

IDEOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF THE SUBJECT

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The essence of Marx's project was the development of a critical method capable of unmasking the opacity of social relations under capitalism. Critical thought faces the task, in Marx's words, of "deciphering the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secrets of our social products." Nowhere is the opacity of social relations so dense, its secrets so deep, than in the shrouded relationship of the subject to the social formation. Marx situates the starting point for an understanding of human agency in his insistence that social and subjective existence must be seen as indissolubly connected elements of historical-material processes. Both the social and the subjective are materially constituted entities of multiple determination, inseparably wedded, yet with relatively distinguishable characteristics. This position challenges that idealism which seeks to place individuals beyond the ken of social processes, proclaiming for them a secular egoism, and divorcing "human essence" from history and the material world.

Yet a theorisation of subjectivity remained in the shadows of Marx's thought. Aware of this, Marx left cryptic notes in the *Grundrisse* of topics for future investigation, including the following speculative title: "Forms of the state and forms of consciousness in relation to the relations of production and circulation, legal relations, family relations." Unfortunately, the burden of the economics prevented him from embarking on such explorations. If dialectical materialism situates the terrain of subjectivity, it has as yet failed to map this terrain, a failure that has produced some unfortunate consequences in Marxist theory and practice. Instead of working through with Marx a basis for a theory of subjectivity, many subsequent thinkers — not least the doomed interpreters of the Second International — vulgarised Marx's conception of social relations, obliterating the problematic of the subject by means of economic reductionism. The tragic failure of the communes in 1919, along with the cataclysm of fascist triumphs, indicted Marxist theory and practice, demanding among other things an explanation of the constitution of the

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subject, revolutionary or not. Much of subsequent Marxist scholarship in this century revolves around this challenge, from Lukács, the Frankfurt School, and the aesthetic debates of the 1930's involving the likes of Brecht and Benjamin; to the post-war revisionist, existentialist, new left and structuralist movements. The most promising of these approaches have looked to a fuller reading of Marx, and to Freud for an explication of the psychic roots of the subject and a science of subjectivity that would not be constrained within the strict parameters of political economy.

Various attempts at synthesizing the theoretical models of Marx and Freud have met with frequent and often well founded criticism, and to date no enduring, viable synthesis has emerged. It is our conviction, however, that the force and relevance of the thought of Marx and Freud is such that their work constitutes the foundation of any relevant exploration of the subject and the social formation. Such a project would look first to a re-examination of Marx's mature theory of ideology which can be discerned in particular in *Das Kapital*. This reading suggests the intersection of ideology with the constitution of the individual subject. Ideology and subjectivity are implicated with one another in those processes of misrecognition in which the complex real relations of social life are taken to be simple, natural relations; and in which the socially constituted subject takes itself to be a naturally given individual. In other words, ideology obscures both the actual determinants of social relations *and* the actual sources of subjective constitution. By specifying the psychical operations involved in the constitution and maintenance of ideological subjectivity, psychoanalysis can contribute significantly to an understanding of ideological mystification (and hence reproduction) of the social relations of production.

The specific domain of ideology lies in what Marx termed the "superstructure," the realm of phenomenal forms and symbolic relations. The specific operation of ideology consists in the substitution, at the level of psychical processes, of symbolic relations for real relations; its specific function: the transfiguration of concrete social relations, through symbolic displacement, into lived ideological relations which effectively serve to reproduce the existing social relations. It is in this superstructural realm of lived symbolic relations that subjectivity is located and constituted. And it is on this plane, we believe, that the Freudian reading must be engaged in order to fully comprehend the meaning of subjectivity and the workings of ideology.

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On Ideology represents the work of a group of scholar/practitioners at the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in England. The work of the Centre consists in the investigation of sexual,

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cultural, political-economic, linguistic and other social practices in western capitalist societies. *On Ideology* is the collaborative outcome of a working group on the topic. The essays in the book survey and critique the theories of several European thinkers — Lukács, Gramsci, Althusser, Poulantzas, Lacan and Kristeva — as they relate to the question of ideology. Through careful and critical analysis, the authors unravel the difficulties associated with the theorisation of the social formation in its complexity, illuminating and stressing the importance of a thorough understanding of both social and subjective formation.

This unpretentious book serves several purposes. First, it presents in readable, concise, but critical form a selection of the main theoretical contributions to the contemporary area of ideology. Second, it represents a fruitful area of English investigation into subjectivity and social formation which, while critically receptive to the contributions of (predominantly French) structuralism, nevertheless retains an attachment to the English tradition of humanist materialism. Third, it illustrates that there remains a barrier preventing thinkers in this area from entering into a theorisation of the role of psychical factors in the workings of ideology and the social formation. Despite the recognition given to the importance of subjective factors in this book and elsewhere, very little specification of these factors takes place. Like so many working in the area of ideology and subjectivity, these authors employ, albeit critically, the currency of structuralist rather than psychoanalytic thought wherever the Marxist paradigm appears to require supplementation.

Our purpose in this review is to trace in summary form the parameters of the problematic of ideology, drawn successfully in the pages of this book; and then to attempt to break the barrier and enter into some preliminary uses of psychoanalytic theory as it might inform the theory of ideology and thereby also the theory of the subject in the social formation.

On Ideology

Stuart Hall begins the collection of essays with "The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the 'Sociology of Knowledge'" a history of the concept "ideology." One lineage of the term can be traced from its inception with the late 18th-century French Ideologues, through the Hegelian project in which the study of ideology becomes the study of Objective Mind, to Lukács' study of class consciousness. The work of Lukács, says Hall, "marks out one of the seminal points of confluence between a certain kind of Marxism and a certain kind of historicism — both deeply coloured by their Hegelian moment of inspiration" (p. 14). Karl Mannheim and Lucien Goldmann share this

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epistemology, with its tendency to idealise the human subject as a unified consciousness and society as a unified totality.

Hall identifies this conception of society as expression of mind as precisely that which is departed from in Marx's conception of a disjointed, *complex* social formation, made up of different levels which exhibit relative autonomy, without any necessary correspondence. Following Althusser, Hall recognises, as do all the authors in this book, that these relatively autonomous levels of the social formation are determined "in the last instance" by the economic infrastructure, but that each level, including the ideological, has its own "internal articulation."

As an illustration of the problems surrounding the study of the "internal articulations" of these "relatively autonomous" levels, Hall refers to the work of Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a significant contribution to understanding the internal development of the emergent ideology of Protestantism; and how Weber nevertheless failed in what is for Marxism the crucial task of showing the relation of the ideological to other levels of the social formation (the political, the economic, etc.). Indeed, it is typical of non-Marxist studies of ideology to divorce the problematic of ideology from its relation to material factors. Hall sees an extreme example of this in the theory of the "sociology of knowledge," which has become the foremost vehicle for understanding ideology in American sociology. In the "sociology of knowledge," social relations are reduced to the terms of everyday social interactions, which thereby become the only object of analysis. This position denies any social reality independent of that created through "ideas in their typical formation," and recognises only that always-relative perspective that individual actors bring to their world. In this formulation, ideology is simply equated with "typical ideas," and social relations become simply the expression of these ideas. The very notion of a determinate material realm distinct from ideology is non-existent here.

Hall locates an important departure from this lineage of thought in that part of Durkheim's work which stresses the structural determinism of society in the production of the forms of thought. Here, social relations construct the categories of cognitive classification and meaning, and not vice versa. This view of social determinism, together with the influences of structural linguistics and the Freudian and Marxist methods of seeking deep structures beneath phenomenal appearances, combined in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss to produce structural anthropology — and a new understanding of ideology. In Lévi-Strauss, it is the deep structure that is the relevant object of scientific investigation, rather than the endless variations of surface cultural permutations. However, Lévi-Strauss's "structural causality" refers not to the primacy of the historical mode of production, but rather to the determinism of trans-historical rules of the classification and combination of meanings. Thus,

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despite Lévi-Strauss's stated indebtedness to Marxism, his work does not constitute in itself a further development of a *materialist* theory of ideology.

In fact, although drawn to each other, structuralism and Marxism have not dwelt comfortably together. This discomfort seems to arise primarily from the tendency of structuralism towards formalism and the abandonment of historical and materialist analyses. Certain semioticians, for example, have defined ideology as a formal attribute of the process of signification — "the form of the signifieds of connotation,"² or "a system of semantic rules to generate messages."³

Lacan's work, as it has been used to elucidate the theory of ideology, falls into a similar structuralist error. Lacan emphasised the constitution of subjectivity, and opened up the possibility of understanding the positioning or *interpellation* of the subject in and through ideology. But specific *historical* configurations of structure and materiality have not entered theoretically into these conceptions, which remain focused on the universals of psychical constitution. In its Lacanian usage, ideology becomes the universal site of a fundamental structure of misrecognition (the mirror-phase) which "situates the agency of the ego, *before its social determination*, in a fictional direction."⁴ The identification of ideology with a pre-social form of misrecognition lifts ideology straight out of the field of historical-material factors.

Nevertheless, in spite of its formalistic and idealistic tendencies, structuralism has offered something very attractive to Marxism: a collection of elegant theories of the superstructure. Any understanding of the internal operations of ideology seems to require some type of structuralist conception. Hall suggests that this "Kantian legacy" continues to haunt the theory of ideology because, in large part, of the underdevelopment of the materialist theory of ideology. In Hall's words:

Ideology is one of the least developed "regions" in Marxist theory. And even where it is possible to construct the *site* of ideology, and the general relation of the ideological instance to other instances, the forms and processes specific to this region remain peculiarly ill-defined and underdeveloped. Semiotics has greatly contributed to our understanding of how signification systems work, of how things and relations signify. But — precisely in the hope of constituting a closed field amenable to positive scientific inquiry — it tends to halt its investigation at the frontier where the internal relations of "languages" articulate with social practices and historical structures.

On the other hand,

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The materialist theory of ideology has considerably advanced our understanding of the economic and socio-historical determinations *on* ideas — but it lacks an adequate theory of *representation*, without which the specificity of the ideological region cannot be constituted. (P. 28)

Hall points out, following Bordieu, that structuralism has taken “the internal relations of a field of classification as its object of analysis” while Marxism stresses the *political* function of symbolic systems: it treats logical relations as relations of power and domination” (p. 29). Pierre Bourdieu has described the inadequacies of both positions as they stand: the first makes the internal organisation of the superstructures autonomous, while the second reduces the symbolic realm of ideology to the relations of production. He argues for a mutual articulation of the Marxist and structuralist approaches, suggesting that this would make possible an understanding of ideology as it “reproduces the field of social positions in a transfigured form,”⁶ i.e., as it reorganises relationships in a way that obscures and thus perpetuates class domination. This Bordieu calls the “symbolic violence” of ideology, referring to the fact that ideology always works to secure hegemony for the ruling class by interceding *symbolically* rather than by means of explicit physical force, although force and ideology frequently appear in concert.

Hall concludes by applauding attempts at “mutual articulation” of Marxist and structuralist approaches. This theoretical combination allows the retention of the Marxist premise of infrastructural “determination in the last instance” without collapsing the relatively autonomous field of ideology into the terms of the economic infrastructure. This position in fact reflects the project of the entire book — thinking through the problem of the relative autonomy of the ideological field — and the book’s limitation, which consists in a lack of original theoretical contributions to the problem area. For, notwithstanding the excellent analyses of the problematic of ideology in this book, the fact is that “relative autonomy” remains a nominal descriptive term, without theoretical specification or practical application — except that, in practice, it has served to encourage, perhaps not regrettably, a great deal of purely discursive scholarship under the banner of Marxism. We shall be returning to the problem of relative autonomy shortly.

Althusser

Althusser has most influentially brought together structuralism and Marxism, and has made seminal contributions to the materialist theory of

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ideology. "Althusser's Theory of Ideology" by Gregor McLennan, Victor Moliner and Roy Peters, traces the chronology of Althusser's thoughts on ideology through several modifications. For the purposes of this exposition, we will limit ourselves to mentioning some of Althusser's key conceptions on ideology.

1. To begin with, and this will involve some repetition, Althusser insists that the social formation is not a simple unity, but a complex, multi-levelled whole. While the mode of production in the infrastructure is ultimately *determinate*, the political, ideological and other superstructural levels might be *dominant*, depending on specific historical contingencies. Thus, in this formulation, the superstructural elements are not simply reflective of, or simply reducible to, the infrastructure, but are instead conditions of the existence of the infrastructure — in a reciprocal relationship with it but ultimately dependent insofar as the parameters of the superstructure are set by the infrastructure.

2. Ideology has a material existence. Althusser employs the Freudian term "overdetermination" to describe the effects of the reciprocal interaction of the different levels within a social formation. This overdetermination endows all the levels, including the ideological, with equal materiality. This recognition of the material effectivity of ideology credits the concept with a status that it was first afforded by Marx in *Das Kapital*, and carries an explicit critique of that reductionism lurking in *The German Ideology* which treats ideology as a surface epiphenomenon of the infrastructure, leaving ideology no effectivity of its own. In his essay on Ideological State Apparatuses,⁷ Althusser grounds the materiality of ideology in the fact that *all* practice is governed by material rituals inserted in material ideological apparatuses.

3. Althusser considers that the existence and nature of the superstructure, and hence of ideology, cannot be understood except from the point of view of the *reproduction of the relations of production*. Class struggle is the arena in which the process of reproduction occurs, and the struggle is engaged both within and outside of production. Outside of production, reproduction takes place through the political system, and through Ideological State Apparatuses — schools, churches, the family, etc. These apparatuses have their own relative autonomy and organisation, and are understood to be indispensable to the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. However, as McLennan et al. point out, the Ideological State Apparatuses seem actually to be merely the place where subjection to the dominant ideology is *organised*.

The effectivity of the dominant ideology on reproduction arises from the nature of ideology itself, from the fact that the dominant ideology assures individuals a specific "lived relation" to the relations of production. In this

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sense the assurance for the reproduction of the relations of production which occurs “in the consciousness, i.e. in the attitudes of the individual-subjects.”⁸

Ultimately, therefore, it is not the Ideological State Apparatuses that procure the reproduction of the relations of production, but the consciousness of individual-subjects.

4. Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. Althusser tells us that ideology functions by addressing itself to individuals, calling upon them, recruiting, transforming and constituting them as subjects — members of the social order. In capitalist relations, this process of interpellation produces subjects with a consciousness of the self as autonomous, centred and free, and of the social world as natural or God-given. Viewed in this way, the specific practico-social function of ideology is to constitute social beings as subjects who misrecognise themselves as autonomous individuals — and by the same token, misrecognise the actual social relations that gave rise to their subjectivity. Therefore, the production of subjectivity — through ideological interpellation — is a necessary part of the reproduction of the relations of production.

It is noteworthy that the notion of interpellation of subjects extends the theoretical embrace of *reproduction* to include the subject, but does not extend our understanding of the subject per se. What is in fact being theorised here is merely the production of a mystified (ideological) consciousness. No account is ventured of the way in which the complex disjunctures within the psychical make-up might be involved in this constitution of subjectivity; of how the individual answers the recruiting call only by repressing it from consciousness. In this respect, as McLennan et al. point out, Althusser’s account remains pre-Freudian.

5. Ideology is “a matter of the *lived* relation between men and their world.”⁹ This lived relation is not consciously apprehended as a relation, but is presented to consciousness as a natural, unmediated encounter with reality. Individuals experience the material effects of ideological relations as natural, self-evident events.

In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this pre-supposes both a real relation and an “imaginary,” “lived” relation.¹⁰

It is because actual social relations are not represented *as such* to consciousness, but are apprehended only in the disguised form of the material effects of practices, that Althusser refers to this apprehension as “imaginary.” And it is because these imaginary apprehensions are of concrete objects and events,

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because they incur a material existence, that we understand the imaginary relations residing in these apprehensions to also be *real* relations.

This conception of a lived relation which is not illusory nor merely phenomenal, but is real and material, and yet is imaginary, stands as the seminal materialist description of ideology. Yet it remains a description, not an explanation. Ideology as conceived by Althusser has enhanced the understanding of the social formation, especially with respect to its reproduction; but the question of how ideology actually works remains largely untheorised. What is lacking, in our view, is specification at the level of psychical operations. How, psychologically speaking, do we enter into and enact the ideological version of things? And if we are simply the receptacles of a dominant ideology, from where springs resistance, human contradiction, change? If we are to reject as idealism the notion that ideology consists merely in false ideas, then how are we to *account* for the imaginary nature of conscious apprehensions, rather than just describing them as imaginary? And if we are really to consider the subject as having some specific effectivity, and not as merely the passive reflection of social processes, then what is the specific nature of that effectivity? Althusser has located and described ideology as a relatively determinate formation within the social formation, and has taken us to the brink of a materialist theory of subjectivity. The crucial steps into psychological explanation remain to be taken.

Gramsci

"Politics and Ideology: Gramsci" by Stuart Hall, Bob Lumley and Gregor McLennan, functions as an introduction to his theoretical arsenal, traces his influence on later Marxist theorists, and finally identifies his contributions to an understanding of ideology. Gramsci himself left no systematic theory of ideology. Yet his attention to the complexities of social formation enables us to "symptomatically read"¹¹ a theory of ideology in his writings. The starting point in Gramsci for placing ideology as a determinate social formation, is his enriched conception of infrastructure/superstructure. He saw that capitalism is not merely a structure of production, but acts as a system which articulates a "whole form of social life conforming everything else into its own movement."¹² Taking a sophisticated reading of Marx, and prefiguring Althusser's later formulations, Gramsci insists that there exists no simple dichotomy between infrastructure and superstructure. The structure of capitalism is determinate of social life, but this determination is not the strict homologous engendering of social forms that economic readings of Marx portray. The infrastructure determines, it sets limits, places pressures, molds the phenomenal forms of the superstructure, yet the activities and institutions of the latter sphere have an autonomy of their own, and place reciprocal

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determinations onto the “base,” structuring as it is structured. The social bloc under capitalism must be viewed in its totality; as Lukács said, “it is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxist and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality.”¹³ Seen in this way, the processes of the superstructure are integral to the processes of the mode of production itself.

Gramsci’s theoretical enterprise was designed to think the specificity of this expanded conception of infrastructure/superstructure, and his richer view of determination. Among the specific concepts he employed, the term *hegemony* is decisive for our understanding of ideology. Lenin had expanded the traditional use of the term, from a description of domination in the relation between states, to a description of class domination internal to the political arena of society. Gramsci was to go a step further, for he saw Lenin’s definition of hegemony as being restricted to the power that a ruling class holds over other classes, particularly through the use of repressive state apparatuses (army, police). Gramsci recognised that apart from times of rupture and political crisis, the normal state of affairs in society is such that not explicit repression, but a whole complex interlocking of political, economic and cultural factors forge the relations of domination and subordination between classes and class fractions in a social formation. Hegemony is seen as this total complex of determinations in which the social positions of classes are secured and the productive apparatuses reproduced.

Hegemony is not, except analytically, understood as a system or a structure; rather, it is seen as a lived process. This means that it is only in the *contested relations among particular historical classes* that hegemony is produced. Hegemonic domination is never secured by a simple imposition of dominance in which a unified ruling class extends itself at will through all the social layers. On the contrary, hegemony “has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified” as it is “continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.”¹⁴ Hegemonic relations are perpetually changing relations of contestation among classes and class fractions — relations which are so structured as to secure the ongoing character of the social formation.

Gramsci’s “hegemony,” in a way similar to Althusser’s more formalistic model of the multi-levelled social formation, expands the arena of potential revolutionary struggle to include all areas where class contestation exists, both within and outside the realm of production. Gramsci’s view of ideology is grounded firmly within this context of class contestation. Ideology is seen as a material formation within the processes of hegemony. It is a lived social process, not simply the expression of a unitary ruling class, nor simply the reflection of economic structures. Ideology is the level of socially articulated meanings and practices which serve to bind classes and class fractions in

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positions of hierarchy, while obscuring the reality of these positions. Therefore, ideologies are not judged according to their inherent truth or falsehood — they always both allude to and obscure the "truth" — but rather according to their function in cementing and unifying the social bloc. This specific "unifying" function of ideology makes it a determinate and relatively autonomous force in the social formation. Furthermore, different ideologies perform the function of unifying (and obscuring) the social bloc in different ways: hence is the ideological realm the site of an ongoing struggle of great importance between contesting ideologies.

This conception of the struggle among contesting ideologies serves as an antidote to structuralist models, which in their attention to the structures of social formation, tend to portray subordinate classes as always merely assimilating the dominant ideology that surrounds them, leaving no hope of revolutionary change. Similarly, the notion of ideological struggle suggests the possibility of understanding different forms of subjectivity. Viewing them in terms of the broad conception of hegemony, we can understand forms of consciousness arising in the context of contesting ideologies, each of which in its own specific way serves to articulate the different levels and contradictory elements of social life in a comprehensive but imaginary unity of thought, action and lived experience.

On Subjectivity

We have shown, in both Althusser and Gramsci, how ideology is situated as a relatively determinate level of social operations. The question still remains: how does this determinate formation determine, how does ideology actually work? A theorization of this problem that stops with the placing of ideology as a level of social formation provides a structural description of the *role* of ideology, but not of *how* it functions. In order to extend our understanding, we must examine the workings of ideology in the subjects it engages. The question of the subject is paramount.

The vicissitudes of the term "subject" are worth reflecting upon briefly. The word itself is derived from the Latin "subjectum" meaning to throw or to cast under. In the earliest English usages, the word carried the sense of substances worked upon or persons "thrown under" authority, as under the dominion of a sovereign. Our modern usage retains vestiges of these prior usages, in the case of a person, for example, as a subject of a portrait, or in the term "British subjects." However, other connotations of the word have arisen. *Subject* has come to describe the thinking free agent. In contrast to the older connotation of subject as product of social or metaphysical determination, the modern usage suggests the autonomous, reflective individual-subject. This change in usage is indicative of a shift in representation in Western thought of the place

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of human agency — from subjects as determined to subjects as determinate — a shift that marks the emergence of idealism. Other dominant philosophical trends of the bourgeois age also influence our sense of the term. Positivism, for example, takes up and reifies the dualist separation of subjects from objects, leading ironically to a devaluation of the newly valued subject. For positivism deposits things that are “objective” in a sphere that is viewed as factual, reliable and neutral, in opposition to a subjective sphere founded on impressions and feelings. The objective is the world of truth and reality, the subjective becomes unreliable and whimsical. In this respect, the modern conception of the subject captures the ironic history of human agency in our era. On the one hand, the subject is elevated outside of history as a self-reflexive free agent, progenitor of its own experience and consciousness; on the other hand, this idealised experience of self, this reified subjectivity, is devalued in the cold logic of that empirical valorisation of the external world which always lurks in the wings of idealism.

A Marxist approach to the subject explicitly rejects the twin poles of idealism and empiricism, and falls closer to the classical understanding of the term *subject*, viewing human agents always as the product of social determination. Ideology is central to any Marxist understanding of the subject; for it is the precise function of ideology to “throw under” in misrecognition the agents in a class society.

The conjuncture of ideology and the subject is taken up directly in Part III of *On Ideology*. Steve Burniston’s and Chris Weedon’s article, “Ideology, Subjectivity, and the Artistic Text,” begins as an attempt to pose the problem of the relationships among art, literature and ideology. They move on to the problematic of a Marxist theory of subjectivity, out of their finding that the shortcomings of the aesthetic theories of such thinkers as Lukács, Goldmann, Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht and Macherey stem largely from the widespread absence of an adequate theorisation of the subject. The second half of this informative and interesting piece examines the implications of the works of two French theorists, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, for the building of a Marxist theory of the subject. The authors correctly see that a Marxism which envisions only a social-economic construction of social-subjective formation repeats the idealistic separation of ideas from materiality, but this time inversely.

The Marxist conception of the subject as determined by social relations has frequently faltered on an equation of human agency with self-consciousness, and hence a metaphysical identification of the conscious subject as the motive force of history. Freud, following the great decenterings of Copernicus, Marx and Darwin, deconstructed an identification of consciousness with a synthetic unity of mental action. He decenters the conception of a self-present, self-motivating, unitary consciousness — thereby breaking with a dominant

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Western philosophical tradition. By exposing the facade of a rational transcendent ego, psychoanalysis provides a critique of the idealist notion of the subject that Marxism has lacked. There remains the challenge of joining these two decenterings, whereby Marx places the subject in history, and Freud places the subject in process. A dialectical appraisal of subjectivity might begin, then, from the position that subjects are constituted in and through the social formation, but *not by and of it*.

Lacan

Lacan explicitly treats his "return to Freud" as a critique of the equation of the subject with self-consciousness, aiming his attack especially on the reified conceptions of ego-psychology. Burniston and Weedon point to this Lacanian critique as the point of intersection with a materialist reading of social formation, insofar as both Althusser and Kristeva take this as a link to their social theories. Lacan, following Freud, argues that subjects are made not born. Lacanian theory bases the constitution of the subject on fundamental misrecognition of the self. Infants have no natural, totalised selves, but rather move through a series of psychic constellations in which self and others are represented in a variety of phantasized (imaginary) positions. The construction of subjectivity curtails these imaginary relations, establishing self and others in fixed, ordered social (symbolic) relations. The entry from "imaginary" to "symbolic" is a *social* entry, because relations of difference among social others come to constitute the boundaries of the subject.

Now Lacan has proposed that the fundamental image of the self-as-such, the narcissistic ego-image, is founded in misrecognition, is a fiction. The perceptual relation to an other in infancy is taken as the image of oneself — and hence the very kernel of self-identity is misplaced, imaginary. Lacan writes that an infant "fastens himself to an image which alienates him from himself"; henceforth, selfhood is "forever irreducible to his lived identity."¹⁵ This basic structure of misrecognition is said to be the foundation for all future relations.

Let us recall the argument that subjects in their social determination do not simply become the bearers of social structure. Rather, in the hegemonic processes of ideology, subjects live the relation with their real conditions of existence *as if* they themselves were the autonomous principle of determination of that relation. Precisely here, in the imaginary determinacy of the centre-self, can ideology call forth subjects, throw them under.

But it is by no means clear — as we have already pointed out — that Lacan's basic structure of misrecognition provides an adequate or even partial theorisation of the relation of subjectivity and ideology. We can mention these refutations. First, no ideological field is necessary for this alienation of the mirror-

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image to take place; the latter is established within a dyadic, essentially pre-social field. Secondly, this alienation cannot account for the specificity of the ideological field or of the relations which obtain there. There is in fact nothing to convince us that the specular misrecognition of the mirror-phase founds *ideological* mis-recognition. Or, to put the distinction in a somewhat different way, Lacan's *imaginary* refers to a presocial consciousness characterised by the free reign of desire, whereas Althusser's *imaginary* refers to a socially articulated consciousness ideologically constituted so as to *expel* desire.

The "Return of the Repressed"

The first step towards introducing psychoanalytic concepts into the theory of ideology should consist in locating the role of the unconscious. Freud himself based the psychoanalytic theory of culture and society on the determinism of the unconscious. Consequently, in his sociological writings, history is revealed as repetition compulsion, and the imperatives of wish-fulfillment far outweigh those of the concrete world. Now, while Freud undoubtedly erred in his reduction of the social to the expression of the repressed unconscious, it would be a far greater error to then, for this reason, neglect to take account of the effectivity of the unconscious. Indeed, denial of the unconscious is, we shall argue, a fundamental aspect of the proper functioning of ideology. We shall go further and say that Freud's conception of society as an epiphenomenon of the repressed unconscious, while it is not really a theory of society at all, nevertheless provides an indispensable psychical link in the explanation of the workings of ideology.

The role of the unconscious in the operations of ideology can be illustrated in a preliminary way by reference to Freud's conception of the "return of the repressed." Stated in the briefest possible way, this refers to the role of objects in the external world in providing substitute gratifications for the demands of unconscious contents. By such attachment to external objects, unconscious desire is ameliorated, regulated and maintained in repression. Where the external objects are culturally signified, this substitute gratification is known as sublimation. Where the substitute objects are not culturally appropriate, the attachment to them is considered neurotic. In either case, repressed unconscious content returns to consciousness, not in its original form, but in the guise of substitute objects — in a *transfigured* form.

It is therefore possible, viewing one synchronic arc of this process of substitute gratification, to construe the social field as a field of substitute objects for the repressed objects of desire. But clearly, the social field is not thereby *organised* according to its investments from the unconscious. The primary-process character of system Unconscious and its contents are quite antithetical to the characteristics of the social field. The articulations of the

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social field are described by a complex of social factors. But the social field is always captive to the powerful, motivating cathexes placed on its elements by the unconscious. It is only such unconscious attachment that brings the inert world of objects, symbols and relations to life, infusing them with a life of their own.

This, then, is how human individuals enter *unconsciously* into discourse with the social, in a way that is determinate without being articulate. It is in the second synchronic arc of the process of substitute gratification that articulate social determination occurs: the social field, its elements imbued with unconscious significance, impresses itself upon consciousness, returning to consciousness in a transfigured form — i.e. via the articulations of the social field — that which is repressed. This transfiguration consists not only in the fact that a cultural object has been substituted for an object of desire, but also in the fact that the substitute object is apprehended by consciousness in terms of the logically ordered symbolic relations of the social field. What resides only as a timeless, undifferentiated desire, returns to consciousness as a symbolically ordered relation. In this transfiguration lies the operation of ideology.

By providing substitute — symbolic — objects for the demands of *repressed* wishes, and by disguising the source and agency of those wishes, the field of ideological relations gives rise to ideological consciousness — a consciousness which misrecognises unconscious imperatives as being the volition of the conscious ego. Unconscious effectivity is denied by this consciousness; self-hood is naturally equated with — and experienced as equivalent to — this consciousness. Only because of the denial of the unconscious can this consciousness attribute autonomy, self-reflexivity and free agency to itself. But what consciousness denies and misapprehends is not limited to unconscious effectivity. As Althusser says, "the reality which is necessarily *ignored* in the very forms of recognition (ideology = recognition/ignorance) is indeed, in the last resort, the reproduction of the relations of production and of the relations deriving from them."¹⁶ But what makes the mis-recognition of social relations and their reproduction happen, what causes consciousness to bestow immanence and naturalness upon socially determined, symbolic objects, is the *unconscious cathexis* of these objects. Were the valuation of worldly objects not unconscious, from where would arise the imaginary status that consciousness attributes to reality?

Through the denial of the unconscious, ideological consciousness constructs, in the realm of subjective experience, that essentialist division between self and social world which characterises ideological thought (as in empiricism and idealism). The social I of pre-ideological cultures becomes the reified transcendent I of ideological cultures. Ideological thought and ideological consciousness commit the fatal error of collapsing the distinction

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between *symbolic logical order* and the *order of the real* (that order which for any Marxist must exist behind the obstructions of ideological phenomena). This is because consciousness has no way in and of itself of distinguishing the “symbolic” from the “real.”¹⁷ It is in this gap between concept and reality that ideology operates, specifically by *not signifying* this gap, thereby producing that reification of concepts which Marx recognised as a hallmark of ideology. Marxist theory seeks to undo this reification of concepts, whose central moment fixes the subject-consciousness in a fictitious empirical or transcendental centredness. Freud’s “decentering” of the subject consisted in his revelation of unconscious effectivity — and his explanation of how repression grants immanence to the ego-*imago*: the *concept* of the self (as centred) is mistaken for the *reality* of the self (decentred or divided), a misrecognition central to and produced by ideology.

We can now define subjectivity as a complex formation. It consists in part of a reified consciousness, constructed ideologically; it is this part that is generally treated as the subject in its entirety. Every act of perception by this consciousness is an act of misrecognition of the true nature of the self and the social formation, and therefore is an act of reproduction of the “divided” self and the social relations of production. This simultaneous reproduction of the self and the social takes place in the same motion, in the identical location — that of lived ideological relations. Another part of the complex subject consists in the unconscious, that determinate level of psychical operations and contents which propels the subject into the ideological realm, wherein that subjectivity is re-established. Ideology, fuelled by unconscious desire, moulded by the social relations of production, serves simultaneously to reproduce particular forms of consciousness and particular relations of production and exploitation.

The model of the “return of the repressed,” in its revelation of the role of unconscious factors in the workings of ideology, comprehends Althusser’s notion of the real yet imaginary relations of ideology — the “way people live” their relation to the actual conditions of their existence. We can say that people *really* live this relation *unconsciously* — that is, according to the imperatives of system Unconscious — and that what is presented in consciousness is the imaginary (ideological) form of this lived relation.

The model of the “return of the repressed” further affirms that ideology has a “material existence.” We can say that ideology does not consist in false representations of real objects, but in the false attribution of reality to representations of materiality which by their nature abstract from that materiality. This distinction between *ideology as misrepresentation of reality* and *ideology as representation of imaginary relations* is crucial, and leads us away from the question of unconscious effectivity, towards a discussion of the nature of representation.

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Ideology and Representation

In understanding the problem of representation, the fundamental, if problematic, Marxist distinction between real relations and their phenomenal forms is at stake. One type of error, already identified as a form of idealism, promotes the notion of ideology as misrepresentation of reality. This position maintains the real/phenomenal distinction, but idealises and de-materialises ideology as merely false ideas. A second type of error simply designates representation as material, dissolving the real/phenomenal distinction, and thereby losing the notion of multiple determination to a homogeneous, discursive view of the social bloc.¹⁸ The correct approach lies in recognising that conscious representation is always ordered in a syntactical logic (epitomised by the order of language) which is asymptotic to the real, and abstract in relation to all of materiality. This contrived character of symbolic thought fails to be recognised by consciousness, and is in fact *naturalised* in the ideological field, where thought gives rise to concrete manifestations and material transformations of reality. Furthermore, as we have shown, unconsciously cathected object-representations are treated as if they transparently reflected reality.

Therefore, conscious representations *do* portray reality, but only in the abstract-relational terms of a system of symbolic logic which does not reside in nature or in the objects themselves, but in the hegemonic logic of symbolic thought and action — i.e., in the ideological field. The phenomenal does not, therefore, *mis-represent* the real, but *transfigures* it by recasting it in terms of a symbolic order. This happens necessarily, because symbolic thought always signifies relations among objects and experiences which do not *in reality* exist. In consciousness, real objects are always signified as abstract symbolic relations.¹⁹

We have taken the position that ideologies exist as lived relations, ordered by the interplay of economic, political and other social factors, and also in turn ordering these factors in such a way that they *mean* something to human beings. Ideology therefore operates at the level of representations, and its particular function consists in making oppressive, contradictory and alienating social events appear inevitable and natural. Representations of things are taken to be the things themselves, and it is in this collapsing of concrete experience into the logic of symbolic relations that ideology operates. It remains now to offer a more specific theorisation of representation at the level of subjective operations.

Thing-presentations and Word-presentations

Freud's theory of psychical representations, a little known and relatively undeveloped part of his work, seems to address itself to the problem of ideology and representation. For Freud, "becoming conscious is no mere act of perception, but is also a *hypercathexis*, a further advance in the psychical organisation."²⁰ In his 1914 paper entitled "The Unconscious," Freud specified the type of hypercathexis which gives rise to consciousness: "The conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone." System Pcs.-Cs. comes about "by this thing-presentation being hypercatheted through being linked with the word-presentation corresponding to it. It is these hypercathexes, we may suppose, that bring about a higher psychical organisation and make it possible for the primary process to be succeeded by the secondary process which is dominant in the Pcs."²¹ This "translation into words which shall remain attached to the object" is the *necessary condition for conscious representation* of any signifier. Therefore, consciousness is redefined as word-presentational consciousness each time such a hypercathexis occurs — that is, with each thought and action. The effect of the hypercathexis of words and things is to cast thing-perceptions into the abstract relations that obtain among words. These word-presentational relations, which are formalised in language, reside at the level of the psyche in system Pcs., the preconscious field of latent word-presentations that are available to consciousness. Conscious representation always consists in the perceptual signifier of experience being replaced by one of these (previously signified verbal) signs from the preconscious.²² In other words, in order to enter consciousness, the signifiers of a current experience are cast into the signifying relations of past experience expressed as word-presentations. Thus, it is not the content of the repressed alone that is banished from consciousness; it is also the *form* of unconscious representation — "thing-presentations" — that is antithetical to the order of consciousness. This illuminates the central ideological effect in which symbolic relations are confounded with the real: Symbolic relations are taken by consciousness to be real relations precisely because consciousness is *structured symbolically* — in the form of word-presentations — and therefore apprehends the world and the self as *naturalised domains* of word-presentations.

Finally, this conception allows us to understand system Pcs. as being organised into a number of latent chains of word-presentations, each reflecting a domain of practice, an aspect of lived relations. Ongoing experience, then, is re-signified in terms of one or another of these symbolic chains of meaning. And different kinds of social practice, different ideologies or partial ideologies, may in this way become part of the subjective make-up of

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individuals. This possibility, which brings to mind Gramsci's insistence on the multiple contestations at all levels of the social formation under hegemony, suggests the possible importance of struggle and revolutionary change at the level of the subject.

Conclusion: The Problem of Determinism

We have attempted to show the relevance of certain psychoanalytic insights for the theory of ideology. And several important contemporary theoretical propositions concerning the nature of ideology do indeed seem to gain some specificity from the psychoanalytic conception of a complex, "divided" subjectivity. In particular, the Althusserian description of ideology as a "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" requires an explanation at the level of the subject. The role of the unconscious in the motivation, if not the articulation, of the ideological field makes new sense of ideology as a "lived relation," and of the role of ideology in the constitution of a misrecognised subjectivity. A conception of ideology as the field in which both unconscious effectivity and social effectivity are misrecognised simultaneously, opens up a genuine dialectic of the subject and the social formation. And Freud's theory of psychical representations offers a specific explanation of the ideological reification of concepts, and the ideological construction of symbolic abstractions in the place of reality.

But perhaps the most far-reaching potential contribution of psychoanalysis to the theory of ideology, and one which we can only allude to here, concerns the problem of determinism. We have already argued that Althusser's notions of "relative autonomy" and "determination in the last instance" remain largely untheorised. The problem facing these conceptions arise from the insistence in Marxist epistemology on a single ultimately determining historical contradiction — that within the infrastructure. While various degrees of leeway are granted to relatively autonomous articulations in the superstructure, the fact is that no theorisation of the internal articulation of any superstructural level of the social formation can ultimately survive in the Marxist arena of thought.

What psychoanalysis can offer is the paradigm of another irreducible source of determinism. The model for this has already emerged here in our discussion of unconscious effectivity upon the ideological field. At once, the problem of the relative autonomy of the ideological instance seems soluble, in terms of the specific function ideology has of weaving social and psychical determinants together into the fabric of an orderly lived experience. Ideology will always be relatively autonomous with respect to infrastructural determinants and unconscious determinants, but it is ultimately determined by both.

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The problem of reproduction is also relocated somewhat in this formulation — shifted from its usual preoccupation with the reproduction of the productive apparatus, to a broader “hegemonic” view in which other determinate contradictions (for example, between *need* and *desire*) might attain dominance in the processes of reproduction.

Julia Kristeva’s notion of the *semiotic* constitutes an important contribution to the theorisation of a psychical determinacy. Her work emerges as an attempt to provide Marxism with a psychoanalytically based theory of subjectivity. The semiotic — ontologically equivalent to Lacan’s “imaginary” — is a quasi-social realm of pre-symbolic relations and “semiotic materials”: sound, gesture, color, movement, intonation. The semiotic realm is pre-linguistic and pre-social and “cannot therefore rest on any concept of a fixed subject which is constituted in the symbolic realm”²³ (Burniston and Wedon, p. 221). It is the realm of affect and bodily sensation unhegemonised by an alien subject-centeredness. Although close to the drives, the semiotic is by no means a biological realm, but is rather the realm of thing-presentations, integrally contained in every symbolic representation. This “double articulation,” as Kristeva calls it, in which the semiotic material of pre-subjective existence is ordered in the relations of the symbolic realm, constitutes the structure of *signifying practice* — the lived experience of the subject. Signifying practice — which constitutes the ideological field — brings together the social and the psychical, the subject and the anti-subject, but only as fixed moments in a continuing process of disjuncture of the semiotic from the symbolic — a disjuncture that can, in the failure of ideology, produce disruption of the social formation.

This conception of an irreducible realm of psychical representation, with its own specific form of articulation, interacting dialectically with other determinate infrastructures in the social formation, remains to be developed, substantiated and justified. But it at least holds the promise of disrupting the impasse in the theories of relative autonomy, determinism and ideology.

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Notes

1. First published in 1977 by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, as its *Working Paper in Cultural Studies*, No. 10.
2. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 92.
3. Veron, quoted in Marina Camargo Heck, “The Ideological Dimension of Media Messages,” University of Birmingham C.C.C.S., Stencilled Occasional Paper, No. 10, p. 5. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies makes available a number of informative Stencilled Occasional Papers.

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4. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1977, p. 2, our emphasis.
5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Symbolic Power*, CCCS Occasional Stencilled Paper, No. 46, translated by Richard Nice.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
7. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
8. McLennan et al., p. 94, quoting Althusser, 1971, p. 170.
9. L. Althusser, *For Marx*, London: Allen Lane, 1969, p. 233.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
11. Althusser, in *For Marx*, uses this Freudian analogy to describe a reading of what is implicit in a text.
12. Stuart Hall, "Rethinking the 'Base and Superstructure' Metaphor," in J. Bloonfield, *The Communist University of London papers on Class, Hegemony, and Party*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, p. 65.
13. Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, Cambridge M.I.T. Press, 1971, p. 52.
14. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, London: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 112.
15. J. Lacan, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
16. Althusser, 1971, pp. 182-183.
17. For this reason, Freud's term "reality testing" is a misnomer. It is not reality that is tested, but representations of reality that are symbolically encoded. We owe the idea of using the Freudian term "the return of the repressed" in this fashion to Jon Schiller, "Foundations of a Psychology of Culture Repression and the 'Testing' of Reality" (Xerox, 1976).
18. This position, which is similar to that of Foucault except that Foucault explicitly disavows the importance of materialism, can be discerned frequently in the work of those interested in developing a materialist theory of the subject, for example in the editorial position of the English journal *Ideology and Consciousness*.
19. The notion of a "symbolic order" has been used by Lacan, but our usage refers more to ways in which linguistic systems create meaning. F. de Saussure's theory of signification (*Course of General Linguistics*, New York Library, 1960) provides the model for understanding that meaning does not arise in the relation of concept to reality, nor even in the relation of content (signifier) to meaning (signified), but in the relation of signifier to signifier — in the abstract relation of difference between signifiers.
20. S. Freud, "The Unconscious," in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XIV, James Strachey, ed. and trans., London: The Hogarth Press, p. 194.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 201-202.
22. Thus, in terms of the Saussurian formula, the signifier of current experience is replaced by a previously articulated sign $\left(\begin{array}{c} Sr \\ Sd \end{array} \right)$ to produce a conscious signification: $\left(\begin{array}{c} Sr \\ Sd \end{array} \right)$. This could be

Sd

taken as the formula for work-presentation. It is perhaps not coincidental that this formula matches exactly the formula for the plane of connotation in Barthes' *Elements of Semiology* (pp. 90-91), in which the signified of connotation is the form of ideology.