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INTRODUCTION



## Studying ideology and discourse as knowledge, power and material practices

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The notion of ideology plays a crucial role in the social sciences in general and discourse studies in particular because it helps us conceptualize, problematize and understand the complex relationship between language use and power structures. In this respect, ideology analysis contributes to a holistic, multilevel and complex understanding of discourse (Shi-xu 2014). The research programs of social scientific approaches to ideology and the still emerging field of discourse studies show several similarities and parallel developments. For both programs, knowledge and power, symbolic realities and their material mediation, as well as the practical production and consequences of knowledge and belief systems are at the very center of interest. During the last century researchers in both fields crossed their way, engaging in debates that enriched the understanding of ideology as a phenomenon as well as of discourse research. It could even be argued that discourse studies were founded on the shoulders of the giants of ideology research. Francis Bacon's analysis of idola, left Hegelian critique on religion and inverted consciousness from Marx, to Lukács, and Gramsci's notion of hegemony have been highly influential when the linguistic turn in social sciences and humanities lead the research agenda to the specific influence of language for the construction of social perception. Here the work of Louis Althusser has to be mentioned. His theory of ideology can be seen as hinge between Marxist notions of ideology and discourse studies. His focus on ideology as representation of an imaginary relationship and a material reality, or the conceptualization of the constitution of subjects through the semiotic practice of interpellation can be understood as a starting point for the arising multidisciplinary research program of critical discourse studies. Finally, Foucault's work on discourse, power and subjectivation has inspired contemporary scholars analysing knowledge as a political tool that is forming people's identities (Foucault 1980). Important inputs came also from Fairclough's work on the relation of ideology and power (1989) as well as from Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) radical stance on hegemony and towards the discursive foundations of realities.

Neither discourse nor ideology is a particularly well-defined phenomenon. For both, we can easily find a wide range of definitions (see, e.g. Eagleton 1991; Herzog and Ruiz 2019). In contrast to approaches which perceive ideology as immaterial beliefs, in the last decade we observe a return of ideology critique and theories of ideology in social

and political philosophy, sociology and cultural studies. These interventions are predominantly considering the material and practical dimensions of ideologies.

Therefore, in this special issue we are particularly interested in the intersection between the symbolic and imaginary aspects of ideologies and discourse, and their material and practical causes and consequences. Very broadly speaking, we are interested in the materialist traditions of both research programs (Beetz and Schwab 2017). Although having narrowed down our interest, there are still two different traditions in research on ideology which both have found their way into this issue.

First, descriptive and analytic approaches (Maesse/Nicoletta Nowicka-Franczak, gradually Toth) seek to understand how ideologies operate as power instruments within economic, political, educational, media and other contexts. These approaches aim at describing the internal (argumentative) logics of ideologies and analyse the material effectivity of these discursive logics in different social realities. The more ideology is understood as material practice and not only as symbolic cosmovision the more this practical effectivity has to be analysed not only as a (pure) symbolic phenomenon but also as a productive and effective moment of the social which is closely related to power, influence and domination. These approaches also contribute to the better understanding of social struggles of change over hegemonic constellations. They seek to analyse when, how and why certain discursive strategies or ideologies become hegemonic and influence hierarchies, field constellations and accumulation systems.

A second set of approaches (Beetz, Herzog, gradually Toth) comes from different critical traditions. These traditions relate ideologies to some form of normative critique of falsity, injustice or inequality. The aim of these critiques of ideology is not only to explain how ideologies function but also to critique/criticize their very functioning (Herzog 2016). However, the standpoint of critique, i.e. the point from which ideologies can be rightfully criticized is often the object of important controversies, and has even been denounced also as ideological in itself (Reitz 2017). In this tradition, ideologies are therefore seen less as a set of beliefs and representations but as practices related to an unsustainable social order and dominating power relations. It tries to bring together the analysis of society, understood as exploitative social constellations with the analysis of practices that systematically reproduce this social order. Ideologies emerge from special conditions as they relate texts to particular contexts, namely inequalities, exclusions and unjustified power structures.

Even if critical theory and discourse analysis have pointed to the crucial role of ideological aspects, both traditions need deeper exchange and discussions on the role of ideology, discourse and materiality. Whether they deal with theories of ideology in general or the critique of particular ideologies, all articles in this issue contribute to this exchange and offer different perspectives on the practical, material and discursive dimensions of ideology.

In this special issue, we bring together discourse studies and critical, social and political theory in order to focus on the ideological dimensions of power, domination, inequality and injustices that are related to discourse production. In particular, the contributions of this special issue reflect on the material conditions of discursive productions. The authors all elaborate on how language is related to the formation of hierarchies in discourses. They furthermore elaborate how subject positions and subjectivities are formed in and

by discourses in an unequal socio-material space. The contributions reflect on the ideological role in these processes and discuss the relationship between ideology and critique.

Apart from the descriptive/normative axis, the contributions in this special issue can also be mapped along different accentuations. Two relevant traditions in the approaches to the study of ideology are, on the one hand, *theories of ideology* (today most prominently present in the field of Discourse Studies) and, on the other hand, *critiques of ideology* (often in the tradition of Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School). One making claims about the functioning of ideology and processes of subjectivation in general, while the other focus more on the (normative) critique of particular ideologies. This typological differentiation, however, does not preclude overlaps and cross-pollinations of the two tendencies: Theories of ideology are measured in their application to concrete forms ideological processes take and every critique of ideology relies on a (implicit or explicit) theory of ideology. Thus both Maesse/Nicoletta and Nowicka-Franczak develop discourse-oriented conceptualisations of the role of ideology in political discourses while analysing particular cases empirically. In contrast to that, Beetz offers a narrow theoretical reflection of ideologies as discursive modalities for the reproduction and transformation of capitalist societies. Also Tóth's paper proposes a theoretical approach to ideology as mystification while normatively critiquing the concrete function of ideology in the reproduction of domination. Finally, Herzog's immanent critique of ideological discourses contributes to a normative critical analysis of social practices.

The contents of this special issue may be described as follows. The paper by **Jens Maesse** and **Gerardo C. Nicoletta** defines ideology as a political discourse practice devoted to exerting power and influence. It is seen as a modality that regulates the relationship between the subject and a specific system of knowledge related to political action where the political-power aspect is suppressed through the subjectivation process itself. Following Gramsci, Foucault and Lacan, this theoretical framework helps us to analyse ideological discourse practices as different modalities of subjectivation. Three types of ideological subjectivation are proposed: oppressive forms, normalizing forms and resisting forms. **Magdalena Nowicka-Franczak's** contribution starts from a Foucauldian position that is analysing ideologies as a practical technology of governing people through symbolic forces of discourse. Taking into account the transformation of Polish political discourse, the article examines the relationship between discursive and ideological practices. Based on empirical examples, the contribution investigates the revival of the question of ideology as a material-practical tool for shaping people's sentiments. The contribution of **Johannes Beetz** outlines a decidedly materialist approach to ideology which conceptualizes the latter as discursive practice and structural limitation. By bringing together Marxian and Marxist notions of ideology and discourse theoretical concepts, ideology is delineated as fundamentally discursive as well as material and not reducible to sets of immaterial distorted ideas or simply false consciousness. Rather than reflecting or expressing their conditions of production, ideological practices actively produce, reproduce, and transform the very material conditions they arise in. In his paper on the discreet harm of ideology, **Tamás Tóth** combines classical Marxist approaches of ideology with a post-Marxist theory of hegemony. Ideologies here are understood as mystification of domination through articulatory practices. For Tóth, fixations or cementing of asymmetrical relations of power (Marx would say: reifications) hinder the overcoming of domination. **Benno Herzog**, in his text on false communication, explores criteria to reveal practices –

and here, especially speech acts – as erroneous. As false or ideological he identifies practices that can produce discursive and material effects contradictory to the practice itself. In the tradition of Marxism and the Frankfurt School, he develops an immanent critique of discourses.

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He studied sociology, philosophy and American studies at the Johannes Gutenberg-University in Mainz, Germany. Johannes is the author of 'Materiality and Subject in Marxism, (Post-)Structuralism, and Material Semiotics' and co-editor of 'Material Discourse – Materialist Analysis'. He is a member of DiscourseNet and a founding member of the DIPE research group on Discourse, Ideology and Political Economy.

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