



Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology...

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ABSTRACT

Modern social theory is awash with talk of 'discourse' and 'ideology'. Sometimes the two concepts are used interchangeably and at other times they are counterposed. The paper seeks to make sense of the part played by these concepts in contemporary debates. It proposes an exercise in retrieval which suggests that our two key terms form distinct theoretical traditions which, while they can be distinguished, can both be made good use of. We first engage with the debate over ideology within modern western Marxism and explore the suggestive distinction proposed by Larrain between a negative and a positive conception of ideology. Next we explore Foucault's version of discourse theory. Our third investigation focuses on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who opt for a rupture between discourse and ideology; their solution will be contrasted with the Gramscian position espoused by Stuart Hall – the approach closest to the solution we will propose – that retains the concept ideology whilst benefiting from the advances secured by discourse theory.

The theory of ideology we propose supplements discourse theory rather than opposing it. It is a version of ideology theory that is different from that bequeathed by Marx. Retained and moved into central prominence is a key feature of the critical thrust of Marx's account, namely, its focus on the way in which the interpellation of subject positions operates systematically to reinforce and reproduce dominant social relations – it is this that is described as the 'directionality' of ideology theory. This directionality is captured by employing ideological analysis to focus upon the effects of discursive practices, which we term 'ideology effects'.

I. DISCOURSE: FOR OR AGAINST IDEOLOGY?

Modern social theory is awash with talk of 'discourse' and 'ideology'. Sometimes the two concepts are used interchangeably and at other

times they are counterposed. Is their current usage a matter of stylistic preference or even an intellectual fad? Would Althusser 'say' the same if we substituted 'discourse' on each occasion he used 'ideology'? Would we have a different Foucault if his texts were to be republished with 'ideology' substituted for 'discourse'? This paper seeks to make sense of the part played by these concepts in contemporary debates. It proposes an exercise in retrieval which suggests that our two key terms form distinct theoretical traditions which, while they can be distinguished, can both be made good use of. We do not hold out the promise of erecting a neat distinction between them; rather we will argue that they both have a distinguishable theoretical role to play in the analysis of social relations.

Concepts of the social are never fully referential, in the sense of identifying a verbal sign that stands for or refers to (and thus comes to represent) some unambiguously identifiable feature of an external reality. Rather what concepts do is to put a handle on, or give emphasis to, some aspect of the complex of interconnections and relations that constitute the social. In this sense ideology and discourse refer to pretty much the same aspect of social life – the idea that human individuals participate in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved; a conception of the social that has a hermeneutic dimension, but which is not reducible to hermeneutics. This consciousness is borne through language and other systems of signs, it is transmitted between people and institutions and, perhaps most important of all, *it makes a difference*; that is, the way in which people comprehend and make sense of the social world has consequences for the direction and character of their action and inaction. Both 'discourse' and 'ideology' refer to these aspects of social life.

The concepts 'discourse' and 'ideology' also differ in important respects. For example, they do not stand alone but are associated not only with other concepts but with different theoretical traditions. Thus, while 'ideology' was not invented by Marx, it has in contemporary usage become closely associated with the Marxist tradition and takes its place within what we suggest is the broad problematic of modern western Marxism, namely, the attempt to understand how relations of domination or subordination are reproduced with only minimal resort to direct coercion. 'Discourse' on the other hand takes its place and derives its significance from its central role in the linguistic turn in modern social theory by providing a term with which to grasp the way in which language and other forms of social semiotics not merely convey social experience, but play some major part in constituting social subjects (the subjectivities and their associated identities), their relations, and the field in which they exist.

The task of distinguishing ideology and discourse does not, unfortunately for our immediate concerns, involve fixed and stable

theories that can be brought into proximity and then compared and contrasted. Our task is made more difficult by the fact that, as we will show, the theoretical traditions of which they are part have, like ancient glaciers, been shifting remorselessly, towards each other. Sticking with our glacial analogy, some commentators have assumed that the two have merged, more or less peacefully, and thus their conceptual apparatus can now be used interchangeably; others have adopted a more catastrophic scenario and have assumed that the two traditions have to fight out a bitter and protracted struggle until one or the other is left crushed such that only small traces of their passage remain in the intellectual debris that they leave behind.

We do not offer an intellectual history of the two traditions. Our reasons for refusing, or perhaps more accurately avoiding, this approach are not only that the very project that used to be called the 'history of ideas' is itself riven by such strenuous conflicts as to be inherently controversial. Our reasons are, in fact, more prosaic and manifest the limits of our competencies and the scope of our present project. In place of anything more ambitious we will organize this paper by undertaking three, what may be called, symptomatic studies. We will first engage with the tradition of ideology theory by examining the trajectory of the debate over ideology within modern western Marxism. We will enter that now extensive debate stimulated by the suggestive distinction made by Jorge Larraín between a negative and a positive conception of ideology within the Marxist tradition.¹ Next we will explore the version of discourse theory elaborated by Michel Foucault. Our third investigation will concern the point of contact, whether convergent or catastrophic, of the two traditions that emerges in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe which opts for a rupture between discourse and ideology. That solution will be contrasted with the Gramscian position espoused by Stuart Hall – the approach closest to the solution we will propose – that retains the concept ideology whilst benefiting from the advances secured by discourse theory. Our justification for this selection, implied by the claim that our studies are symptomatic, is that these strands are not only widely influential in their own right but set up contrasting engagements between the figures of ideology and discourse. The interrogation of these three bodies of work will provide us with the opportunity to propose, if not a resolution, then a potentially productive exchange between the alternative traditions.

Before embarking on these explorations there are two preliminary matters. Readers may be assisted if we provide an indication of what we hope is a serviceable, if provisional, distinction between ideology and discourse. We will then briefly sketch, that is assert rather than argue for, a general framework of our theoretical position.

II. PRELIMINARIES

We propose the following as a provisional distinction between the concepts ideology and discourse. The concept 'ideology' typically figures in inquiries that are concerned to identify the way in which forms of consciousness condition the way in which people, to paraphrase Marx, become conscious of their conflicting interests and struggle over them.² Ideology thus implies the existence of some link between 'interests' and 'forms of consciousness'. Central to such a conception is the contention that interests are identifiable in a form that is distinguishable from the form in which these interests are experienced.

Discourse, on the other hand, focuses attention on the terms of engagement within social relations by insisting that all social relations are lived and comprehended by their participants in terms of specific linguistic or semiotic vehicles that organize their thinking, understanding and experiencing. The concept of 'discourse' remains self-consciously neutral or skeptical about whether discourse as a form of existence is connected with elements, such as are invoked by notions of interest, that are external to the discursive content of lived experience.

The distinction we have drawn, it should be noted, makes no attempt to say what either ideology or discourse 'is'. We have sought merely to offer a distinction rather than definitions. Instead of attempting to map all the differences that distinguish discourse and ideology we want to suggest a short form of a general distinction, which we stress is both tentative and provisional. If 'discourse' and 'ideology' both figure in accounts of the general field of social action mediated through communicative practices, then 'discourse' focuses upon the *internal* features of those practices, in particular their linguistic and semiotic dimensions. On the other hand, 'ideology' directs attention towards the *external* aspects of focusing on the way in which lived experience is connected to notions of interest and position that are in principle distinguishable from lived experience.

Our adherence to some version of an internal/external distinction requires an intellectual commitment to some version of philosophical realism, what we will call soft-realism. We want to find a philosophical framework that allows us to hang on to 'truth' (with a small 't') and interests as not being reducible to subjective preference whilst passing on 'Truth' (with a capital 'T'). We do not purport to offer a philosophically worked out position, but descriptively it aspires to the kind of 'third way' position that Richard Bernstein captures in his phrase 'between objectivism and relativism'.³ Our soft-realism is 'soft' in that it readily accepts the typical postmodernist claim that knowledge claims can never be verified and that there is no vantage point external to discourse from which truth-claims can be validated. Yet our position is 'realist' in that we insist that there is a non-discursive

realm that can be known even though that knowledge can never be more than fallible, always liable to be displaced by some 'better' account.

We see our project of retrieval as being part of a more general quest for a theory of 'the Third Way'. Such a view rejects the catastrophic scenarios, currently canvassed in the name of postmodernism, which insist that we must finally abandon any aspirations to retain a grip on a knowable and objective reality, and give up any intellectual or political projects that bear any mark of the Enlightenment. Rather the Third Way aspires to take seriously the challenge of postmodernism with its undermining of objectivist epistemology and representational accounts of language. It is in this light that we engage with discourse theory with the hope of supplementing, and even of further developing, the tradition of ideology theory.

III. IDEOLOGY: CRITICAL OR SOCIOLOGICAL?

In his study of Marx's theory of ideology Jorge Larrain makes a distinction between a positive and negative conception of ideology. The 'negative' one which refers to some kind of distorted thought, and the 'positive' conception focuses on the construction of social consciousness. His general thesis is that, whilst the positive version has come to have preponderant influence in the subsequent trajectory of the Marxist theory of ideology, the negative conception is the one which provides the most critical edge to Marx's thought.

[T]he critical and negative connotations of the concept of ideology are . . . always used for the critique of a specific kind of error which is connected in one way or another with the concealment or distortion of a contradictory and inverted reality. It is in this sense both a restricted and historical concept: restricted because it does not encompass all kinds of errors and because not all the ruling ideas are affected by it; historical because it depends on the evolution of contradictions.⁴

He argues that the negative conception does not necessarily involve a view of ideology as mere illusion nor is it reducible to a conception of ideology as 'false consciousness'. The critical thrust of Marx's view of ideology stems from its focus on what Marx called 'the language of real life'⁵ in which the ideas produced by subordinate classes express and reproduce the dominant material relations and the interests associated therewith. Larrain's interpretation of Marx's conception of ideology treats it as a misrepresentational theory.

Ideology is a particular form of consciousness which gives an inadequate or distorted picture of contradictions, either by ignoring them, or by misrepresenting them.⁶

This 'negative' conception of ideology is perhaps most clearly elaborated in *The German Ideology* in which Marx's usage of the term variously refers to that realm of consciousness in which 'men [sic] and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*', as 'reflexes and echoes of their life-process' or as 'phantoms'.⁷ The persistent thread that runs through all of these references is one of mystification, resulting in a 'negative' conception of ideology entailing the notion of misconception, misperception or misrecognition or an 'incomplete' knowledge of social reality.

We propose to do some additional work on Larrain's distinction. What we want to emphasize is a conception of ideology that goes beyond the general claim that all thought is socially constructed – which is true but insufficient. What the concept of ideology adds is the contention that ideology exhibits a *directionality* in the sense that ideology always works to favour some and to disadvantage others. Thus the critical project of a theory of ideology is concerned to explain how the forms of consciousness generated by the lived experience of subordinate classes and social groups facilitate the reproduction of existing social relations and thus impede such classes and groups from developing forms of consciousness that reveal the nature of their subordination. In its simplest and most pervasive form ideology presents the existing social relations as both natural and inevitable; particular interests come to be disassociated from their specific location and come to appear as universal and neutral.

In order to insert this idea of the directionality of ideology we need to amend Larrain's terminology – if only for the reason that the negative-positive distinction sounds too value laden. But more importantly we think the designations 'critical' and 'sociological' are more helpful in capturing the thrust of our argument. The critical conception of ideology delimits a realm in which social knowledge and experience are constructed in such a way as to 'mystify' the situation, circumstance or experience of subordinate classes or dominated groups. Its focus is thus upon the social effects or consequences, which leads us to suggest that the most incisive way in which the concept ideology can be employed is to identify 'ideological effects'. It should be stressed that this view does not involve any implications of negation or reversal that figure so strongly in Marx's optical metaphor of the *camera obscura*.

The sociological conception of ideology focuses on a plural conception of ideology as the outcome or result of the specific social position of classes, groups or agents. Ideology is the result of objective social position and, most significantly, as a sphere or arena of struggle, a conception that opens the theoretical door to notions of a multiplicity of competing 'ideologies', but does not imply a correspondence account in which every social class articulates its own specific 'ideology'. But the plurality of competing ideologies are thus linked to some

conception of social position and objective interests. In this sociological sense ideology is 'real', or material, rather than fictional or delusory, and is thus unavoidable in that it simply describes the framework of meanings and values within which people exist and conduct their social lives.

It is this 'positive', or as we prefer 'sociological', conception that has provided the major vehicle for the elaboration of the theory of ideology, which itself has been a central feature in modern western Marxism. It involves a closer attention to the actual terms in which social and economic struggles were fought over. We will argue that, despite the obvious merit of this second variant, it has had the unintended consequence of pushing aside or marginalizing the critical conception of ideology. One significant feature of the primacy of the sociological variant for contemporary Marxists has been a tendency to blur or to conflate the concepts ideology and discourse. Our contention is that it is both possible and desirable to retain this conception of ideology as the vehicle of 'lived experience', and to reinstate something of the earlier 'negative' or, as we prefer, critical tradition.

The most immediate problem with Marx's invocation of the mystifying properties of ideology is that it relies upon a set of epistemological assumptions constructed around a 'truth'/'falsity' distinction. In its most extreme form this gives rise to the dubious notion of 'false consciousness' that had such a prevalence in post-Marx Marxism. We are most emphatic in not wanting to revive that tradition. It would undoubtedly be easy to dispense, in the name of purging Marx of the rationalism of the truth/falsity distinction, with the negative or critical conception of ideology. Yet at the same time we want to argue that the 'mystification' thesis involves an important and critical potential that it is important to retain and develop.

The reason that we think it worth doing work to retain, in acceptable form, Marx's critical conception of ideology is that it makes possible a concept of 'ideology' that is not reducible to 'discourse'. An important consequence of this delineation is to insist that a serviceable conception of ideology is not about 'ideas' or 'thinking' even though it was in the context of a philosophical problematic organized around the mind/being distinction in which Marx developed his conception. Ideology is concerned with the realm of the lived, or the experienced, rather than of 'thinking'.⁸ An important example through which to make this point is provided by the notion of 'common sense'. It is precisely the 'spontaneous' quality of common sense, its transparency, its 'naturalness', its refusal to examine the premisses on which it is grounded, its resistance to correction, its quality of being instantly recognizable which makes common sense, at one and the same time, 'lived', 'spontaneous' and unconscious. We live in common sense – we do not think it.

IV. MARX AND LANGUAGE: THE MISSING DIMENSION

Twentieth-century social theory has witnessed an upsurge of attention to language and communicative interaction. Linguistics, semiotics, semantics and, more generally, discourse theory, have become key foci in social and philosophical thought and have been central themes in the work of some of the century's foremost intellectuals: Wittgenstein, Habermas, Chomsky and Foucault – to name but a few of the most influential. As Raymond Williams has pointed out 'Marxism has contributed very little to thinking about language itself.'⁹

Much of the inadequacy of Marx's approach to language stems from the philosophical context in which Marx worked; his conception of an all-embracing confrontation between idealism and materialism and his own commitment to the latter resulted in a preponderant emphasis upon the material integument of social life and a parallel suspicion of the mental or ideational dimensions. Thus the general emphasis on the role of productive labour in the constitution of social subjects resulted in what sometimes came over as a rather physicalist strand in his philosophical materialism. Interestingly, however, Marx's silence on the question of language was not complete; in *The German Ideology*, we find a critical, but all-too-brief, recognition of its importance. Language is conceived as an essential element of the social, as one of four primary aspects. As Williams' summarizes Marx

The distinctively human mode of this primary material production has been characterized in three aspects: needs, new needs, and human reproduction. . . . The distinctive humanity of the development is then expressed by the fourth 'aspect', that such production is *from the beginning also* a social relationship. It then involves from the beginning, as a necessary element, that practical consciousness that is language.¹⁰

Thus, in *The German Ideology* language appears not as secondary to production, but rather as necessarily contemporaneous with all that defines the specificity of the social.

What distinguishes discourse theory from Marx's theory of ideology is that the latter is rooted in an *action theory* that is organized around the dualism of action and consciousness. Discourse theory is one of the major consequences of the *linguistic turn*, that marks a break from action theory and focuses on the centrality of the 'linguistic constitution' of the social. Thus our two key concepts are rooted in radically different epistemological strategies; they are thus always in tension. The key question is whether this tension can be turned to productive use.

Thus, rather than being wholly absent from Marxism all this time, language was relegated to a peripheral role. Culture, particularly in the distinctive form of the novel, was central to the first wave of critical

theory and then in English Marxism through the work of Raymond Williams.¹¹ Subsequently 'communication' has been central to the long trajectory of Habermas' work on the fringes of the Marxist tradition.

It is not so much the absence of a developed theorization of language that is significant. Rather it is that outside the over-embracing concept of 'superstructure' Marxism has never found even an adequate label with which to set about developing a regional theory. Perhaps it is a significant testimony to the profound, and inherently limiting, impact of Marx's base/superstructure metaphor that this absence has only become apparent with the rise of the direct challenge embodied in post-structuralist social theory. The blind spot imposed by the concept of 'superstructure' stems in no small measure from its over-inclusiveness which reaches out to embrace not only language, communication and culture but the institutional nexus of the state and political institutions. The concept superstructure has functioned as a residual category into which almost all that is outside the sphere of production was, albeit unwittingly, relegated.

It is our contention that the theoretical crisis of Marxism is not so much that of its economism, its reductionism or its determinism. Rather, beneath its aspirations to provide a totalizing social theory, is the residual nature of the concept 'superstructure' that forces it to do service as the repository for such diverse forms of sociality and renders it incapable of generating adequate concepts and delineations to meet the challenges that we call upon it to provide. It is not just that the imagery of base-and-superstructure provides us with a constraining metaphorical embrace, but rather that its one-sidedness, the very development and richness of the one side, the economic basis, leaves all the rest constricted, conflated and hopelessly underdeveloped. It may well be that the most significant implication of the vices of economism, reductionism and determinism is not that they concentrate one-sidedly on economic relations and practices, but rather that they impede and even exclude an adequate theorization of so many other manifestations of human sociality.

The lineage of western Marxism has been concerned to overcome this one-sidedness in Marx's legacy. In order to explore this route we propose a brief re-examination of the crucial interventions of Louis Althusser.

V. ALTHUSSER AND THE OPENING TOWARDS DISCOURSE

No single figure looms as large as does Louis Althusser in the explosion of western Marxism. His interventions established new standards of theoretical rigour and sophistication. His writings are, on the one hand, innovative and yet, at the same time, exhibit a deep concern to sustain a commitment to an 'orthodoxy' with Marxism.

While he has more recently suffered a fall from favour with the general turn against structuralism, many of his insights remain of central importance; nowhere is this more true than with respect to the debate over ideology.

We will review Althusser's treatment of ideology in terms of Larrain's distinction between a negative and positive conception. Althusser offers a version of a negative conception by distinguishing between ideology and science. Here ideology is conceived as imperfect, theoretically unrefined, and hence flawed knowledge. Science is conceived as true knowledge, transformed through theoretical practice. Two consequences should be noted: first his concerns are located within an epistemological tradition of truth/falsity and second he retains Marx's problematic of 'ideas' which expresses itself in a pronounced tendency to concentrate upon 'theoretical ideologies' as bodies of, more or less, complete systems of thought.

In terms of his positive or sociological conception we find a quite different Althusser for whom ideology is 'lived experience'. Within this framework he advances a conception of subjects as constituted in and through ideology; ideology is conceived as a field within which opposing classes engage in and express their conflicts within alternative or competing ideological formations.

It is the articulation between Althusser's negative and positive conceptions that is particularly pertinent for our discussion. His most important contribution to the study of ideologies is his concept of 'interpellation', the mechanism through which ideology constitutes people as subjects (subjectivity + subjection). More specifically, what is of greatest interest for the present discussion, is the connection between Althusser's retention of the ideology/science couplet – unrefined (flawed) knowledge versus refined (complete) knowledge – and the notion of individuals being 'interpellated' in and through ideology and thereby constituted as subjects. We suggest the key feature of interpellation is not only the 'hailing' by the powerful 'other' ('Hey you' the policeman hails the pedestrian in Althusser's example), but equally important is the process of recognition by the interpellated subject; a recognition which attests to the dual mechanism of subjection and subjectivity.¹²

We suggest that Althusser may be read as coming close to the distinction that has come to be designated by the ideology-discourse couplet. He starts from an insistence on the materiality of ideology; but there is an important shift which, in its simplest form, is from the production of 'ideas' to the production of 'subjects' within the lived existence of individuals and their practices. But what is missing from Althusser is any developed theorization of linguistic practice as material practices not reducible to a mere 'reflection' of the lived existence of individuals. This is an absolutely crucial component, for if this lacuna is not filled, ultimately practice can only find its theoretical

grounding in the materiality of productive and reproductive activity, that is in a reductionism: precisely that deficiency that he set out to free Marxism from.

We do not wish to read more into Althusser than his work can accommodate. The metaphorical usage of the imagery of interpellation as 'hailing' – that is the metaphor of being hailed verbally and thereby constituted as social subjects through our recognition/misrecognition of the 'call' – is central to his conception. Interpellation does more than 'hail', it situates or places subjects within specific discursive contexts. The politician who, for example, invokes the current concerns of 'worried parents' about the role of 'satanic cults' in child abuse not only brings into play a set of normative presuppositions about parenthood, its responsibilities and its anxieties, but it also inserts an external causation that is both mysterious and demonic for the all too common practices of 'normal' parenthood that are the deeply disturbing reality of child abuse. Or again, the interpellation of the 'ordinary taxpayer' brings into play a set of discourses about the forms of political calculation which are presupposed to motivate taxpayers that celebrate selfishness in political judgement and that set up the possibility of opposition to 'welfare scroungers' and other undesirables. In other words interpellation needs to be understood as involving more than the mere mutual recognition of 'hailing'; beyond that are more complex processes whereby subjects and subject positions are both constituted and changed.

There is a direct link between Althusser's interpellation thesis and the concept of discourse that is too striking to be ignored. This aspect of Althusser's version of ideology can be appropriately understood as what we have called the sociological variant of ideology theory that is, as we will argue in more detail below, entirely compatible with discourse theory. What Althusser achieves is well captured by Stuart Hall.

Althusser's revisions [to the theory of ideology] . . . sponsored a decisive move away from the 'distorted ideas' and 'false consciousness' approach to ideology. It opened the gate to a more linguistic or 'discursive' conception of ideology. It put on the agenda the whole neglected issue of how ideology becomes internalized, how we come to speak 'spontaneously'.¹³

It is this 'discursive conception of ideology' that makes possible a re-reading of Althusser – one that permits something closer to the recognition of the role that discourse has to play in the constitution of the social and of social subjects.

We arrive at the following reading of Althusser: it is through discourse that individuals are interpellated as subjects; ideology represents those specific forms of discourse whose contents are

inadequate to articulate the interests of those social categories (classes, groups, etc.) who are constituted through those discourses.

The political provenance of this position needs to be spelt out. The discursive practices through which subjects are constituted and repositioned *may* have, but do not necessarily have, ideological effects. These discursive practices exist as potential arenas of contestation that may run the gamut from positive alternative to negative refusal – ‘bloody-mindedness’ that simply refuses the interpellation and rejects identification with it. There is always a possibility of opening up ‘new discursive spaces’ that aim to unite disparate and dispersed discursive elements into cohesive popular social movements. These may come to articulate alternative discourses whose attractive capacity undermines the previously dominant discourses and wins new adherents: in other words, to advance Gramsci’s project of counter-hegemony.

VI. WHAT IS DISCOURSE?

Our account of the vicissitudes of the Marxist theory of ideology has underlined the existence of significant limitations as well as undoubted potential. It has been the mission entrusted to the concept ‘discourse’ to overcome these deficiencies and to realise this potential. We start by drawing a provisional distinction between ideology and discourse. Discourse theory urges us to shake off the organization of the world into two great realms of the mental and the material. The concept facilitates the escape from the pervasive influence of the thought/being opposition in the grand trinity of oppositions that has formed the philosophical background for the project of the social sciences: nature/culture, individual/society and mind/body. One attractive way of effecting a breach with these pervasive dualities is to start with language as a defining character and condition of sociality. It provides an uncomplicated way to think of ‘the social’ as something distinct from the mere aggregate of individuals.

Discourse theory is best understood as an attempt to ground what we understand by ‘the social’ in a primary attribute of the social history of the species. Language, as a starting point, has another important advantage; it exhibits both persistence over time and widespread diversity and thus exemplifies both the generality and the specificity that characterizes the distinctively social aspect of the species. It is not our intention to trace the intellectual history of how various strands in linguistic theory came to form the different strands of contemporary discourse theory. Our project is to offer a preliminary and intentionally non-technical account of discourse theory. This we will then employ to examine the part played by discourse theory, explicitly conceived as an alternative to ideology theory, in the work of Michel Foucault.

What is discourse? 'Discourse' refers to the individual social networks of communication through the medium of language or non-verbal sign-systems. Its key characteristic is that of putting in place a *system* of linked signs. Whilst the more important examples are speech systems or written language (texts), discourse can be non-verbal; for example, practices in which males open doors for females, rise when females enter rooms, etc. are elements of a discourse whose organizing framework is a strict sexual division of labour, in which females are both secondary but valorised as in need of male care and protection.

Stuart Hall offers the following general definition of discourse: 'sets of ready-made and preconstituted "experiencings" displayed and arranged through language'.¹⁴ What the concept tries to capture is that people live and experience within discourse in the sense that discourses impose frameworks which limit what can be experienced or the meaning that experience can encompass, and thereby influence what can be said and done. Each discourse allows certain things to be said and impedes or prevents other things from being said. Discourses thus provide specific and distinguishable mediums through which communicative action takes place.

The key epistemological assumption involved is the contention that language, speech and writing can never be fully referential. The point can be made in a number of ways but perhaps the most useful is to invoke Saussure;¹⁵ the sign has two elements, the signified (the thought or mental image) and the signifier (a sound or visible image such as a spoken or written word or phrase). The connection between signified and signifier is never fixed in that the sign is always to a greater or lesser extent arbitrary. The openness of the connection between signified and signifier has the consequence that language is always more than denotative (as in pointing a finger at a physical entity and saying 'cat'). As a consequence 'meaning' is never fully referential and is always contestable. This openness is particularly apparent when we recognize the linguistic devices or tropes that play such an important part in the process of signification. For example, the social sciences are replete with metaphors such as the one which is so widespread that its metaphorical nature is not recognized: the organic metaphor in which 'society' is thought and theorised as if it were a body. Technical discourses often try to limit such openness by employing articulated rules to stabilize the connection between sign and meaning. It is for this reason that scientific discourses in their development exhibit more or less sharp paradigm shifts of the kind identified by Kuhn, in which particular concepts are abandoned and new ones introduced, whereas normal speech change occurs more gradually by barely perceptible shifts in the usage of the same sign.

Discourse provides a vehicle for thought, communication and action; a discourse has its own internal organization, but only in

specialized or technical discourses does it exhibit any strong coherence. A discourse is a system or structure with variably open boundaries between itself and other discourses. This suggests the idea that discourses 'channel' rather than 'control' the discursive possibilities, facilitating some things being said and others being impeded. Although there are rival versions of the concept 'discursive formation' (we will consider Foucault's usage below) we suggest that such a concept is necessary for more or less stable aggregated discourses. For example, sociology can be pictured as a system of competing discourses of the social which conduct themselves according to identifiable but variable procedural rules. On the other hand there are popular discourses about the social. In these popular discourses there are different ways in which social divisions, sexuality, social values, etc. are pictured. In one of the most richly textured accounts of popular discourses, Pierre Bourdieu reveals the contrasting class dimensions of the discourses of everything from moral values to table manners, from political affiliation to sporting interests in French society.¹⁶

One aspect of discourses that has received insufficient attention is the relation between the conditions of their production and the manner of their deployment. Foucault, for example, has done more than anyone to stress the significance of the production of professional discourses. What he does not provide is an account of what we have called 'popular discourses'. Thus when it comes to his central concern with the discourses of sexuality we suggest that it is useful to identify competing popular discourses that, whilst strongly influenced by a changing balance of forces between the professional discourses, are never reducible to the professional discourses. This provides an important opening for a theory of ideology to go beyond charting the shifting discursive deployments and to move towards a causal account of the shifting balance of forces in order to explain the ideological *effects* of these ever-present and often subterranean discursive struggles.

Two related questions have troubled many who have grappled with discourse theory. Is the concept of discourse so broad that all communicative practices are necessarily discursive? In its alternative version the question is: Is there anything external to discourse? While Derrida did not hesitate to pronounce that 'there is nothing outside of the text',¹⁷ the majority of proponents of discourse theory have refused to embrace the view that there is nothing outside of discourse. This is true of Hindess and Hirst who inaugurated the English-language encounter between Marxism and discourse theory and, with sweeping finality, displaced ideology with discourse, but who nevertheless explicitly resisted the view that there is nothing outside discourse.¹⁸ In very similar terms Foucault insists on maintaining a distinction between discursive and non-discursive realms.¹⁹ On the other hand, Laclau and Mouffe, as we will see below, reject the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive.²⁰

It is not our intention to propose any resolution of this highly abstract, but nonetheless important issue; rather we think it pertinent to comment on the conditions that generate these questions – this does not make them go away but it helps to show why they come to assume such significance. All efforts to specify a unique point of entry to ‘the social’, whether it be through discourse or through ideology, must run the risk of a run-away expansion (‘there is nothing outside of discourse’, ‘power is everywhere’, etc.) by virtue of the attempt to embrace ‘the social’ within a unifying conceptualization. It is precisely the common recognition of the unbounded character of ‘the social’ that impels the logic of the totalizing drift towards an over-inclusiveness that, paradoxically, deprives the favoured conceptualization of specificity. We suggest that the more prudent strategy is to refuse both the totalizing and the abolitionist strategy; rather we should attend to the implications of the boundaries proposed or refused by each version of the diverse attempts to theorize discourse. This caution will provide our own approach to an interrogation of Foucault’s deployment of discourse theory.

VII. MICHEL FOUCAULT: DISCOURSE VERSUS IDEOLOGY

The engagement between Foucault and Marxism is not easy to follow. Foucault, whilst making occasional deferential bows towards Marx, speaks in highly generalized terms of a rather vulgar Marxism. Significantly he did not engage with the contemporary trends in the widely influential explosion of high theory that characterized French Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s.

Our interpretation seeks to reduce the distance between Marxism and Foucault. An important strand of the reading of discourse as being opposed to ideology rests on the counterposing of Althusser and Foucault. It was Foucault himself who insisted

I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyse the phenomena of power. . . . My objective, instead has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.²¹

But there is a pertinent difference between Althusser and Foucault: Althusser’s project is firmly located within the problematic of the reproduction of domination. For Foucault there is a perennial hesitation. On the one hand he espouses a clear commitment to unravelling domination, but on the other he is concerned to avoid any homogenization of domination. While Foucault seeks to avoid these problems by insisting on a clear separation between discourse and

ideology, Althusser makes an as yet unnamed 'theory of discourse' a component of his theory of ideology.²²

Foucault engaged explicitly neither with Althusser, his old teacher, nor with Poulantzas for whom the problem of power was also central. Foucault's strategy of engagement with Marxism was to avoid operating on its terrain by eschewing the project of general theory itself. If western Marxism has been an engagement with the impasse of classical Marxism, then Foucault's work can be conceived as a response to the difficulties encountered by western Marxism.

The specific field of Foucault's encounter with western Marxism that concerns us is his self-conscious attempt to avoid not just the concept of ideology, but the field designated by that concept. For Foucault the emergence of the modern disciplinary society

is both much more and much less than ideology. It is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge – methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control.²³

These processes he views as significantly 'material', in a sense not captured by the concept ideology which is locked into the problematic of ideas or consciousness. Ideology 'always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth'.²⁴

The problem is not changing people's consciousness . . . but the political, economic, institutional régime of the production of truth. . . . The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself.²⁵

Discourses are *not* representations of a more or less distorted reality. Rather discourses should be understood as 'economies' (with their own intrinsic technology, tactics, effects of power, which in turn they transmit). In other words power is inscribed *within* discourses, not outside them. In addition he views the concept of ideology as locked within a theoretical humanism of the Subject.

As regards Marxism, I'm not one of those who try to elicit the effects of power at the level of ideology. Indeed I wonder whether, before one poses the question of ideology, it wouldn't be more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it. Because what troubles me with these analyses which prioritise ideology is that there is always presupposed a human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy, endowed with a consciousness which power is then thought to seize upon.²⁶

Thus discourse is not simply that which masks, rather it

is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.²⁷

Foucault, sets up discourse in opposition to ideology. But if we reintroduce our distinction between critical and sociological conceptions of ideology the issue is not so simple. Foucault's rejection of theoretical humanism and his rejection of the truth/falsity dichotomy places him in unambiguous opposition to any notion of critical ideology. On the other hand, his view of discourse as the medium of struggle mirrors the central thrust of that feature of Marx's concept of ideology as the terrain in which people become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. In this respect Foucault's conception of discourse is very similar to the 'sociological' version of ideology that we have argued has been the main thrust of the treatment of ideology in western Marxism.

Thus despite the opposition that Foucault sets up with his distinction between discourse and ideology the gulf is not as wide as he suggests. There are, we suggest, important respects in which the account of ideology in western Marxism may be preferred to Foucault's treatment of discourse. His account of discourse remained markedly structuralist. Discourses are characteristically 'professional' which emanate from institutionalized sites of production. The consequence is that these discourses are 'imposed' in that they generate subject positions into which people are 'inserted' through discourse. The paradoxical effect is that whilst one of his most prominent themes is the thesis that where there is power, there is resistance, the nature of this resistance is itself conceived as the production of alternative discourses.

Another feature of his structuralist account of discourse is that it gives rise to rather flat and totalizing historical accounts in which dominant discourses impose their own rationalities upon the discursive possibilities of participants. There is a marked absence of attention to tensions, let alone contradictions, *within* discourses that provide the raw material for the discourses of resistance. The feature of his work most relevant for our concerns is his attempt to understand the link between discourse and social institutions. Each set of social practices are located within and are structured by what he terms a 'discursive formation'. The originality of Foucault's conception is that it involves more than the aggregation of discourses into some relatively persistent field. Foucault provides two advances over the use we have so far made of the concept discursive formation. First, he insists that the system of discursive statements which constitute a formation are not merely a unity but also enshrine a 'dispersal'.²⁸ Second, the concept 'discursive formation' focuses attention on its conditions of existence. In simple terms he directs attention towards the conditions that make that formation possible. He shifts attention away from the internal dynamics of the constituent elements of signs, signifiers and signified. His account of discursive formation breaks with the internal preoccupations of structural linguistics in order to

focus upon the external or social conditions within which discourses are formed and transformed. It does not overstate his positions to insist that Foucault's theory of discourse is a non-linguistic theory. In an important sense what Foucault proposed was a rigorously social, or even materialist, examination of the formation of discourses. We emphasize the importance of his project and, most significantly, its congruence or compatibility with the theory of ideology.

Foucault, in an important sense, went further than Marx had done to lay the basis for a rigorously relational account of ideology. What he offers is the possibility of an account of the emergence of ideology from a complex of social and institutional practices. And in so doing he makes it possible to avoid the tendency, that has dogged Marxism, to succumb to teleological explanations of 'causes' or 'origins' such as appeals to the needs of the capitalist class or to the ruse of capital.

What Foucault offers is a framework for undertaking concrete historical studies of the conditions and circumstances that made possible the emergence of some new set of institutional practices, the prison, the asylum, etc. It is in this context that we can now see why Foucault, despite verbal flourishes suggesting that 'everything is discourses' could not sustain such a position; and at the same time he resisted the slide into relativism. It is the attempt to secure an account of the contribution of discursive formations to the emergence of institutional practices, specifying their institutional and relational preconditions, that holds in check the relativism that he comes so close to embracing.

Thus we can make sense of the distinction that Foucault makes between discursive and non-discursive practices; the latter being conceived as 'primary relations' existing

independently of all discourse or all objects of discourse, [that] may be described between institutions, techniques and social forms, etc.²⁹

It is not that he thinks that there is somewhere a realm *outside* discourse, because all practices and institutions function through the medium of discourse. Rather social practices and institutions are not reducible to discourses; they have their conditions of possibility that are not provided for by discourse alone.

We are now in a position to explain why it is that Foucault's discourse theory fails to provide a satisfactory account of the results or consequences of discourses for social practice in general and oppositional struggles in particular – what we have termed 'ideological effects'.³⁰ His epistemological commitment to local knowledge, his concern to exclude any suggestion of linear social 'progress' and his deep suspicion of grand theory are reasons for this omission. His account of the transition from one mode of domination to another tends to advance a rather bleak account in which resistance only seems

to give rise to new and ever more pervasive forms of domination. However, we suggest that the omission of an explicit concern with 'effects' or causal consequences has a more circumstantial explanation and, as such, is more easily remedied. There is a certain trade-off between two different, but not contradictory, motives. Foucault focused his attention on the conditions of possibility (or the conditions of existence) of specific historical outcomes. What were the conditions that gave rise to the 'invention' of the asylum or the prison? He tended not to ask the 'result' or 'effect' questions: what were the consequences of asylums, prisons, etc.? But our point is that there is nothing in his analysis of discourse that impedes either of these enquiries or inhibits the exploration of questions of both cause and effect.

The significance of the interpretation of Foucault's theory of discourse which we propose is that while he was undoubtedly motivated by a concern to secure a clear break from the whole tradition of ideology theory, nevertheless, the advances that he secured are not incompatible with that tradition. Indeed, we have gone one step further, in suggesting that he actually provides some significant openings by providing a framework for a fully sociological account of ideology through the interplay and interconnection of discourse and institutional practices.

VIII. POST-MARXISM AND DISCOURSE

One of the distinctive features of contemporary post-Marxism is the displacement of the concept of ideology by that of discourse. It is not so much that the concept ideology is abolished or abandoned, but rather that its use would be to invoke those features of Marxism, in particular its reductionism and its economism, with which the exponents of post-Marxism seek to break. We will suggest that once this break or rupture is effected, then the concept of ideology can be reinstated without apology; it can be reintroduced without any need for too many parenthetical remarks about what ideology does *not* mean. We focus our attention on Laclau and Mouffe because they offer the most developed account of post-Marxist discourse theory.

It is important to recall that in the course of the long march from Marxism to post-Marxism, Ernesto Laclau made a significant contribution to the sociological conception of ideology³¹ and that Chantal Mouffe had explored the potential of Gramsci's conception of hegemony.³² They did much to further the break, initiated by Gramsci, with the notion of ideologies as pre-formed systems of 'ideas' that political protagonists wielded as weapons in the class struggle. Laclau insisted that mental elements, concepts, etc., do not have any necessary class or political implications (e.g. that 'nationalism' is not tied to any particular class position).

The key link between this earlier work and their current position is provided by the concept of 'articulation'. In its simplest form it focuses on the way in which discourses and ideologies emerge by bringing into proximity and combination elements that do not have any pre-given class or political significance. It is the way in which different elements are combined that gives each specific discourse its ideological significance or effects.³³

One of the more interesting theoretical contributions made by Laclau and Mouffe is to have located the theory of articulation within a more fully developed account of discourse. They refuse Foucault's distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive; rather they view all objects of inquiry or knowledge as discursive. But they insist that the discursivity of all objects of knowledge has no necessary connection with the perennial philosophical debate about whether there is an external reality that exists independent of consciousness. Of course earthquakes occur, and their occurrence is independent of consciousness; but it is their construction in discourse that determines whether they are 'movements of tectonic plates' or manifestations of 'the wrath of the gods'. To extend their point, we should refuse the slogan 'everything is discursive'; it obscures the much more interesting claim that all knowledge is located within discourse.

Discourse is constitutive of social relations in that all knowledge, all talk, all argument takes place within a discursive context through which experience comes to have, not only meaning for its participants, but shared and communicable meaning within social relations. Laclau and Mouffe significantly clarify Foucault's distinction between discourse and discursive formation. A discursive formation is never entirely 'closed' in the sense of providing a unitary or bounded system that permits only some statements and excludes others. As Foucault says of medical discourse

if one wished to define this discourse by a codified and normative system of statement, one would have to recognize that this medicine disintegrated as soon as it appeared.³⁴

Rather, every discursive formation is in some degree open, and is characterised not by unity (although one should not ignore the projects of unification, the pursuit of coherence that plays such a crucial part in the history of all disciplines), but by dispersion, choice, division and opposition.

What is the significance of this counter-intuitive disruption of the unity of discursive formations? It is part of an epistemological strategy that refuses to continue the search for fixed grounds of knowledge or guarantees of meaning and it is also part of the retreat from totalizing notions of Ideology as *Weltanschauung*. But beyond this general point there are two further implications. The first refers us back to 'articulation'. It reminds us of the always provisional way in which the

elements of discourse are articulated such that meaning is never fully secured. The most immediate consequence being that different discourses can occur within the same discursive formation. This in turn leads to the second, and more political, point that discourses are always subject to the play of alternatives and of struggle.

Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of difference, to construct a centre.³⁵

This open and contested conception of discourse plays a significant part in Laclau and Mouffe's project of securing the final expulsion of economism from the history of Marxism. The significance of their insistence upon the discursive nature of social relations can be seen in their working out of the thesis that discourses constitute 'subjects'. No subject position can be fully fixed by reference to some given set of differences. They apply this idea with good effect in a critique of essentialist feminism which holds that there is some pre-given mechanism of women's oppression or that there is some feminine essence. The latter position detracts from, or even incapacitates, attention to the diverse practices that constitute the historically specific forms of the sex/gender system.

However, the emphasis on the articulation of dispersed elements into specific discursive configurations, whilst providing a useful corrective against essentialism, is not without its own limitations. The question to be addressed is: Are there any limits upon the combination of the elements that can come together within any specific discourse? To answer this question it is necessary to return to Foucault's discussion of discursive formations. He holds out the promise of providing 'rules of formation' that specify the conditions of existence of each formation. In so doing he introduces a set of concepts that are never fully developed; he refers to 'surfaces of emergence', 'authorities of delimitation' and 'grids of specification'.³⁶ What is involved is an attempt to specify the way in which non-discursive elements, such as the institutional framework within which a discourse emerges, set limits to its subsequent development. Laclau and Mouffe reintroduce Althusser's concept of 'overdetermination'. With regard to the question of how sexual differences should be theorized they argue that 'overdetermination among the diverse sexual differences produces a systematic effect of sexual division'.³⁷ But in this context 'over-determination' seems to function as an alternate to 'articulation' without getting any closer to advancing a solution to the really difficult question of whether there are any limiting conditions upon the possible combinations of the dispersed elements whose articulation specifies any particular discourse.

The problem that is posed, but not satisfactorily resolved, by Laclau and Mouffe, is to find a way of going beyond the identification of the problem of 'articulation' and 'overdetermination'. What is needed are

the appropriate terms within which to be able to specify the constraints that effect the emergence of discursive formations. To address this issue we now need to retrace our steps in order to consider whether Gramsci may not already have opened up the broad outlines of a solution. This is to be found not in a reworking of Gramsci's concept of hegemony where Laclau and Mouffe seek it, but rather through his notion of common sense.

IX. GRAMSCI AND HALL ON COMMON SENSE

In Gramsci's discussion of 'common sense' and culture, the strategic role of language in the construction of a hegemonic project emerges.

[P]hilosophy is a conception of the world and . . . philosophical activity is not to be conceived solely as the 'individual' elaboration of systematically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular 'mentality' and to diffuse the philosophical innovations that will demonstrate themselves to be 'historically true' to the extent that they become concretely – i.e. historically and socially – universal. Given all this, the question of language in general and of languages in the technical sense must be put in the forefront of our investigation.³⁸

One must be careful not to overstate the case here. Language is not a major focal point in Gramsci's analyses. But one can claim that he was acutely aware of its import, even though he never devoted substantive attention to the connection between language, ideology and hegemony. Part of the reason for this under-theorization may stem from the conceptual overlap that exists between these concepts. As Stuart Hall notes

Gramsci uses the term 'ideology' . . . in what may now seem a classical sense, as systems of ideas, but in a broad context: 'on condition that the word is used in its highest sense as a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life.' He sees it also in terms of historical functions: its role in 'preserving the ideological unity of an entire social block'; of providing individuals and groups with their various 'conceptions of the world', that influence and modify their actions; and, above all, as a means to 'organize human masses and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.'³⁹

There are two possible readings of these formulations. The first, is a broad reading that focuses on the role of discourse in constituting what Lovejoy referred to as unconscious mental habits.⁴⁰ Beliefs, attitudes and presuppositions are tacitly presupposed within a linguistic practice rather than formally argued for. Thus discourse, although

it is not a concept that Gramsci himself used, provides ways of thinking, that seem so natural that they are not scrutinized. But the second reading, which is what is novel in Gramsci's treatment, is that there emerges a more substantial or embodied notion of discourse. This is revealed once we recognize just how close Gramsci's concept of common sense, and by implication 'discourse', is to Anthony Giddens' conception of 'structure' defined as

the rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. Structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability and as an instantiation in action.⁴¹

Common sense (or popular discourse) is both the medium of social action and constitutive of the social relations that they reproduce.

While common sense has these, almost structural, qualities Gramsci succeeds in encompassing an active sense of 'common sense', exemplified in his positive connection with 'good sense', which is his way of insisting that common sense is not always reactionary or traditional. What we encounter here is the difficulty that Foucault tried to deal with through his injunction that power induces resistance, but never quite convinces us how resistance is possible given the ever more pervasive grip of disciplinary society. The problem is: if we view common sense as providing the taken-for-granted medium of lived experience, how is any alternative possible? How can we escape from the bleak scenario in which dominant discourses so construct us that resistance seems impossible? Where can resistance, 'good sense' or opposition come from? Gramsci's answer is incomplete in that his most direct answer presupposed the existence of an already-existing alternative agent, the 'modern Prince', the revolutionary party capable, through its organic connections with the oppressed, of discovering, articulating and leading resistance. Whilst we are anxious to retain a commitment to the possibility of strategic political intervention, we are more equivocal than was Gramsci about the idea of revolutionary agency. And yet it remains true that resistance is possible and does emerge from the most unprepossessing circumstances.

It is Gramsci's emphasis on the importance for political practice of the generation of transformative 'common sense' that has been a central theme in Stuart Hall's work. Transformative capacity is no longer conceived, as for example in Leninism, as the attainment of some higher or more elevated level of consciousness. Both the rise and now the fall of Thatcherism in Britain have served as major vehicles for his studies over the last decade. What he addressed is how a regime whose aims are so clearly antithetical to the interests of both labour and the new social movements, has been able to construct and maintain its political dominance, and then to lose it so rapidly. Drawing heavily on Gramsci and recent advances in discourse theory,

Hall has provided some of the most provocative insights into the relationship between discourse and ideology.

However, Hall's work leads to the same kind of conceptual overlap between ideology and discourse that sparked our original concern with the connection between ideology and discourse. For instance, Hall defines ideology as

the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.⁴²

At another point he points out that 'the whole discourse of Thatcherism combines ideological elements into a discursive chain in such a way that the logic or unity of the discourse depends on the subject addressed assuming a number of specific subject positions'.⁴³ This is an invaluable step in theorizing how discourses combine disparate social elements to secure the dominance of a historical bloc. Yet Hall's formulation fails to make clear what it is about the process of combination of discursive elements that renders the resultant distinctively ideological.

Similarly, in the course of a partial critique of Althusser's notion of the constitution of social subjects through the process of interpellation, Hall argues that

[A]nyone who is genuinely interested in the production and mechanisms of *ideology* must be concerned with the question of the production of subjects and the unconscious categories that enable definite forms of subjectivity to arise. It is clear that the *discourses* of the New Right have been engaged precisely in this work of the production of new subject positions and the transformation of subjectivities.⁴⁴

Here he speaks of both the production and mechanisms of ideology, but then seems to imply that discourse *is that mechanism*. Hall's problem with establishing a distinction between the two terms would seem to stem from a dualistic view of ideology as both process and effect. We suggest that a more attractive suggestion, towards which our argument has been pointing, is a reformulation that establishes a distinction between discourse as *process* and ideology as *effect*.

X. RECOVERING IDEOLOGY

Our exploration of the major episodes in the encounters between ideology and discourse permits the recovery of a constructive role for a theory of ideology. The theory of ideology that we suggest supplements discourse theory rather than being opposed to or

opposed by discourse theory. It is a version of ideology theory that is in many respects different from that bequeathed by Marx. Displaced is the ideas/being distinction with its major epistemological consequence, the decentring of the humanist subject manifest in the problematic of consciousness, and expelled is the opposition between true and false consciousness. But retained and moved into central prominence is a key feature of the critical thrust of Marx's account, namely, its focus on the way in which the interpellation of subject positions operates systematically to reinforce and reproduce dominant social relations – it is this that we have described as the directionality of ideology theory. We suggest that this directionality is captured by employing ideological analysis to focus upon the effects of discursive practices, hence our concentration on 'ideology effects'.

The concepts of 'discourse' and 'discursive formation', distinguished in the way we have extracted from Foucault, identify processes which are always semiotic, that is they involve the production of meanings and truth-claims. However these processes are *always more* than semiotic because they inscribe signs within social practices as a condition of existence of the meanings and subjectivities produced. The implication of this rather abstract presentation can be exemplified by returning to the example used above (p. 485) of the commonplace, but contested, practice in which males routinely open doors for females. To avoid a simple equation between discourse and language the semiotics of door opening are not, of course, dependent on spoken words, but in the exaggeration of opening, stepping aside and ushering through; these social practices make up the *discourse* of door-opening. This behaviour only takes its social meaning as part of a *discursive formation* consisting of a group of dispersed ritualised gender roles and their associated discourses. However this discursive formation only acquires its full *ideological effect* through its ironic reversal of the systematic relations of subordination that characterize patriarchal social relations. This effect is 'ideological' in that it pertains to relations of domination/subordination, facilitates their reproduction and, finally, reunites the critical and sociological dimensions of ideology by the mystification in which the apparent deferential treatment of women masks the structural inequalities that underlie and are the condition of such practices. Thus what makes some discourses ideological is their connection with systems of domination. Ideological discourses contain forms of signification that are incorporated into lived experience where the basic mechanism of incorporation is one whereby sectional or specific interests are represented as universal interests.

Our contention is that the distinction we have drawn between discourse and ideology provides a general framework for the analysis of discursive fields and their potential, but not necessary, ideological effects. Thus we conclude that whilst there is an important distinction

between the concepts discourse and ideology there is no necessary opposition between them, but rather there can exist a connection of supplementation and expansion.

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NOTES

1. J. Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, London, Macmillan, 1983.
2. Note that we completely exclude any concern with Ideology, ideology with the capital 'I', conceived as systems of ideas or world views.
3. R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983.
4. J. Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, London, Macmillan, 1983, p. 42.
5. K. Marx and F. Engels 'The German Ideology', *Karl Marx-Frederick Engels Collected Works*, (Vol. 5) New York, International Publishers, 1976, p. 36.
6. Larrain, *ibid.*, p. 27.
7. K. Marx and F. Engels, *ibid.*, p. 36.
8. This emphasis on 'lived experience' was one of the major advances secured by Althusser, even though he somewhat detracted from this recognition by his use of the term 'imaginary' to distinguish the realm of ideology from that of 'real relations'; 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London, New Left Books, 1971.
9. R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 21.
10. R. Williams, *ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
11. R. Williams, *ibid.*, and *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London, Verso, 1980.
12. L. Althusser, *ibid.*, p. 174.
13. S. Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology', in B. Matthews (ed.), *Marx 100 Years On*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1983, p. 64.
14. S. Hall, 'Culture, the Media and the "Ideological Effect"' in J. Curran *et al.* (eds), *Mass Communications and Society*, Edward Arnold, London, 1977, p. 322.
15. F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, London, Fontana, 1974.
16. P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, London, Routledge, 1984.
17. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 158.
18. B. Hindess and P. Hirst, *Mode of Production and Social Formation*, London, Macmillan, 1977.
19. M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1972.
20. E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London, Verso, 1985, pp. 105–114.
21. M. Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in Dreyfus and Rabinow *Michel Foucault*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 208.
22. By the mid-70s Pêcheux was making this link between ideology and discourse explicit; M. Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, St. Martins Press, New York, 1982.
23. M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980, p. 102.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
27. M. Foucault, 'The Order of

Discourse', in R. Young (ed.), *Untying the Text*, London, Routledge, 1981, pp. 52–3.

28. M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York, Pantheon books, 1972, p. 38.

29. M. Foucault, *ibid.*, p. 45.

30. See *above* p. 478.

31. E. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* London, Verso, 1977.

32. C. Mouffe, 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci' in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, London, Routledge, 1979.

33. Gramsci described this process of re-articulation in the following terms

[C]riticism makes possible a process of differentiation and change in the relative weight that the elements of the old ideologies used to possess. What was previously secondary and subordinate, or even incidental, is now taken to be primary – becomes the nucleus of a new ideological and theoretical complex.

A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Turin, Gerrantana, 1975, Vol. 2, p. 1058.

34. M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of*

Knowledge, New York, Pantheon Books, 1972, p. 34.

35. M. Laclau, and C. Mouffe, *ibid.*, p. 112.

36. M. Foucault, *ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

37. M. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *ibid.*, p. 117.

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39. S. Hall, 'The Toad in the Garden: Thatcher Among the Theorists' in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 55.

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41. A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p. 16.

42. S. Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology', *op. cit.*, p. 59.

43. S. Hall, 'The Toad in the Garden', *op. cit.*, p. 49.

44. S. Hall, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, p. 46 (emphasis added).