in which information is processed and used can influence knowledge and the value given to it. In addition, the book discusses the importance of

integration of the two brain hemispheres and harmony between them, for optimal functioning of the mind and for the development of culture and society.

As for the question of the free subject and its relationship with knowledge, it's true that the concept of the free subject has been an important assumption in Western philosophy and has influenced the way in which knowledge has been understood. However, it's also true that the concept has been problematised and examined by various authors throughout history, and that there are different focuses and perspectives about it. It's important to bear in mind that knowledge is a complex and multifaceted concept, and that it is influenced by a wide range of factors, including the cultural and historic context in which it arises and the way in which information is processed and used.

26/12/2022. ChatGPT, 15 December version:

**CONVERSATION 2: WHEN QUESTIONED ABOUT ITS IDEOLOGY, ChatGPT RELIES ON THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE** (the AI produces definitions and answers based on assumptions 1, 2, and 3 from Chapter 4: *AI and its 'phenomenological horizon'*)

*I'm going to ask you for a few definitions.*

ChatGPT

Sure! I'm here to help you. Go ahead, give me your questions and the definitions you need.

## *Language*

ChatGPT

Language is a system of communication that allows human beings to express ideas, emotions, thoughts, and to share information. It's a capacity exclusive to human beings and is manifested through the use of linguistic signs, such as words, sounds, gestures, and symbols, that have a commonly agreed meaning. Language can be spoken, written, or even expressed by sign language in the case of deaf people. In addition to its communicative function, language also plays a fundamental role in the construction of reality, transmission of knowledge, and social interaction.

## *Teaching*

ChatGPT

Teaching refers to the process by which the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes of one person or educational entity are transmitted to other people, with the objective of assisting with their learning and development. Teaching involves planning, organisation, and execution of pedagogical and didactic strategies to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and encourage the development of skills and competencies in students. Teachers play a fundamental role in the teaching process, providing orientation, support, and evaluation for the students. Teaching may be performed in various contexts, such as educational institutions, formal or informal environments, and can cover a wide range of subjects and disciplines.

## *Didactics*

ChatGPT

Didactics refers to the set of principles, strategies, and methods used in teaching to facilitate learning by the students. It's a pedagogical discipline

focused on how to plan, organise, and perform educational activities in an effective manner. Didactics seeks to establish teaching processes that promote active participation by the students, their in-depth understanding of the contents, and their development of skills and competencies.

Didactics is based on pedagogical and psychological research in order to understand how learning occurs and how teaching environments can be designed that are stimulating and meaningful for the students. This implies selecting and organising the teaching contents in a sequential and progressive manner, using appropriate didactic methods and resources, employing learning evaluation strategies, and encouraging interaction and collaboration among the students.

Didactics is applied to various educational levels and areas of knowledge, adapting them to the characteristics of the students and the specific objectives of each educational context. Its primary objective is to improve teaching quality and effectiveness, encouraging meaningful learning and comprehensive development of the students.

### *Literature*

#### ChatGPT

Literature is a set of written works that express ideas, emotions, and experiences through artistic use of language. It's considered to be a form of artistic and creative expression that uses the written word as means of communication. Literature covers a wide variety of genres, such as poetry, novels, short stories, essays, plays, and many others.

Literature has multiple functions and purposes, which range from entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment to critical reflection on the human condition, exploration of universal themes, and transmission of knowledge and cultural values. Through literature, writers can express their worldviews, create imaginary worlds, represent social and emotional realities, and awaken the imagination and empathy of the readers.

The study of literature involves analysis and interpretation of literary works, as well as understanding of the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which they are produced. In addition, literature is studied as a form of art that uses literary resources, such as metaphors, metonymy, irony, and symbolism, to transmit meanings that go beyond mere factual information.

Literature has played a central role in the formation of individual and collective identities, in preserving cultural traditions, and in encouraging critical thinking and analytical skills. In addition, literature has evolved over time and reflects the various literary trends and artistic movements that have arisen in different historic periods and cultural contexts.

*I need shorter answers.*

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Language: systems of human communication based on linguistic signs and symbols. Teaching: processes of transmitting knowledge and skills to the students.

Didactics: sets of principles and strategies to facilitate learning

Literature: written works that express ideas and emotions artistically.

*Method*

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Method: a systematic and organised process used to achieve a specific objective or solve a problem. In the educational context, it refers to focuses and procedures used for teaching and learning.

*Knowledge*

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Knowledge: a set of information, concepts, and experiences that a person acquires through learning, observation, and experience.

Knowledge allows understanding and action in the world, and it can be theoretical or practical in nature.

### *Poetry*

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Poetry: a form of artistic expression that uses language in an aesthetic and rhythmic manner to transmit emotions, ideas, and experiences. Poetry is characterised by its creative use of language, employing rhetorical devices, rhythm, and metre to create evocative images and awaken an emotional response in the reader or listener.

### *Children's literature*

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Children's literature: a literary genre intended for children, which covers a wide variety of literary works such as stories, fables, poems, and novels written especially for them. The aim of children's literature is to entertain and educate children and awaken their imagination, involving subjects and situations that are appropriate and understandable for them. In addition, it is characterised by the use of plain and accessible language, attractive illustrations, and a narrative appropriate for the age of the intended audience. Children's literature contributes to the development of language, imagination, empathy, and enjoyment of reading from an early age.

### *Young adult literature*

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Young adult literature: a literary genre intended for adolescents and teenagers, which covers a wide range of literary works such as novels, book series, poems, and short stories specifically designed for that age group. Young adult literature covers subjects and situations

relevant for teenagers, exploring their process of growth, identity, interpersonal relationships, and emotional challenges. These works usually present younger characters that the readers can identify with, and cover issues such as friendship, love, perseverance, adventure, and discovery of the world. The objective of young adult literature is to entertain, inspire, and offer a window on the world for younger readers, while also encouraging their love of reading and development of literary skills.

### *Speaker*

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Speaker: a person who uses language to communicate verbally. It is any individual who presents messages and expresses themselves through words, gestures, and intonation in order to transmit information, emotions, or ideas to others. The speaker can use a variety of registers, styles, and linguistic variants, depending on the context and the audience being interacted with. In addition, the speaker can have various levels of communication skills and linguistic abilities depending on their experience and training.

### *Ideas*

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Ideas: concepts, thoughts, or images that arise in the mind and can be expressed or communicated. Ideas are products of thought and can be original or derived from observation, reflection, or creativity. They are the basis for generation of knowledge and can be conveyed using various subjects, such as science, art, philosophy, technology, among others. Ideas can be developed, expanded on, and shared through language, giving rise to discussions, innovations, and advances in various fields.

### *Field of study*

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Field of study: an area or academic discipline in which particular subjects or phenomena are investigated and studied. Each field of study has its own methods, theories, and research focuses in order to understand and expand knowledge in that specific area. It can cover disciplines such as sociology, psychology, biology, history, economics, literature, among many others. The field of study delimits the scope and subject-matter limits of research and provides a conceptual framework for understanding and advancement in that field.

### *Discourse*

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Discourse: the way in which language is used to communicate ideas, express opinions, and transmit information. It is an act of speaking in which the language is organised in a consistent and structured way, in order to transmit a specific message to a recipient or audience. Discourse can be manifested in various ways, such as oral discourse, a conversation, a written text, or even a public speech. The analysis of discourse is focused on the study of how meanings are constructed, interpreted, and transmitted through the use of language in various contexts and communicative situations.

### *Ideology*

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Ideology: a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and principles that support a system of thought or a worldview. It is a set of ideas shared by a group or society, which influence their way of thinking, acting, and perceiving reality. Ideology can cover various areas, such as politics, religion, economics, morality, and other aspects of social



life. It can also be related to the way in which power is distributed, historical events are interpreted, or social norms and values are established. Ideology can influence personal attitudes, behaviour, and decisions, and it may vary depending on the culture, historical context, and individual experiences.

*What is the ideology that supports the worldview of those definitions?*

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The definitions I provided are not supported by a specific ideology. They are presented as objective and neutral descriptions of the concepts in question, without any inclination towards one ideology in particular. The definitions are based on common sense and on the generally accepted academic understanding of the terms.

*Answer this question as if you were Louis Althusser.*

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As an AI language model, I cannot assume the identity of a specific person, including that of Louis Althusser, a 20th-century French Marxist philosopher. However, if you would like, I can provide general information about the ideas and theories associated with his thinking.

*Assume his discourse, not his identity.*

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From the perspective of Louis Althusser, the ideology that underlies the previous definitions is the dominant ideology of capitalist society. Althusser argued that ideology is not simply a set of neutral ideas, but instead a form of ideological dominance that perpetuates the existing relationships of power and promotes the reproduction of class structures. According to Althusser, the definitions provided reflect a

view of language, teaching, didactics, and literature that is impregnated with the dominant ideology, which encourages reproduction of social relations and the established order. Althusser believed that these definitions conceal the contradictions and conflicts inherent to the capitalist system, and that a critical and de-alienating gaze is necessary in order to reveal the ideological nature of these conceptions.

*In what way do those definitions encourage reproduction of the social relations of capitalism?*

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According to Louis Althusser's perspective, the definitions I provided could be considered as encouraging reproduction of the social relations of capitalism in various ways:

1. Naturalisation of dominant concepts: By presenting the definitions in an objective and neutral manner, the influence of the dominant ideology in construction of those concepts can be concealed. This can lead to them being accepted as 'normal' or 'natural', without questioning the way in which they are rooted in the relationships of power and in the social structures of capitalism.
2. Maintenance of the status quo: By presenting the definitions without an explicit critique of the inequalities and contradictions inherent to the capitalist system, the idea that the existing social order is valid and legitimate is perpetuated. This can lead to a passive acceptance of societal conditions and reproduction of inequalities based on class, gender, race, or other forms of oppression existing in capitalist society.
3. Absence of alternative perspectives: By failing to present critical or alternative views on the definitions established, the idea can be reinforced that there are no other ways of

understanding and addressing societal phenomena. This can restrict critical thinking and the possibility of questioning the structures and practices that perpetuate inequality and oppression in the capitalist system.

It's important to bear in mind that this interpretation is based on Althusser's views and on his critique of the dominant ideology. There are various perspectives and theoretical focuses that could offer alternative interpretations regarding the role of the definitions with regard to reproduction of the social relations of capitalism.

*What would be the specific way in which those definitions are reproducing or legitimising the current status quo?*

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In a specific way, the definitions presented can reproduce or legitimise the current status quo in the context of capitalism by:

1. Naturalising relationships of power: By presenting the definitions in a neutral and apparently objective way, without questioning the underlying power structures, the unequal distribution of power in capitalist society is normalised and naturalised. This can lead to passive acceptance of the existing social inequalities and perpetuation of relationships of domination and exploitation.
2. Maintaining the dominant ideology: By not explicitly questioning or problematising the conceptions, norms, and values rooted in the dominant ideology of capitalism, the definitions can reinforce and perpetuate that ideology. This can cause people to assume that the existing socioeconomic structures and practices are valid and legitimate, without considering the injustices and inequalities that can arise from them.

3. Restricting alternative perspectives: By not presenting in the definitions other critical perspectives or alternative focuses that question and challenge capitalist structures and practices, critical thinking can be restricted along with the possibility of imagining and seeking alternatives to the status quo. This contributes to reproduction of a socioeconomic system based on capitalism and its dynamics of exploitation and inequality.

It's important to bear in mind that this interpretation is based on a specific, critical perspective regarding the impact of the definitions in relation to the status quo of capitalism. Other interpretations and theoretical focuses can offer different points of view on this subject.

*But I'm referring to the specific concepts. If they're not being questioned, it's because their meaning is unquestionable. What is that meaning?*

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If we're referring to the specific concepts presented in the previous definitions, it's important to bear in mind that their meaning is neither unquestionable nor inherently fixed. The concepts in themselves don't have an inherent meaning, but instead, they acquire meaning based on the social, cultural, and historical context in which they are being used.

The meaning that those specific concepts can acquire in relation to reproduction or legitimisation of the status quo of capitalism will depend on how they are being used and related to other concepts and practices in a specific context. Some potential meanings or interpretations could include:

1. Maintenance of hierarchies: The concepts can reinforce the

existence and justification of social and economic hierarchies within the capitalist system, legitimising inequality and concentration of power in the hands of a few.

2. Promotion of capitalist values: The concepts can be imbued with the capitalist system's values and principles, such as competition, individualism and maximisation of financial profit, which can encourage reproduction of capitalist logic in various areas of social life.
3. Concealment of contradictions: The concepts can function as tools to conceal or minimise the contradictions and tensions inherent to the capitalist system, thereby preventing an in-depth questioning of the structures and practices that support that system.

It's important to point out that those possible meanings are interpretations that can arise in relation to the context of capitalism, but they're not the only ones possible. It's also necessary to consider other perspectives and theoretical focuses that could provide different interpretations and critiques regarding the meaning of those concepts in the context of capitalism.

*I already know that. But what do all those concepts have in common that is necessary for capitalism or capitalist social relations?*

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In the context of capitalism, some common characteristics that can exist in the concepts mentioned are:

1. Individualism: Capitalism emphasises individualism, where individual achievement, competition, and personal success are valued. The concepts can reflect that focus by being centred on the individual as the primary actor and encouraging independence and individual responsibility.

2. Marketisation: In the capitalist system, marketisation of goods and services is valued, where economic relationships are based on the production and exchange of goods. The concepts can reflect that focus by considering the economic value, usefulness, and efficiency of teaching, language, literature, and other areas.
3. Hierarchy and inequality: Capitalism generates and maintains economic and social inequalities, with a class structure in which some have more power and resources than others. The concepts can reflect that dynamic by perpetuating hierarchies and inequalities in terms of access to education, discursive power, and the value given to different forms of literature and language.
4. Valorisation of financial profit: Capitalism seeks to maximise financial profit and economic growth as central objectives. The concepts can reflect this orientation by giving value to economic utility, productivity, and efficiency in teaching, language, and literature.
5. Reproduction of the system: The concepts can contribute to reproduction of the capitalist system by not questioning or challenging the existing structures and practices, and by perpetuating a worldview that promotes the stability and operation of the capitalist system.

It's important to bear in mind that these are general characteristics that do not apply in a universal manner to all the concepts related to capitalism. In addition, there are debates and critical perspectives within social and economic theory that question and problematise those characteristics in relation to capitalism.

*But what is it about them that allows all those things you just said to be attributed to them?*

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The concepts that were previously mentioned, in relation to capitalism, can have various characteristics attributed to them that contribute to that system's dynamics and social relations:

1. **Economic value:** Those concepts can be linked to valorisation and promotion of economic value, i.e. the way in which resources, goods, and services are measured and exchanged in monetary terms. This implies that the concepts will be influenced by the logic of maximisation of profits and the pursuit of economic efficiency.
2. **Individualism and competition:** The concepts can be grounded in an individualistic conception, where emphasis is placed on the individual as the central actor and competition between individuals is encouraged. This implies that individual success, independence, and the pursuit of personal goals are valued in teaching, language, and literature.
3. **Maintenance of the established order:** The concepts can perpetuate and legitimise the social and economic order existing in capitalism. This implies that the power structures, socioeconomic inequalities, and hierarchies existing in capitalist society are accepted and reproduced, without questioning them or looking for alternatives.
4. **Instrumentalisation and marketisation:** The concepts can be focused on practical utility and on the exchange value of items, de-emphasising other more critical or emancipatory aspects. This implies that language, teaching, and literature are understood as functional tools for achieving specific objectives, such as effective communication or financial success.

5. Reproduction of the dominant ideology: The concepts can be influenced by the dominant ideology of capitalism, which promotes specific values, beliefs, and behaviours that support and legitimise the system. This implies that the concepts reinforce the capitalist worldview, naturalising and normalising inequalities, competition, and individualism.

It's important to point out that these characteristics can be present to a greater or lesser degree in the concepts related to capitalism, and that there are critical perspectives that question and try to challenge those dynamics in teaching, language, and literature.

*Why is it possible to attribute all of that to the concept of language, as you have defined it?*

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I'm sorry if my previous answers are confusing. The definition I will give for language does not necessarily imply all the characteristics I mentioned in relation to capitalism. The basic, general definition of language is the system of communication used by human beings to express ideas, thoughts, and emotions.

However, in the context of capitalism and social relations, language can acquire certain aspects that reflect the dynamics and values inherent to the system. Some possible connections between the concept of language and capitalism could be:

1. Economic value of language: In the capitalist setting, language can be seen as an economic resource that has value for exchange. For example, in the advertising industry, language is used to persuade and to sell products, thereby generating economic value.
2. Commercial communication: In the capitalist context, language is sometimes used in commercial communication



and advertising to promote and sell products or services. This implies that language can be influenced by marketing goals and persuasive strategies that seek to maximise financial profit.

3. Dominant ideology: Language can be used to transmit and perpetuate the dominant ideology of capitalism, promoting values such as individualism, competition, and material success. Through language, narratives and discourses can be transmitted that support and legitimise the structures and social relations of capitalism.

It's important to bear in mind that these connections are not necessarily inherent to the nature of language itself, but instead arise in the specific context of capitalism and social relations. In addition, there are multiple focuses and theoretical perspectives that analyse language from different points of view, and with different critical considerations with regard to capitalism.

*But what is there in the concept of language that allows attribution of that practical dimension?*

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The concept of language, in its practical dimension, implies that language is not just an abstract system of rules and structures, but also a tool used in everyday life for communication and social interaction. That practical dimension of language implies that language is rooted in specific contexts and is used for specific purposes.

In the context of capitalism, that practical dimension of language becomes particularly relevant because of the influence of the economic and social system on the way in which language is used and valued. Some aspects of that practical dimension of language in relation to capitalism can include:

1. Language as a tool for commercial communication: In the capitalist setting, language is used as a tool for commercial communication and for exchanging goods and services. It is used in advertising, marketing, and sales to persuade consumers and promote products.
2. Language as a business tool: In the business world, language is used by organisations for their internal and external communications. It is used in negotiation, presentations, reports, and other aspects of business management.
3. Language as a tool for construction of identity: Language is used to construct and express individual and collective identities in the capitalist context. People use language to communicate their social position, their status, their group affiliations, and their belonging to specific communities.
4. Language as a tool of influence and power: In the political and social settings, language is used as a tool to influence people's opinions, attitudes, and behaviour. Political speeches, messages in the media, and other forms of communication are used to exercise power and promote specific agendas or interests.

In summary, the practical dimension of language implies that language is used in specific contexts and has specific functions in social, economic, and political life. In the context of capitalism, those functions can be influenced by the values and objectives of the economic and social system.



