HEGEMONIC LANGUAGE

Towards a Historical-Materialist Theory of Language

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Preface

The following text is the result of my 3-year long stay in Frankfurt am Main in Germany, from 2011 to 2014, where I was a postgraduate student at the Institut für Philosophie at Goethe-Universität, under the supervision of prof. Axel Honneth (primary supervisor) and prof. Peter Thomas (second supervisor), as part of a scholarship granted to me jointly by the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst and the Open Society Foundations. This PhD thesis will be primarily a personal reminder of how many things can be done in a short time span and how much more I could have done, had I perhaps been more prudent in certain matters.

I thank my supervisors, professors Axel Honneth in Frankfurt and Peter Thomas in London, for giving me valuable feedback during my studies, and for agreeing to supervise me at all in the first place. I received open-minded and extremely knowledgeable scholarly advice, without which this text would be of a much poorer quality. Of course, all of the potential faults one finds in this work are to be ascribed to myself only. I thank both DAAD and OSI for giving me the opportunity to live and study in Germany, and, more importantly, to do what I find interesting and stimulating. There is no greater joy in life than being able to love the thing you do for "work". I am very grateful to Anna Wolfart at DAAD for helping in all formal matters during my scholarship and for always being very pleasant in our correspondences.

Finally, I thank my family for being supportive, but also, and especially, my partner Paula, for the love and understanding without which it would have been much more difficult to endure the years that have passed, and without which the years that are to come would be much more grim.

Introduction

The practical aim of this work is twofold. Firstly, it is to construct a theory of language based on historical-materialist premises, i.e. a theory which stresses the sociality and historicity of language, and finds in them the fundamental characteristics which make language one of the central phenomena of human life. Such a theory is inherently counterposed to the dominant theories and philosophies of language in the last century, be they Saussurean, idealistic, structuralist, psychologistic or Chomskyan etc. It also rejects vulgar materialistic accounts of language, where language is seen merely as a "reflection" of the economic base of society, as well as the version proposed in Stalin's short pamphlet, *Marxism and Linguistics*,[1] which sees language merely as a means of communication, regardless of society or class, therefore neutralised and consequently branded irrelevant for Marxist theory. In short, the first aim would be showing what language *is not* and what it *cannot* be by showing what it is.

The second aim is related to Marxist theory in general. Following the presuppositions of this work, a Marxist account of language proves to be an immensely important field of research for Marxism. The reasons are fairly simple, if one is willing to accept them: language is a certain type of social practice, it is related to the way people *act*, which also means that it is interconnected with consciousness, i.e. to the way people think and to the content of their thought. Language is *ideological* and *political*; it is an element of class rule and class struggle. Thus, understanding language should be of utmost importance for any socialist revolutionary project, as ideological struggle is central not only to a revolutionary period, but, perhaps even more, to a period where revolution is not even in sight. I do not wish to derogate other Marxist fields of research, but, on the contrary, to simply insist on their equal importance. Ideological phenomena should not be a secondary or inferior object of research to strictly economic phenomena, or vice-versa. In reality, those phenomena form a dialectic unity; only if theory follows suit, can a pregnant Marxist philosophy be formed.

The theoretical framework of this work is definitely Gramscian, but I would not situate the work in the field of Gramscian studies, in the sense that it would be a work *on* Gramsci and a particular topic which he dealt with. Rather, it comes down to the fact that Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* offer one of the most intriguing Marxist accounts of language. Gramsci's genius as a thinker of society is beyond doubt, but the importance of language in his thought

[1] Stalin 1973.

has long been neglected.[2] However, one should bear in mind that, as Alessandro Carlucci emphasizes, "it would be reductive and essentially wrong to turn to [Gramsci's] writings in search of a pure, systematic theory of language".[3] But, as I do not intend to formulate a Marxist linguistics (since that would be the wrong approach because it probably could not avoid some of the same mistakes traditional linguistics makes), but rather, to assess language in order to theoretically place it in the broader field of Marxist social theory, following in Gramsci's steps seems quite justified. It is not only a matter of approach or methodology; it is also, and perhaps primarily, a matter of the validity and innovativity of Gramsci's thought on language, probably best summarized in the claim that "language is a worldview". Of course, numerous other authors, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, offer a lot of insights on language which have proved useful for this work, from Valentin Voloshinov and Mikhail Bakhtin, to Pierre Bourdieu, Raymond Williams and Jean-Jacques Lecercle, to only name a few. The fundamental criteria by which I assessed any author's theses were the same: if he or she considers language to be a social, historical, material and thus ideological and political phenomenon. Of course, I do not claim to have covered every author which had something to say on the topic, but this work is not a summary of theories on and philosophies of language anyway, but an attempt at a coherent historical-materialist account of language.

The theoretical aim of this work is to show that language is a social, historical process. Furthermore, language is always ideological, and, vice-versa, ideology is linguistic. Thus, certain power relations are always enmeshed in every utterance and one can always trace class aspects of utterances, even of words. With such an approach, I wish to analyse how language can serve class hegemony, be it bourgeois or proletarian. When it comes to the former, my interest lays in the role language has in the strengthening of the capitalist mode of production. Language is surely one of the central bourgeois tools by means of which they perpetuate their domination over the working class and efface the economic "base" and its contradictions. Of course, it is just one of many mechanisms by which such a goal is achieved. My intention is

[2] This has firstly been remedied in Italy by Franco Lo Piparo, who wrote a book which stressed this, although ending in another extreme (claiming that Gramsci was not a Marxist at all, but primarily a linguist, see Lo Piparo 1979). This started a broader interest in the topic, first in Italy, then in the English-speaking world from the 1990s till today. On language in Gramsci see particularly Peter Ives' work: *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (2004a), *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (2004b) and *Gramsci, Language and Translation* (2010), as well as Alessandro Carlucci's magnificent book *Gramsci and Languages* (2013).

[3] Carlucci 2013, p. 1.

not to put language to the analytical forefront of bourgeois class domination, nor – what would be even worse – to claim that it and it alone forms what we call "hegemony": such arguments, trying to escape from economic reductionism, end up in the opposite extreme at an ideological or linguistic reductionism. But no aspect of what we call ideology – language included – can be conceived and adequately conceptualized outside of the dialectical unity of economic "base" and its various "superstructures".

One of the particular problems I wish to confront is how language functions as a medium of "translating" the material conditions of capitalist social life into forming persons, i.e., in effect, forming entire classes. Learning a language is parallel to inheriting a specific worldview, which is always class-determined. A worldview, to paraphrase Buci-Glucksmann,[4] has effects in practice, and practice in return contains knowledge effects, which is precisely the way in which a subaltern class is constantly being re-produced, reproducing at once not only its subalternity, but also the domination of the dominant. A person's specific material conditions of life, i.e. their class position, determines their worldview, which, in return, forms them *as* members of that particular class and makes them act in accordance to it. The end result being that the subaltern classes themselves perpetuate the social system which enslaves them. Not only this process itself, but also the possibilities of breaking this "enchanted circle" is something I aim to delve deeper into.

[4] Buci-Glucksmann 1980, p. 349.

Chapter I

The Fetishisation of Language

When one reads Aristotle's *Politics*, one finds it hard to believe that Aristotle's claim, made over two millennia ago, that the human ability to speak is inextricably interwoven with the fact that man is a *political animal*[1] is so often completely ignored by modern scholars, be they linguists or philosophers of language. Of course, hardly anyone will deny that language has a lot to do with living in a community, with social life, but when it comes to theoretically trying to understand language, this fact is mostly put aside. Language has been abstracted from society and petrified in an ahistorical structure, or made into an "inherent ability" to all humans merely "triggered" in childhood; it has been made static and void of any ideological meaning (it still has to be continuously proven over and over again that meaning is, by definition, ideological, the syntagma "ideological meaning" thus being a pleonasm); it has been stripped of all and any power relations implicit in any statement, even of the importance of mere social and historical context; it has been proclaimed rational and thus idealized, making irrationality and internal contradiction absent from it etc.

Of course, these theses come from various currents of thought, and although some of the aforementioned claims do come together in some of them, they are mostly typical for one author or group. Therefore, the first step for constructing a historical-materialist theory of language has to be a critical overview of some of the most prominent theories of language which are opposed to it. In that sense, I shall be following the path of Jean-Jacques Lecercle in his book *A Marxist Philosophy of Language*,[2] where he starts from a critique of various interpretations of language in order to arrive to a proposal of a historical-materialist philosophy of language.

What is common to all the theories of language discussed below is either a *methodological individualism* or an *abstraction*, in differing degrees, *of language from society*. The former is an approach which sees the individual as being the correct theoretical starting point for understanding language, which then results in neglecting or outright denying that language has anything to do with society. It is typical in general for theories which claim

[1] Aristotle 1998, 1253a8-18.

[2] Lecercle 2009.

to be "scientific" and put much emphasis on that claim, such as psychologism or biologism,[3] and in particular to Chomsky (with whom we will deal in more detail later). What is interesting is that even certain Marxists have succumbed to this notion: Perry Anderson, in his book *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, claims that "the subject of speech is axiomatically *individual* – 'don't speak all together' being the customary way of saying that plural speech is non-speech, that which cannot be heard. By contrast, the relevant subjects in the domain of economic, cultural, political or military structures are first and foremost *collective*: nations, classes, castes, groups, generations".[4] In attempting to critique poststructuralist approaches to language, Anderson ended up defending the naive notion, typical of all bourgeois approaches to language resting on methodological individualism, that since it is the individual who speaks, language is by definition an individual phenomenon, which has nothing to do with what Anderson terms "collective subjects". But this is to remain completely blind to the fact that that particular individual learned the language within a particular society, social group or class, and that she speaks in accordance to those events in her life. It means to neglect that, by speaking, one is uttering the words of former generations and is evoking an entire history of meanings and social processes.

The second characteristic of the approaches to language I shall criticise below is an *abstraction of language from society*. This is obviously connected to the first characteristic, since it ends up in the same theoretical blind alley, from the historical-materialist standpoint, as does methodological individualism. The difference is that these approaches do not necessarily start from the individual. An example would be Saussurean linguistics, whose object of research is language as structure, independent of any acts of speech or the history of language. It is the well-known notion of synchrony that is in the centre of this conception of language, while diachrony is proclaimed irrelevant for linguistics proper.

Both of these characteristics are quite similar, and entail what is in essence a *fetishisation of language*. In both cases, language is isolated from its social aspects and fixed

[3] I do not intend to go into detail on these two currents of thought, which are today actually quite similar and tend to intersect more often than not. The general tendency of both is to ascribe language to man's biological faculties, specifically those within the brain as the mere function of its nervous stimuli (hence the similarity). Psychologism will then talk about the psyche which rests upon these functions of the brain, while biologism will rather go in the direction of neuroscience. One of the best critics of these approaches is the evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould, whose general similarities with a historical-materialist methodology are notable (cf. Clark and York 2011).

[4] Anderson 1983, pp. 44-5.

into an immobile concept or thing. It is abstracted from society and reduced either to the faculties of the individual organism or to a scientific system – thus neglecting the fact that language is a social practice – which results in the impossibility of discussing concrete social phenomena with relation to language. This reflects a common trait or tendency of bourgeois sciences to "fix" objects of their research into a conglomerate of facts, systems and static concepts, even when these objects are essentially indivisible from society and thus all but "fixable", since they are historical, dynamic, and full of contradictions.

Therefore, we must embark on a path of "defetishising" language in order to be able to discuss language as a social practice and try to offer a historical-materialist interpretation of it in the end. In what follows in the remainder of this chapter, I do not offer an extensive overview of the authors and theories I discuss, but more of a focused critique from a historical-materialist standpoint.

1.1. The Linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure

1.1.1. "The Science of Language"

Few will probably object to the claim that Ferdinand de Saussure's book, *Course in General Linguistics* (*Cours de linguistique générale*), was the most influential book of the 20th century in the field of linguistics. It has influenced not only modern linguistics, but also authors like Noam Chomsky or groups like the French (post)structuralists. A critique of Saussure thus seems the most logical first step in building a historical-materialist conception of language, which is, as will be shown, significantly opposed to the main presuppositions of Saussure and the remaining authors discussed in this chapter.

In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure divides language into *langue*, an abstract system internalized by a speech community, and *parole*, the individual acts of speech of the members of that speech community. The former is the sole object of linguistics, according to Saussure, while the latter is described as a potential object of research for other sciences, but not for "the science of language" which should exclude speech from its research:[5] "the activity of the speaker should be studied in a number of disciplines which have no place in linguistics except through their relation to language".[6] Thus, language as *langue* is an abstract, "homogeneous" system, separated from the concrete social phenomena related to speech. The exclusion of these phenomena is necessary because including speech would only

[5] Saussure 1959, p. 15.

[6] Ibid., p. 18.

cause confusion in the linguist's construction of a static object of research: "my definition of language presupposes the exclusion of everything that is outside its organism or system – in a word, of everything known as 'external linguistics'".[7]

Granted, Saussure never *denies* the existence of social aspects of language: he explicitly acknowledges the role ethnological phenomena, history, politics and social institutions play in the formation of a language,[8] which comprise the aforementioned "external linguistics". But by making this distinction and proclaiming that these phenomena should have nothing to do with the object of "the science of language", he marginalizes what is in fact essential, and claims instead a constructed abstraction to be essential. This is what Jean-Jacques Lecercle criticizes as the "principle of immanence", by which the study of *langue* is governed: "nothing external to the system of *langue* is relevant to its description".[9] The effect of such a separation of language into *langue* and *parole* is that "*parole* is nothing but individual variation on the norm represented by *langue*, with the result that the ensemble evolves according to its own tendencies and the system consequently ignores human history – that of the community of its speakers".[10]

What such an abstraction of *langue* from social reality completely neglects is that language is not just a system of symbols, but primarily something representing social relations in general and the relations of power between speakers in a concrete speech context in particular, which can be discerned from the specific style of speech a speaker utilizes. "To speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in the hierarchy of styles which express the hierarchy of corresponding social groups".[11] By ignoring such problems and focusing its study on the internal relations of words, Saussurean linguistics only succeeds in creating a theoretical construct which does not exist in reality. As Bourdieu notes: "[t]he all-purpose word in the dictionary, a product of the neutralization of the practical relations within which it functions, has no social existence: in practice, it is always immersed in situations, to such an extent that the core meaning which remains relatively invariant through the diversity of

[7] Ibid., p. 20.

[8] Ibid., pp. 20-1.

[9] Lecercle 2009, p. 10.

[10] Ibid., pp. 112-3.

[11] Bourdieu 2012, p. 54

[linguistic] markets may pass unnoticed".[12] What Saussure ignores, consciously or unconsciously, is the fact that every language is subject to certain conditions of its social production, which is what Bourdieu's work is very good at showing in detail.[13]

Finally, according to Saussure, *langue* should be studied from the point of view of *synchrony*, while the phenomena that are related to *diachrony* are, again, a potential object of research for other sciences, but irrelevant for linguistics. This is significant because that means that language as *langue*, for Saussure, is static, immobile and fixable, which brings us to another significant point of critique:

> the Saussurian system has another major characteristic, encapsulated in the concept of 'synchrony': it is stable – that is, temporally immobile. It is not denied that languages [...] have a history, but study of it is relegated to the margins of science under the agreeable rubric of 'diachrony'. But this 'point in time', as arrested as Zeno's arrow and recalling the Hegelian 'essential section' criticised by Althusser, ignores, in favour of the system whose construction it makes possible, the complex temporality of real languages (a differential temporality, which is not the same for the vocabulary, the syntax, or the phonemes); and the fact that languages are never immobile but constantly subject to historical change, rendering synchronic description somewhat arbitrary.[14]

This is an important point to note, because, in reality, language is crossed with multiple non-contemporaneous temporalities, be it the mere "double temporality" of every meaning of a word, which simultaneously summons the history of its previous meanings and gives specific meaning to the current social context it was used in, be it the different temporalities for different parts of language, as Lecercle notes, such as the vocabulary, the syntax etc.[15] Thus, synchrony actually seems to be quite a misleading concept for the study of language.

1.1.2. "Linguistic Value": The Word-Money Analogy

Since Saussure detaches language from living discourse, i.e. the social practice of speech, he is forced to find an internal logic within the "system of language" itself. The strictly linguistic

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[12] Ibid., p. 39.

[13] The problems in this chapter, and here particularly, only hint at the problems I will be dealing with in the remainder of this work, which is the reason I do not wish to further discuss them here.

[14] Lecercle 2009, pp. 10-11.

[15] The concept of universal linear time is something Saussurean linguistics shares with most of the sciences within capitalism, which is a result of capitalism itself (Cf. Bensaïd 2009, Part I and III). I shall further discuss time in general, and the temporality of language in particular in chapter four.

laws of language as system (grammar, phonetics etc.) could not present a sufficient explanation for the reason why in speech, some words and sentences are selected over others, whereby all of them confine equally to the same laws. In short, Saussure's system as is would not be able to account for *linguistic variety*, the various words and expressions signifying essentially the same and for the logic behind choosing one of them over the other in speech. Since locating this logic in discourse was, for Saussure, out of the question (simply because the entire building of "language as system" would then crumble), he had to explain linguistic variety by another law internal to *langue*: linguistic value.

Linguistic value is founded on the fact that the elements of every language stand in a relation and are interconnected. A word always stands in a comparative relation with other similar words and the value of each of those words springs from that relation: "[l]anguage is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others".[16] Specific linguistic values are thus characteristic for each existing language, and differ accordingly from other languages. These values are the sole reason why some words are used over other, equally logical and meaningful words. Furthermore, linguistic value has nothing to do with any potential content of the words themselves, but springs purely from the relation with other words. After he offers several examples, Saussure quite clearly states that "we find in all the foregoing examples values *emanating from the system*. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not".[17]

The reason why Saussure comes to such an untenable conclusion – value emanating from the system itself on the basis of the difference of elements of the system standing in a relation – which he terms a "paradoxical principle", is because he conceptualizes *langue* like a capitalist market, where words are analogous to money. "[E]ven outside language all values are apparently governed by the same paradoxical principle. They are always composed: (1) of a dissimilar thing that can be exchanged for the thing of which the value is to be determined ; and (2) of similar things that can be compared with the thing of which the value is to be determined".[18] Saussure then proceeds to give an example of five francs that can be

[16] Saussure 1959, p. 114.

[17] Ibid., p. 117. My emphasis.

[18] Ibid., p. 115.

exchanged for an amount of bread of the same value, as well as that "it can be compared with a similar value of the same system, e.g. a one-franc piece, or with coins of another system (a dollar, etc.)".[19] Words, he continues, are exchanged in fundamentally the same manner.

Even taken by itself, this analogy is quite problematic, but when one takes into account Saussure's fundamental misunderstanding of the economy, the analogy and the concept of linguistic value itself lose all plausibility. Saussure sees money as a universal form characteristic of all economies, and, furthermore, he does not understand that money is only the universal expression of value created by *labour* – which was already the theoretical advance of the classical political economy of Ricardo and his labour theory of value.[20] His inability to see the social roots of value expressed in money as its universal form is therefore ironically analogous to his inability to see the social roots of language. For him, both the value of money, as well as the linguistic value of words emanate from the economic, that is, linguistic systems themselves, respectively.

> By taking money as a universal feature of all economies, Saussure cannot derive it from a specific social form of labor. And the same thing is true for his analysis of language. The pure form of language – the language system – floats detached from speech and discourse, just as the pure form of exchange – money – remains disconnected from the rudimentary elements of economic life. As a result, he is reduced to empty propositions of the sort that characterize vulgar economics: 'language is speech less speaking'; 'language is a system of pure values'; 'in language there are only differences''; 'language is a form and not a substance' (CGL, 77, 80, 120, 122). These are textbook examples of abstraction of the formal features of a system from the concrete social relations that animate them.[21]

Saussure reproduces the fetishism of capitalist society in general, and of classic economics in particular, in his linguistics and the theory of language as system. Both find laws which emanate from within the system itself and do not notice the fundamental roots of economic and linguistic realities in society and various forms of social practice. "Saussure's notion of linguistic value is imbued with the formalist abstractions of the capitalist economy, indeed with some of its most fetishised appearances. Saussure's claim that 'language is a form and not a substance' mirrors a central feature of the capitalist economy: that things have value not because of their concrete, useful characteristics, but because of their exchangeability with

[19] Ibid.

[20] McNally 2001, p.52.

[21] Ibid.

other units of abstract human labor".[22] As McNally notes, this "inverted logic" is Marx's primary focus in *Capital*.[23]

The concept of linguistic value and the analogy of capitalist market = language as system, as well as words = money is untenable because of the fundamentally misguided presuppositions they imply. They succumb to an evident form of fetishism, whereby the social roots of phenomena that are the object of research are completely abstracted from, and no version of a theory of language which would rest upon such an analogy can be free of those flaws, be it the poststructuralist version of Jacques Derrida,[24] or the Marxist version of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi.[25]

1.1.3. Historicizing Saussure

One might claim that this critique is too harsh on Saussure. After all, he was a linguist, and what he was trying to do with the main theses in the *Course* was in part influenced by the historical context of theoretical knowledge of his time. As Peter Ives notes, "much of European linguistics at the time of Saussure's death focused on tracing the history of word forms and attempting to determine the patterns in these changes",[26] which was called "diachronic change". Saussure's *Course* is actually a rebellious reaction against this tradition which was preventing linguistics from becoming a science by making it impossible – within the theoretical confines of this old tradition – to delineate a "fixed" object of study (which seems to be the ultimate criteria of "scientificity" of theories up to this day). In short,

[22] Ibid., p. 54.

[23] Ibid., p. 52.

[24] Derrida sees not only language as analogous to economy, but also the relations between subjects analogous to economic relations. „The economy of the subject is an economy of calculation, of balance sheets, of credits and debts, of what one owes and is owed in turn. It follows, then, that subjects are capitalists, calculators intent upon being paid back with interest. And since subjects are constituted in and through language for Derrida, language too must be a system of calculation, a capitalist system". (McNally 2001, p. 61.)

[25] Although Rossi-Landi, unlike Saussure, founds linguistic value on the basis of language being „linguistic work", so that linguistic value does not emerge from the linguistic system itself, his theory still „models language on the capitalist market – and thereby commits the same error that plagues Saussure" (McNally 2001, p. 55). For Rossi-Landi's work, see: Rossi-Landi 1983, particularly chapter 2.

[26] Ives 2004b, p. 17.

"Saussure argued that such an approach could never be truly scientific because it could never isolate language as a decisive object of study".[27]

That is the reason why the following had happened: "[Saussure] argued that for linguistics to separate itself from other sciences such as psychology, anthropology and philology, it must take the systemic element of language as its primary focus".[28] It is by "systematizing" language, fixing it, and removing all irrelevant phenomena out if it (history, change, "how language is used in practice"[29]), that linguistics will obtain an "object of study" and finally become "scientific". If that was what was necessary to finally enable linguistics to "scientifically" research the relations of signifiers and signifieds within the newly born "structure" of language, we might say: "fair enough". But the criticism I elaborated above is still applicable; if nothing else, there remains a fundamental contradiction within such a linguistics, as Saussure explicitly acknowledges the effects society, history, politics etc. have on language, but at the same time, he marginalizes these factors and these phenomena to the "un-scientifical" parts of "external" linguistics and proclaims them irrelevant for the "science of language".

It is not a coincidence that Saussure's theory gave birth to structuralism, and later on, poststructuralism, which epitomise this tendency of "scientific abstraction" of their object of study from the real world.[30] "Post-structuralists have had little quarrel with [Saussure's] initial methodological moves. In their search for structures, discourses, texts and codes independent of human actors, they have retained Saussure's formalist abstractionism".[31] Pierre Bourdieu beautifully describes this theoretical heritage of Saussure's linguistics:

> The entire destiny of modern linguistics is in fact determined by Saussure's inaugural act through which he separates the 'external' elements of linguistics from the 'internal' elements, and, by reserving the title of linguistics for the latter, excludes from it all the investigations which establish a relationship between language and anthropology, the political history of those who speak it, or even the geography of the domain where it is spoken, because all of these things add nothing to a knowledge of language taken in itself. Given that it sprang from the autonomy attributed to language in relation to its social conditions of production,

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] For a succinct critique of structuralism and poststructuralism, see the already mentioned book of Perry Anderson 1983. Also cf. Jameson 1974.

[31] McNally 2001, p. 47.

> reproduction and use, structural linguistics could not become the dominant social science without exercising an ideological effect, by bestowing the appearance of scientificity on the naturalization of the products of history, that is, on symbolic objects.[32]

Likewise, it is an irony of theoretical history, as Ives notes, "that linguistic structuralism based on this demarcation of 'objects of study' was incorporated into anthropology and the other social sciences whose domains are not language",[33] which was directly opposite of Saussure's intention of separating linguistics from other sciences.

Thus, what Saussure's theory offers is a conception of language which searches for the key for understanding language in its abstraction from reality, from all the phenomena which – from a historical-materialist standpoint – are fundamental for language, and without which language is not the living social process of everyday life, which participates in the creation of concepts and ideas, in class conflict, in culture etc.

> Saussure's structuralism contained the idea that underneath the actual manifestation of phenomena was a 'hidden' structure. Because Saussure saw individual utterances as secondary to, and generated by, the system of language (which was not obviously apparent), the actions of individuals came to be seen as mere superficial occurrences, whereas real understanding came from uncovering the underlying structures.[34]

Given his aforementioned intention, perhaps Saussure's "omission" is "reasonable"[35] (although even that is questionable). But the fact remains that Saussure offers a picture of a dead language, while we are interested solely in a living one. We can say, with David McNally, that for Saussure "language is speech dematerialized and dehistoricized, speech stripped of its entanglement in the bodies and lives of real historical actors".[36]

1.1.4. On the "Similarities" between Saussure and Gramsci

This would be a suitable moment to address some of the theses of Alessandro Carlucci from his book *Gramsci and Languages*,[37] where he claims that there is a significant similarity between Saussure's understanding of language and that of Antonio Gramsci. Firstly, I fundamentally disagree with Carlucci's reading of Saussure (which is probably the main

[32] Bourdieu 2012, p. 33.

[33] Ives 2004b, p. 17.

[34] Ibid., p. 21.

[35] Ibid., p. 19.

[36] McNally 2001, p. 47.

[37] Carlucci 2012, pp. 70-89.

reason I disagree with his theses on Gramsci and Saussure). What it seems to me that Carlucci does is that he focuses on and emphasizes those aspects of Saussure's understanding of language which Saussure inevitably proclaims irrelevant *for the "science of language"*. Again, I am aware of the fact that Saussure *acknowledges* the social, historical, political etc. aspects of language, but the reason why I stressed "for the science of language" is because Saussure considers these aspects potentially relevant *for other sciences, but not for objective, synchronic linguistics*. A linguistics which would attempt to address these problems would, according to Saussure, be *un-scientifical*, because it would not be able to "fix" its object of study: "one might if really necessary apply the term linguistics to each of the two disciplines [language and speaking] and speak of a linguistics of speaking. But that science must not be confused with linguistics proper, whose sole object is language";[38] "the concrete object of linguistic science is the social product deposited in the brain of each individual, i.e. language"[39] etc. There are numerous such examples throughout the *Course*.[40]

Yes, Saussure does claim that language (*langue*) is "social", but what is contained within this notion? An empty claim on the origin of language and its stability, separability and homogeneity,[41] which make it an ideal object of study. Because the way Saussure actually claims this is "by resorting, like [Auguste] Comte, to the metaphor of treasure, which he applies indiscriminately to the 'community' and the individual: he speaks of 'inner treasure', of a 'treasure deposited by the practice of speech in subjects belonging to the same community', of 'the sum of individual treasures of language', and of the 'sum of imprints deposited in each brain'",[42] which in essence means that "Saussure resolves the question of social and economic conditions of the appropriation of language without ever needing to raise it".[43] Thus, the claim has nothing to do with *connecting* society and language and observing them as related phenomena. That what is truly social is actually contained within *parole*, which Saussure claims is individual. And for Saussure, *parole* is "dispensable": "the science of language is possible only if the other elements [of speech] are excluded."[44] But it is not

[38] Saussure 1959, pp. 19-20.

[39] Ibid., p. 23.

[40] Particularly in chapters III, IV and V.

[41] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[42] Bourdieu 2012, p. 43.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Saussure 1959, p. 15.

enough to situate the sociality of language merely in its origins. This is one of the primary lessons of the Bakhtin School: what is social about language is not contained merely in the fact that it is a social "product", but first and foremost in that it is a social *process*, i.e. a *practice*. It is those elements of language which Saussure situates in *parole*, and which Bakhtin calls *dialogism*, that make language truly social.[45]

What Carlucci quotes from Gramsci to partially prove his point is Gramsci's claim that grammar "is the 'photograph' of a given phase of a national (collective) language that has been formed historically and is continuously developing, or the fundamental traits of a photograph".[46] I quote this particular section because it seems to me to best represent what Carlucci tries to use to bring Gramsci and Saussure together, namely, Gramsci's *sensu stricto linguistical* understanding of certain aspects of language – the research of the elements of language such as phonemes – precisely as "objects of study" for the linguist as a "scientist". Sure, in that regard, Gramsci does present some similarities with Saussure,[47] but that is not the general way in which Gramsci conceives language, and it is definitely not what Gramsci *focuses on* and *emphasizes* in his approach to language, which Saussure does, as I hope I showed above. In fact, it is strange Carlucci avoids quoting other parts of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, where it is evident that Gramsci considers a purely grammatical conception of language fundamentally reductionist. To take just one most directly related example, where the photograph-metaphor is also used, when speaking of "the language of the arts", Gramsci claims that this language should be "understood not just as purely verbal expression *which grammar can photograph* in a given time and place, but as a sum of images and modes of expression which *fall outside grammar*".[48] Of course, Gramsci uses "language" here metaphorically, since he speaks of "language of the work of art", not of strictly verbal language. Yet, it signals the general way Gramsci understands verbal language, because it too, like art, possesses a field "outside grammar", that is, certain "historicist elements",[49] as

[45] I will shortly refer to Voloshinov's critique of Saussure and Bakhtin's critique of linguistics in this chapter, part 1.1.5. On the sociality of language and Bakhtin and Voloshinov, see chapters II, III and IV.

[46] Gramsci 2012a, pp. 179-80. Carlucci quotes this on p. 71 of his book.

[47] Namely, three: one being Saussure's aforementioned understanding of the sociality of language as contained in the fact that it is a social product, the second being the „photographic" approach a linguist should take towards language, and the third the disapproval of policies forcing linguistic unification, which is connected to the first one.

[48] Gramsci 2012a, p. 120. My emphasis.

[49] Ibid.

Gramsci calls them. This is the reason why reading literature which stems neither from the same historical time, nor from the same society as the reader, requires a process of "translation" (a motif found so often in Gramsci's *Notebooks*)[50] on the side of the reader. If language did not contain these "historicist elements" – and now we are speaking of verbal or written language – a perfect grammatical knowledge of a foreign language would suffice to "perfectly understand" a foreign literary work, and no such effort of translating this non-grammatical content would be necessary.[51]

This point can be further proved with other references from the *Prison Notebooks* where Gramsci explicitly conceives grammar as the *formal* aspect of language, which does not contain the "historicist elements" in itself. The most innovative and sharp-minded thoughts on language in Gramsci are to be found in those parts of the *Notebooks* where he tries to understand the role of language *as a social practice* (which is inconceivable for language as a system in Saussure), where he links it with common sense and the fractured and contradictory consciousness of the subaltern classes, and where he explicitly defines language as "a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words *grammatically devoid of content*".[52] The reason why I emphasized the end of the sentence is because, in my opinion, this places Gramsci far away from any kind of Saussurean linguistics. The content he is speaking about (and which he implicitly claims remains hidden to or disappears within a purely *grammatical* approach to words) is ideological, political and social through and through, as can be seen from the rest of that particular note in the *Prison Notebooks* (but as well as from the *Prison Notebooks* in its entirety, in my opinion). This is something Saussure would never have wanted to have anything to do with, the entire point of his objective "internal" linguistics in the *Course in General Linguistics* being to remain completely free of such research.

It should be noted that Carlucci does somewhat ameliorate this problematic linking of Saussure and Gramsci later on in his book. He writes:

> Gramsci's writings do not provide any significant evidence to justify presenting him as a linguist or a philosopher of language in the narrow sense of the terms; that is, a specialist who

[50] Cf. Ives and Lacorte 2010.

[51] „Immediate contact between reader and writer is made [only] when the unity of form and content for the reader can presuppose a unity of poetic and emotional worlds. Otherwise, the reader must begin to translate the 'language' of the content into his own language." (Gramsci 2012a, p. 121.)

[52] Gramsci 2012b, p. 323. My emphasis.

> fully developed and/or used, in his work, a somewhat systematic theory of language. His writings do not contain new theories for studying the internal elements of language – namely, for studying how languages work and change with regard to the intrinsic functioning of verbal signs (*internal linguistics*, in Saussure's terminology). Quite the contrary: in his writings, Gramsci praised historical-comparative linguistics for its rigorous study of phonological and semantic change. Although he expressed some views remarkably similar to Saussure's synchronic linguistics, on the whole Gramsci remained cautious about theoretical innovations in the field of linguistics proper.[53]

It seems to me that some of Carlucci's own remarks from this quote refute his prior theses, especially the last sentence. It is not only that Gramsci "praised historical comparative linguistics", was not a linguist himself, and was "cautious" about "linguistics proper"; it is primarily the fact that, as Carlucci states, Gramsci never in his *Prison Notebooks* attempted researching "the internal elements of language", which is precisely what Saussure's linguistics *is solely based upon*. When Gramsci uses the metaphor of a photograph to describe grammar, he does so *in relation to* "linguistics proper", that is, in relation to internal linguistics or the study of the internal elements of language – in short, exclusively in relation to linguistics as science in the narrow sense of the term – and *not* in relation to language in general. Besides, as already mentioned, he uses the word "grammar", not "language", which, I believe, is indicative of my point. It seems to me that Carlucci is conflating grammar and language in Gramsci, as if they were the one and the same thing. But it is pretty obvious from the other places I referred to that Gramsci considers grammar only one part of language, which – and here lies the rub of Carlucci's misconception – does not express what living language truly is in social practice, but only expresses what it is *for the (Saussurean) linguist*: a photograph, grammatically *devoid of content*, since this content *falls outside grammar*.

Thus, even if we agree with Carlucci that Gramsci respected linguistics proper, in the sense of a scholastic curiosity, as well as a consequence of his academic past, he never conceived of, approached or discussed language as Saussure did. Gramsci theorized language *primarily* in relation to politics, history, culture and consciousness, and never in relation to the mere "intrinsic functioning of verbal signs",[54] which was Saussure's *exclusive* concern, which Saussure then completely isolated from those typically "Gramscian" issues. Gramsci was a politician, Saussure was a linguist. The fact that Gramsci showed scholarly interest in

[53] Carlucci 2012, p. 152.

[54] Ibid.

linguistics is not an argument for the claim that he expressed views "remarkably" similar to Saussure's.[55]

1.1.5. Voloshinov and Bakhtin on Saussurean Linguistics

When discussing Saussurean linguistics, especially in regard to a historical-materialist approach to language, we should not forget about Valentin Voloshinov's critique of Saussure, probably one of the first from the Marxist current of thought.[56] In his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*,[57] Voloshinov situates the linguistic theory of Saussure within what he terms "abstract objectivism". His critique can be summarized as follows:

> language is not a stable system of self-identical forms, but a system of signs adaptable to ever-new contexts. Utterances are not individual acts complete in themselves, but links in a chain of discursive communication that is in the process of becoming. Language is a historically developing phenomenon rather than an arrested static system. The Saussurean approach ignores the compositional forms of the whole utterance in favour of an abstract understanding of the elements of language. The meaning of a word derives entirely from its (verbal and extraverbal) context and it maintains an evaluative accent in use, something that is ignored by Saussure. Language is not a ready-made product that is handed down but an enduring part of the stream of verbal communication. The system of language and its historical evolution are incapable of being reconciled by a Saussurean approach.
>
> In addition, Voloshinov holds that Saussure's approach, which values a synchronic national-linguistic unity (langue), easily coalesces with oppressive political power. It derives from the tradition of Indo-European linguistics that prized a scholastic study of 'dead languages' over a more egalitarian study of vital and interactive living discourse.[58]

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[55] I must note that I do not mean to discredit Carlucci's book by this critique. On the contrary, I consider it one of the best books on the topic and am extremely grateful for the tremendous amount of work Carlucci obviously put in the book.

[56] Besides, I shall be referring to Voloshinov significantly later in this work, as I mentioned in the introduction.

[57] I am aware of the discussion about the authorship of this book and that some ascribe it not to Voloshinov, but to Mikhail Bakhtin. However, I believe enough proof to the contrary has been given in Brandist 2002 (the large number of references Voloshinov used, which Bakhtin seldom does in his works; the difference of style; the differing approaches to certain problems; the explicit Marxism of Voloshinov etc.) On the problem of authorship within the Bakhtin Circle, see also Brandist, Shepherd and Tihanov (eds.) 2004.

[58] Brandist 2002, pp. 80-1.

The points Voloshinov makes summarize everything that was pointed out in this chapter as the faults of the Saussurean language-system, but as well as what I described as Carlucci's misreading of Saussure above. To this we can add Bakhtin's critique:

> Linguistics, stylistics and the philosophy of language [...] have sought first and foremost for *unity* in diversity. This exclusive 'orientation toward unity' in the present and past life of languages has concentrated the attention of philosophical and linguistic thought on the firmest, most stable, least changeable and most mono-semic aspects of discourse – on the phonetic aspects first of all – that are furthest removed from the changing socio-semantic spheres of discourse.[59]

Both of these quotes, especially the one from Bakhtin, point to what I consider one of the primary arguments for the sociality of language. Language is social because it manifests and unfolds *in dialogue*; because through dialogue, language is a social process. That is why saying with Saussure that language is social merely because it is a social product is not at all enough (and misses the point), although that as well is important. I do not wish to go deeper into this topic here, as it will be discussed in the following chapters.

However, there is one point I wish to focus on a bit more, and offer some additional input into what Voloshinov considers the reason of such an approach to language within linguistics: the "scholastic study of 'dead languages'". Voloshinov evokes this thesis when he writes about the "abstract objectivist" mode of linguistic thought (which is the Saussurean one): "at the basis of the modes of linguistic thought that lead to the postulation of language as a system of normatively identical forms lies a *practical and theoretical focus of attention on the study of defunct, alien languages preserved in written monuments*".[60] I think Voloshinov slightly overemphasizes the "dead languages" issue, mostly as an effect of the historical context of Soviet linguistics in the 1920s.[61] The old linguistic paradigms were still very much alive and the new ones were trying to claim new ground and theoretical legitimacy. In order to do that, of course, one had to theoretically de-legitimise the old theories, and since their biggest characteristic was the study of ancient languages and the attempts at reconstructing proto-languages (like ancient Slavic), this was the most obvious "root" of the problems of those old approaches one could focus on. This is not to say that

[59] Bakhtin 2008, p. 274.

[60] Voloshinov 1986, p. 71.

[61] See Brandist and Chown (eds.) 2011, particularly the first text, by Vladimir Alpatov, „Soviet Linguistics of the 1920s and 1930s and the Scholarly Heritage", pp. 17-34.

Voloshinov was wrong in pointing this out, but only that, in my view, a significant part of the explanation for linguistics' general inability to grasp the *living* language is, as I already mentioned above, the tendency of sciences in capitalism in general to fetishise their object of study by attempting to claim it for themselves and solidify it, turning a social phenomenon into an abstract concept or thing. This was precisely what Saussure was trying to do, finally establishing linguistics as an objective science with its own object of research, clearly demarcated from other sciences, which rendered his theoretical project somewhat susceptible to some of the most common traits of scientific positivism.

1.1.6. Final Remarks

The linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, as outlined in the *Course in General Linguistics*, is an attempt to construct an objective "science of language" by abstracting it from all the social phenomena related to it and turning it into an abstract and immobile object of study. Those phenomena that are abstracted from are relegated into speech, and its research is condemned to the margins of science, or, in any case, to those sciences which have nothing to do with "linguistics proper". This object of study is a system, instead of a process, whereby the activity of speaking is presented only as a manifestation of the system, completely irrelevant for it. The depth of the various non-contemporaneous temporalities of language is substituted with a cross section of language frozen in synchrony. In short, it is a fetishising procedure, in that it isolates language from the social facts that determine it and fixes it into an abstract system.

Perhaps such a theoretical procedure was necessary for the formation of linguistics. We might add: "all the worse for linguistics". In any case, Saussure's approach to language is opposed to any theory of language which would be based on historical-materialist premises, and which would, therefore, be interested *precisely* in those phenomena in language which Saussure wants to leave untouched: the social, the historical, the ideological, the political, the economical etc. Thus, in order to discuss those phenomena, we have to abolish the distinction between *langue* and *parole*, as well as the one between *synchrony* and *diachrony*. In order to discuss those phenomena, we have to reject Saussurean linguistics like it rejected them.

1.2. The Methodological Individualism of Noam Chomsky

1.2.1. The Consequences of Chomsky's "Biolinguistics"

Noam Chomsky is, like Saussure, one of the most prominent figures of 20th century linguistics. Chomsky shares some of the characteristics of Saussure's approach to language, although, unlike Saussure, he does not acknowledge the – at least partially – social character of language at all. For Chomsky, language is not even a social product, like it was for Saussure. Thus, Chomsky goes even further in fetishising language. What is extremely fascinating with Chomsky, however, is that his approach to language is diametrically opposed to his political activism. Not only in his political books, but also in his interviews and comments, he shows a remarkable sensitivity to the relations of power and the effects of ideology within society. However, when it comes to language, it is as if Chomsky becomes a completely different person, oblivious to those processes and social relations which he so fervently criticises in his political activism. I will not go into detail, but will focus instead on the core arguments of Chomsky's linguistics.

Already in his early works, Chomsky adopts the Saussurean procedure of demarcating the linguistic object of study from all the phenomena external to language:

> [l]inguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.[62]

As is obvious, the focus of studying language is situated in the individual, who is "an ideal speaker-listener", pulled out of the context of concrete speech. It is already a concept of language free of society or time, or even individual speech disorders. "Here, we are faced with a completely decontextualised, detemporalized and disembodied concept of language".[63]

However, in his later works,[64] Chomsky goes even further in the same direction, and links linguistics with psychology and, later on, neuroscience:

> Chomsky [...] declared that linguistics was to be understood as part of cognitive psychology. Cognition has, in mainstream (particularly American) psychology, been concerned with mental processes within the individual. At the same time, a generative grammar, based on

[62] Chomsky 1965, p. 3.

[63] Linell 2004, p. 123.

[64] Particularly from Chomsky 2005 [1968] onwards.

> abstract formal rules of syntax, was assumed to be the adequate model of the language. Such a strongly transformed version of *la langue*, now termed *competence*, was now assumed to be internalized by the language user.[65]

This way, Chomsky got closer to those approaches which I criticised in note three of this chapter, namely, psychologism and biologism. It is not a coincidence that Chomsky's theory is sometimes described as "psycholinguistics"[66] or "biolinguistics",[67] whether by others, or by Chomsky himself. I shall try to summarize what is at stake with this trait of Chomsky's approach to language.

Firstly, the analogy between Saussure's *langue* and Chomsky's *competence* that Lecercle noted is definitely an analogy which points to a trait we already got familiar with earlier in Saussure. As Bourdieu writes,

> Chomskyan 'competence' is simply another name for Saussure's *langue*. Corresponding to language as 'universal treasure', as the collective property of the whole group, there is linguistic competence as the 'deposit' of this 'treasure' in each individual or as the participation of each member of the 'linguistic community' in this public good. The shift in vocabulary conceals the *fictio juris* through which Chomsky, converting the immanent laws of legitimate discourse into universal norms or correct linguistic practice, sidesteps the question of the economic and social conditions of the acquisition of the legitimate competence and of the constitution of the [linguistic] market in which this definition of the legitimate and the illegitimate is established and imposed.[68]

What linguistics, be it Saussurean or Chomskyan, treats as a "universal language" or as "universal linguistic practice" by looking at official national language, is in fact a discourse which has imposed itself as the dominant discourse by the means of certain social practices (such as class struggle). The entire history of the constitution of such discourses, the result of which are national languages, is something Chomskyan linguistics remains both uninterested in and ignorant to. Likewise, the social consequences of such processes also remain hidden: by not being able to speak the dominant discourse, i.e. the national language, fluently, certain people – whose number ends up to be quite significant – are not able to participate in the social institutions where adequate knowledge of this discourse is obligatory. If such people (the subaltern classes) attempt to say something publicly, they will often, as Bourdieu notes,

[65] Linell 2004, p. 123.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Chomsky 2005, p. vii.

[68] Bourdieu 2012, p. 44.

not be listened to: "[t]he competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak. Here again, social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality".[69] Thus, the concept of linguistic "competence", analogous to Saussure's *langue*, remains completely blind to such social processes and relations of power within language itself.

Secondly, for Chomsky, "language is a mental organ: a 'biological endowment' that is species-specific and innate. Chomsky clearly establishes an analogy between language – a mental organ – and the heart or eye – physical organs".[70] The "innateness" of language is contained in the fact that, "according to Chomsky, we no more learn to speak than we learn to grow arms or reach puberty".[71] In the life of an individual of the human species, language is not socially inherited, learned or socially adopted in any way; it is merely "triggered", as a genetic programme already present within the individual, by experience. This process of triggering is the same, irrelevant to the forms of society, its development or any other such "external" characteristics. The only important thing is that it has to happen, which is why "experience plays a necessary but limited role in language development".[72]

Furthermore, language, as this "genetic programme", is completely independent from any cultural differences, which means that "each member of the human species is identical as regards the faculty of language, because language is inscribed in his or her brain" and that "[l]angauge must therefore be studied in the individual" and "has nothing to do with social existence".[73] This is why Chomsky's linguistics is similar to bourgeois positivistic sciences, since "the logical consequence of Chomskyan naturalism is methodological individualism, which is characteristic of liberal thinking in economics and politics". What derives from language thus conceived is that it has no history – since it is completely separated from society, since for Chomsky even Saussure's claim about language being a social product would be too un-scientifical – other than "the quasi-frozen history of the evolution of the species over the very long term and by leaps".[74] There is no such thing as the social history of

[69] Bourdieu 2012, p. 55.

[70] Lecercle 2009, p. 19.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., p. 20.

[73] Ibid., p. 21.

[74] Ibid.

language: its change has been dictated exclusively by internal biological laws, i.e. the laws of evolution. Unlike Saussure, Chomsky does not merely marginalize diachrony – he denies its possibility.

Finally, there is the distinction Chomsky makes between internal language (I-language) and external language (E-language), in a way similar to Saussure, but more radical:

> The object of linguistic science is obviously [...] not language such as we use it, but an abstract construct, which Chomsky calls I-language. The letter I is the initial of the three adjectives that characterize language thus conceived: it is internal (there is at least one element that Chomsky takes over from structuralism – the principle of immanence); individual (language is not a social or cultural object); and intensional [...] by which Chomsky means that the language object he constructs is a generative grammar – that is, a limited number of principles capable of generating an infinity of utterances [...]. The rest [...] is consigned to 'common sense', as the object of what Chomsky calls 'folk-linguistics' in all the senses of the term.[75]

Thus, we have again, as in Saussure, the principle of immanence, i.e. the approach according to which nothing external to language has any importance. However, as we saw above, Chomsky does define language differently in comparison with Saussure. Language now becomes a "biological endowment", sealing the deal with methodological individualism.

1.2.2. Final Remarks

Chomskyan linguistics is incompatible with a Marxist theory of language for several reasons.[76] Firstly, it is based on *methodological individualism*, which means it considers language *a priori* from an a-social and a-historical viewpoint. I-language, the object of linguistics as Chomsky had defined it, excludes precisely those phenomena which we are interested in. Chomsky thus repeats what Saussure does, but in a much more radical and theoretically pernicious way – which brings us to the second point: Chomsky's *naturalism*. For Chomsky, language is an all-human trait inscribed in our brain. It has nothing to do with learning, but is a fixable aspect of human nature. For the same reasons, linguistics is itself a natural science, benefiting highly from the insights of biology, psychology and neuroscience. Since Marxism had quite a lot of experience with its own type of vulgar materialism, in some aspects similar to Chomsky's naturalism, today it is quite weary of such crude reductions.

[75] Ibid., p. 22.

[76] I mostly build upon the summary in Lecercle 2009, pp. 35-37, where I adopt the three characterestics he describes, although not in the same order and treating his second characteristic – fetishism – not as a characteristic, but as a process to which all the three characteristics underlie.

Finally, we can find in Chomsky a *refusal of history*. For Chomsky, the change that all concrete social languages have undergone up to today is irrelevant, and, in essence, presents nothing in relation to "language as such" found in our brain. What underlies all these different forms of languages, be it various forms of the same national language, or various national languages, is a pattern, a genetic programme within our brain. One enormous field of social change – that of linguistic change – is thus completely denied its existence. It is ironic that even such an isolation and abstraction of language did not help Chomsky to come to an irrefutable theory of the internal functions of this "genetic programme".[77]

These three points all bring us once again to *the fetishisation of language*, although Chomsky went even further with it than Saussure did. Chomsky "reduces what is essentially a practice – human language – to a series of 'things' inscribed in the brain of the speaker or her genes".[78] Chomsky, like Saussure, tried to "construct linguistics as a science by giving it a specific object, constructed by excluding the non-pertinent phenomena encompassed under the necessarily vague notion of language" – *langue* in Saussure, a genetic programme in Chomsky. Thus, he succumbed to the same errors of scientific positivism as Saussure did. However, Saussure at least acknowledged that language was a social product, which Chomsky vehemently denies, and thus fetishises language even more boldly. Therefore, we might conclude with Jean-Jacques Lecercle:

> if it is agreed that Chomsky's aim is to constitute a science, we still need to ask what his linguistics aims to be the science of – that is, what its object is. For the I-language does indeed possess all the characteristics of a scientific object: it is presented as real – that is, as having a material existence in the brain of the speaker; it is specific, constructed by purging irrelevant phenomena; and it is abstract. But it is not obvious that this object is language, construed in the broadest or narrowest sense of the term. For Chomsky, in fact, linguistics can at best only be a provisional science; and, at worst, not a science at all – or, rather, not a specific science. At worst, the I-language is an object for scientific psychology, which will itself one day be reduced to biology. At best, it is currently the object of the science of language, pending the day when the advances in biology will render superfluous indirect description of the language faculty via grammatical structures which, whatever level they are envisaged at, can only be surface phenomena, effects of the material constitution of the mind/brain.[79]

[77] I have not referred to Lecercle's very interesting analysis on this – Lecercle being a philologist, and thus qualified for the topic – which can be found in Lecercle 2009, pp. 24-34.

[78] Ibid., p. 35.

[79] Ibid., pp. 42-3.

1.3. The Idealism of Habermas' Communicative Theory of Language

1.3.1. Cooperative Language

The work of Jürgen Habermas brings us to a significantly different approach to language compared to that of Saussure and Chomsky. Although not a Marxist in the strict sense, Habermas was definitely influenced by historical materialism and takes over some of its theoretical presuppositions and concepts. His *magnum opus*, *The Theory of Communicative Action*,[80] offers a philosophy of language already well aware of and building upon most of the fundamental points we had to argue for in relation to Saussure and Chomsky: it is based on social interaction, thus avoiding methodological individualism, and it conceives of language as a social phenomenon. Thus, the critique of Habermas will be different from that of Saussure and Chomsky in the sense that it is a discussion within our own "theoretical camp", so to say.

The main theses of Habermas's work can be summarized as follows: "the very structure of language as interlocution presupposes agreement, or at least a striving for agreement. Philosophy will therefore start with an analysis of interlocution".[81] This is something we could be pleased with, especially in comparison with Chomsky and Saussure. However, we can also read from that thesis a slight differing from a historical-materialist standpoint on society: "the underlying tendency is to think the social in the mode of co-operation, not struggle. This does not mean that Habermas ignores the facts and that he is not aware of the concrete existence of class struggle, but that he theoretically reconstructs society on the basis of co-operation implicit in the very constitution of language".[82] One cannot thus claim that Habermas ignores class struggle, and therefore, one cannot *a priori* dismiss his attempt to "theoretically reconstruct society on the basis of co-operation" (unless one adopts an orthodox and dogmatic Marxist stance). But, as we shall see later, this will prove to be the stumbling block of Habermas's project.

There are two key concepts of Habermas's philosophy of language:[83] firstly, the concept of inter-subjective understanding, according to which the fundamental characteristic of humans as social beings is their communicative activity, and language thus becomes in a

[80] Habermas 1984 and 1987.

[81] Lecercle 2009, p. 46.

[82] Ibid.

[83] As is noted in Lecercle 2009.

certain way "[t]he infrastructure on the basis of which the whole of society is reconstructed".[84] But what is essential for communicative action is that it is not based on struggle, but on dialogue, i.e. a process of mutual recognition and understanding, the goal of which is an agreement about particular truth claims. Thus, "Habermas's philosophy of language is an *ethics of discussion*"[85] as well. Secondly, there is the concept of life-world (Lebenswelt), borrowed from Husserl, which Habermas describes as "formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions",[86] which define the limits and potentials of a discussion or dialogue by defining the understanding and interpretation of communicative subjects involved. The purpose and goal of Habermas's project is then to

> establish the 'basis of validity of discourse', which for Habermas assumes the following structure: any speaker, simply by virtue of speaking, transmits four universal claims to validity. She must in fact (a) express herself intelligibly (intelligibility claim); (b) give it to be understood that something is the case (truth claim: we are only considering 'serious' locutions here – that is, those really directed at phenomena, and thus enjoined to truth, at least as a goal); (c) make herself understood by her interlocutor(s) (sincerity claim: making oneself understood in the framework of consensus is in fact to state the truth about oneself, to be sincere); and (d) agree with her interlocutor (accuracy claim, which is defined as a set of norms to which the interlocutors collectively subscribe). These four claims are the presupposed basis of inter-subjective understanding; they furnish language with its structure as interlocution; they are the basis of the agreement realised by each process of enunciation – that is, the basis of the fundamental consensus of which language is at once the source and the medium, and on which philosophy constructs its ethics of discussion. If, in fact, these claims are not honoured (for Habermas is not unaware that the facts do not correspond to the idyllic consensus he describes), it simply means that human beings quit the domain of communicative action and embarked on a different kind of action – strategic action – which does not presuppose the same validity claims.[87]

This is where things become problematic. What Habermas essentially does by outlining such a structure of "the basis of validity of discourse" is that he leaves the sphere of social reality which language is a part of in order to idealistically place language within a certain sphere of ethics. But the core of the problem lies in the fact that, for Habermas, "it is

[84] Lecercle 2009, p. 46.

[85] Ibid., p. 47.

[86] Habermas, 1984, p. 70.

[87] Lecercle 2009, p. 48.

not a question of a moral decision, of a constraint imposed on linguistic practice from without, but of the very structure of interlocution: mutual communicative obligations have a rational basis and to refuse them (e.g. to defend a theory of linguistic exchange as *agon* – that is, as a verbal contest) involves abandoning the framework of reason".[88] In short, Habermas imposes an ideal vision of dialogue upon the reality of language itself, which is actually ridden with all sorts of conflicts.

This becomes particularly obvious when Habermas writes about those speech acts which are explicitly *uncooperative*, like threats, insults or orders. For him, "[i]mperatives or threats that are deployed purely strategically and robbed of their normative validity claims are not illocutionary acts, or acts aimed towards reaching understanding, at all. They remain parasitic insofar as their comprehension must be derived from the employment conditions for illocutionary acts that are covered by norms".[89] Threats are problems for Habermas because they clearly are speech acts,[90] although the content of their illocutionary force is not cooperative but agonistic. In order to preserve the universality of his structure of validity of discourse, Habermas is forced to exclude threats from the category of speech acts. Therefore, we arrive at a contradiction: on the one hand, dialogue (communicative action) is immanently cooperative, but, on the other hand, those utterances (speech acts) which are explicitly uncooperative (like threats) are not treated as speech acts. "The argument is manifestly circular: it claims to discover in speech acts a consensual interlocutory structure, but only counts as speech acts those of them that conform to this structure".[91]

1.3.2. Reading Habermas with his Critics

We are again faced with an *abstraction of language from a certain aspect of social reality*, and although Habermas does not at all go as far as Saussure or Chomsky have gone, we still cannot neglect this. Whereas Saussure and Chomsky succumbed to this process in the name of constructing a linguistic science, Habermas is doing it in order to preserve the constructed ideal of communicative action as the basis of human interaction. But such an idealization of

[88] Ibid., p. 49.

[89] Habermas 1992, p. 84.

[90] „A threat has a speaker, an addressee, a propositional content, and exercises illocutionary force over the addressee, producing a perlocutionary effect on her". Lecercle 2009, p. 53.

[91] Ibid.

language is unacceptable, at least if one's aim is to build a *social theory* (and not an *ethics*) of language.

> Even if it is purely methodological and provisional [...], *idealization* [...] has the practical effect of removing from relations of communication the power relations which are implemented within them in a transfigured form. This is confirmed by the uncritical borrowing of concepts such as 'illocutionary force' which tends to locate the power of words in words themselves rather than in the institutional conditions of their use.[92]

Bourdieu reminds us, again, as with Saussure and Chomsky, that language is a social process and thus determined largely by the relations of power (class relations) of the society which it is a part of. I mentioned at the beginning of part 1.3.1. that Habermas puts class struggle aside when constructing his theory of communicative action and that that will prove to be its stumbling block. So why does Habermas make such a mistake?

Habermas does not simply construct a social philosophy of language; there is a fundamental inversion of this included in his project, in that he conceives of society through the prism of an idealized language, which should then be the building block of a future just society. As Perry Anderson notes, language for Habermas "becomes, not merely the hallmark of humanity as such, but the promissory note of democracy – itself conceived as essentially the communication necessary to arrive at a consensual truth. [...] Language as such is identified with an aspiration to the good life".[93] Habermas thinks within those frameworks even before *The Theory of Communicative Action*, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*: "[o]ur first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus" and "the truth of statements is based on anticipating the realization of the good life".[94] These thoughts are what runs through the entire *Theory of Communicative Action* as underlying premises. In short, in Habermas, language and democracy become intertwined: "democracy can be defined as the institutionalization of conditions for the practice of ideal – that is, domination-free – speech".[95]

But there is no such thing as "domination-free" speech. Such a claim can only be a consequence of the abstraction of speech or language from the reality of social relations, from the social totality which language is part of and which thus defines it. Even if we were to give

[92] Bourdieu 2012, p. 44 (note 4).

[93] Anderson 1983, p. 63.

[94] Habermas 1971, p. 314.

[95] Anderson 1983, p. 64.

Habermas a benefit of the doubt and completely ignore the social relations between speakers, the socio-historical context in which the dialogue is occurring, the specific world-views and irrational idiosyncrasies of each speaker etc., and if we were to presuppose that all speakers are honestly and eagerly intent on a rational discussion with the goal of reaching an agreement – in short, if we were to imagine a truly *ideal* speech situation – we would see again that power enters the stage merely through the way every dialogue requires a certain level of clarity at each moment for it to continue. The higher the "stakes" in the dialogue – which are always pretty high in any wide debate on social issues – the higher is the required level of clarity which has to be maintained. At the very moment when you are asked to clarify what you said or what you mean, a relation of power emerges between you and the other speaker(s) depending on how successful you were.

> You alter your language when those you are speaking to continually ask 'What do you mean?' 'Explain yourself' [...]. In many instances, no explicit coercion is necessarily involved here. You consent to change your language. However, depending on the context, there is considerable coercion at play. If you do not make yourself understood, you are the one who suffers the consequences, not your listener. This is clearly a power relationship.[96]

The mere ability or competence to maintain and successfully abide to the specific required level of clarity in a dialogue thus brings by itself the questions of the education of the speakers, their social background (i.e. class background), and also the very important question of "who, and by what criteria, sets the required level of clarity?", etc.

Therefore, Habermas constructs an idealized intersubjectivity: "[u]prooted from the relations of production (and reproduction) and domination, this intersubjectivity is as abstract and formal as that of the Rawlsian theory of justice. Whereas the reality is one of inequality and violence (even in the communicative relation and the cruelty of words), it postulates a peaceful general reciprocity".[97] There are numerous reasons why reality – even that of linguistic practice – is filled with inequality and violence. As Bourdieu showed (as well as Bakhtin and Gramsci, in their own way), the way an individual speaks is defined by her class origin, but also by the "institutional conditions" of speech production mentioned above. Furthermore, language itself is part of class struggle: since no meanings are fixed forever, various social groups use the same words but inscribe different meanings to them, and since each meaning, in such a sense, represents a certain world-view (as we shall see in later

[96] Ives 2004b, p. 123.

[97] Bensaïd 2009, p. 152.

chapters), there is a struggle for the imposition of meanings, i.e. for "official" or at least "dominant" or widely accepted meanings of words. "The field of meaning is open, and words are never reliable. The repetition of the sign on the social battle front makes meaning vacillate, rather than fixing it".[98]

Finally, what remains completely unaccounted for is the corporeality of language – something Saussure was also oblivious to (in fact, even most social theories today likewise are). The following chapter will cover this topic in detail, but for now, it is enough to consider how language is essentially embodied merely by the fact that non-verbal communication is a fundamental part of speech. Gestures, facial expressions, bodily sensations and emotions (from pleasure and joy to pain and torment) all are part of what language also expresses, which obviously covers a wide range of often contrary and incompatible feelings. Since Habermas "effectively identifies language with propositional speech, considering the aspiration to rational understanding (as opposed, for example, to erotic or emotional expression) as its essential feature" he also "detaches language from the body, sensation, labor, and eros, just as he demarcates it from structures of power and domination".[99] Since Habermas' goal is an "emancipatory" language, he has to free it of all such expressive content and ignore its corporeality (among other things already mentioned).

> After all, by suggesting that emancipation is not possible in the realm of social labor, and by leaving us with a dehistoricized, ultra-cognitivist theory of language, Habermas so reduces the power of critique and so restricts the concept of emancipation that it is hard to see what sort of 'utopian perspective' remains. His 'emancipatory politics' involve little more than a gesture toward a noncoercive public sphere where the best argument can prevail – a classically intellectualist construction. Yet, this is the fruit of detaching language from the body, labor, eros, and history.[100]

1.3.3. Final Remarks

That is why Habermas's abstraction of language from class struggle, the body and history is the downfall of his theory: it idealizes language and projects this ideal image onto society itself, turning Marx on his head.

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[98] Ibid., p. 151.

[99] McNally 2001, pp. 108-109.

[100] Ibid., p. 109.

> To the abstract and crippled universalization of capital, to the tyrannical eruption of fragmented divinities and fetishes, communicative rationality offers a response that is immediately ensnared in ideology. With a view to establishing an organic link between socialism and democracy, Habermas thus dissolves class interests into those of humanity constituting itself as a species, in purely imaginary fashion. The production paradigm is erased in favour of the communication paradigm. Social relations become relations of communication.[101]

In attempting to reconstruct a certain form of historically and theoretically acceptable historical materialism, Habermas only distances himself from it completely. Of course, the problem is not the theoretical distancing by itself, but the consequences of such a process: Habermas replaces political thinking with ethics.[102] Again, that is something we are not interested in, as a historical-materialist theory of language should be interested especially in political phenomena, and showing that language itself is a profoundly political phenomenon, in the specific sense that it is a part of class struggle, which is itself determined by the relations of production within society. That should not be read as a vulgar materialist approach, as I do not wish to argue for a one-sided and linear relation between the economic "base" and the ideological "superstructure". Rather, what I wish to argue should be the object of a historical-materialist theory of language is "*the relationship between the structured systems of sociologically pertinent linguistic differences and the equally structured systems of social differences*".[103] This relationship, unfortunately, is not within the theoretical grasp of Habermas's philosophy of language.

1.4. Totalizing Language

Saussure, Chomsky and Habermas do not help us with formulating potential positive theses for a historical-materialist theory of language. However, they can help us in the negative sense: we can learn from their examples and set a framework for such a project by avoiding the mistakes they made.[104] These mistakes can be summarized as follows: 1) turning language

[101] Bensaïd 2009, p. 152.

[102] Lecercle 2009, p. 60. For Lecercle's explanation of the historical conjuncture which he claims is in part responsible for this, see ibid., pp. 59-60.

[103] Bourdieu 2012, p. 54.

[104] This is precisely the path Lecercle takes, starting from several negative principles of what he calls „the dominant philosophy of language", in order to arrive at their opposites, and thus formulate positive principles for

into *a stable system*, abstracted from society and its utilization within it, and focusing exclusively on the internal elements of such a system, whereby everything external to it is proclaimed irrelevant (to this we can counterpose *language as social practice*, which cannot be turned into a stable object of positive science without losing touch with its roots within society, and whose end-result can only be an abstract, not a socially real concept of language); 2) turning language into *a biological endowment*, whereby language becomes merely the capacity to speak inherent in the human species as a result of evolution, and its study therefore limited to the individual, thus becoming separated not only from its social context, but also from its history (to this we can counterpose *language as a socio-historical process*, as a social product which is never finished, but is simultaneously being transformed from within society, and is formative itself in relation to social groups and their members – its study is therefore necessarily linked to society and to the various forms it takes within it); 3) turning language into *an ethics of rational discourse*, whereby language is idealized and freed of all its conflictual forms and relations of power, and becomes a foundation for a project of a democratic society (to this we can counterpose *language as class struggle*, whereby language represents and is in part determined by the social relations of its time, which links it not only to dominant and dominated classes, but also to the social relations and mode of production which produces these classes – language is political and ideological, it is a form of power precisely because it is a social practice).

In all of these cases, language was abstracted from certain aspects of its social existence. In some cases, such as that of Chomsky, this abstraction is extreme and quite obvious, while in others, such as Habermas, the abstraction is mild, but is nonetheless problematic (Saussure could perhaps be placed somewhere between the two). The three names I chose represent some of the most important currents of thought within the field of linguistics or the philosophy of language, and their specific theoretical characteristics are thus often found in other works and authors, which means that a lot of the critical remarks I made pertain to some of the most dominant trends within the study of language, which Jean-Jacques Lecercle terms "the dominant philosophy of language".[105] In relation to this procedure of abstraction common, to various extents, to all of these currents, a historical-materialist theory of language should strive to operate within the framework of *social totality*. This means that

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a Marxist philosophy of language (Lecercle 2009, pp. 64-72). His list and mine do overlap, but they are not the same.

[105] Lecercle 2009, p. 64. See previous note.

one should never lose sight of, marginalize or put aside the various phenomena related to social, living language, i.e. the phenomena of the "language of real life",[106] as Marx and Engels call them in *The German Ideology*.

> We can say with Bourdieu, as a programmatic and theoretical starting point, that it is therefore necessary to draw out all the consequences of the fact, so powerfully repressed by linguists and their imitators, that the 'social nature of language is one of its internal characteristics', as the *Course in General Linguistics* asserted, and that social heterogeneity is inherent in language.[107] This must be done while at the same time being aware of the risks involved in the enterprise, not the least of which is the apparent crudeness which can accompany the most rigorous analyses capable - and culpable - of contributing to the return of the repressed; in short, one must choose to pay a higher price for truth while accepting a lower profit of distinction.[108]

That means to do precisely the opposite of what linguistics, or "the dominant philosophy of language", has done: it has sacrificed truth for distinction. We wish here, on the contrary, to remain faithful to social truth.

[106] Marx and Engels 1845, p. 36.

[107] As I hopefully showed, Saussure only acknowledged that fact, but did not „draw out" almost any consequences of it, so he, too, is subject to this "repression" typical of linguists which Bourdieu criticizes.

[108] Bourdieu 2012, p. 34.

Chapter II

Language as Social Practice

2.1. Introduction: The Social Variation of Languages

No one would dispute the fact that the phenomenon of language is *somehow* linked to society, i.e. to man being a "social animal". There are between 6000 and 7000 estimated living languages in the world today, each linked with a specific society or community. Yet, when it comes to explaining what this link truly is, people have tended to come to quite dissimilar conclusions. Theoretically, the conclusions that tended to marginalize or minimize the link and, consequently, the profound social character of language (like Chomsky), were mostly the ones that set language as their starting point, instead of perhaps embarking upon the path of a linguistic theory or a philosophy of language from the more general viewpoint of society. We can take the example of Benjamin Lee Whorf, undoubtedly a great mind and a great linguist, but who would nonetheless end up stumbling whenever he came upon potentially defining what the relationship between society and language really is.

Whorf starts by showing how language can indicate different ways in which various people conceptualize reality. He gives various concrete examples of this, from the Hopi to the Aztecs, but one of the examples he gave that are most famous today are the differences between the Eskimo's and Western words for snow:

> We have the same word for falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed like hard ice, slushy snow, wind-driven flying snow – whatever the situation may be. To an Eskimo, this all-inclusive word would be almost unthinkable; he would say that falling snow, slushy snow, and so on, are sensuously and operationally different, different things to contend with; he uses different words for them and for other kinds of snow.[1]

Therefore, the language with which a person speaks can tell us a lot about the way that person thinks, i.e. conceives reality, which is quite a radical thesis for a linguist.[2] However, what Whorf proceeds to do next is that he locates the primary source of these differences between languages in languages themselves: "the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern" which "are the unperceived intricate systematizations of his own

[1] Whorf 1959, p. 216.

[2] This thesis is, within linguistic circles, also more commonly known as the „Whorf-Sapir thesis".

language".[3] Each language has its own internal logic, a specific way of forming patterns, "a specific system or organization, a 'geometry' of form principles".[4] These are "culturally ordained",[5] but since this is practically the only instance where Whorf links this pattern formation with society and never explains what this could mean, the reader is left to conclude that "culturally ordained" means that every community has its own pattern formation simply because it has its own language. This seems to be confirmed later in Whorf's book where he repeats that these rules of pattern formation are "characteristic of each language".[6]

The question "why do then languages contain different pattern formations at all?" remains essentially unanswered, since the implied answer seems to be "it is simply inherent to them". Whorf's problem is that he does not understand that the root of this fact (that different languages imply different ways of conceiving reality) is to be found not in the specific underlying "structure" or "logic" of a language, but in the different ways of life of different people, i.e. in the different relations of people to nature and the different relations amongst people themselves, that is to say: their specific social relations and their specific material conditions of life. If Whorf was to start from the social form of life and had attempted to understand language from there, he would have come to realise this. As Evald Ilyenkov writes,

> [a] completely different picture arises when, proceeding from individual experience, it is precisely the verbally formed world which is taken as the starting point in the theory of knowledge. It is all the more easy to yield to such an illusion, since in individual experience, words (and signs in general) are in actual fact just as much given to sensual contemplation as are the sun, rivers and mountains, statues and paintings, etc. etc. Here are the roots of idealism in its 'sign-symbolic' variation.[7]

We can find an example opposite to Whorf in Maurice Godelier, who relates man's conception of reality directly with social relations and the material conditions of life, without even touching upon the question of language. Godelier writes about two African tribes, the Pygmies and the Bantu: both groups live in the Equatorial African forest of the Congo. The difference between the two is that the Pygmies live deep inside the forest and are hunter-gatherers, while the Bantu live on the outskirts of the forest and are slash-and-burn

[3] Whorf 1959, p. 252.

[4] Ibid., p. 259.

[5] Ibid., p. 252.

[6] Ibid., p. 257.

[7] Ilyenkov 2009, p. 304.

agriculturalists.[8] For the former, the forest is the source of all food, water and shelter, while for the latter it is an obstacle for cultivation. The different and, indeed, contrary conceptions of the same environment (the rainforest) that are the result of this are quite astonishing, and I therefore quote Godelier's exposition at length.

> For the Pygmies, the forest represents a friendly, hospitable and benevolent reality. They feel wholly secure there. They contrast the forest with the spaces cleared by the Bantu, which appear to them to be a hostile world where the heat is overwhelming, the water polluted and deadly, and illnesses are numerous. For the Bantu, on the other hand, the forest is a hostile, inhospitable and deadly reality into whose depths they venture only rarely and always at great risk. They see it as being peopled by demons and maleficent spirits, with the Pygmies, if not the incarnation of such spirits at least their representatives. This contrast primarily corresponds to two ways of using the forest based upon different economic and technical systems. For the Pygmies, who are hunter-gatherers, the forest holds no secrets, They easily and rapidly find their bearings there. Even if they shift their camp from month to month, it is always within the same territory. Each band live in a stable relation to the forest, which harbours in its depths all the animal and vegetable species they exploit in order to survive - especially antelopes and a wide variety of vegetables. In the forest they are protected from the sun and the springs are abundant and pure (unlike the wells sunk in the middle of the Bantu villages). Furthermore, for them the forest is not merely a collection of vegetable species, animals and human beings (the Mbuti themselves), but also a supernatural, ubiquitous, omniscient and omnipotent reality upon which the maintenance of their life depends. [...]
>
> Conversely, for the Bantu agriculturists the forest is an obstacle which must be cleared with axes if manioc and maize are to be cultivated. This is an arduous form of work, ever liable to be frustrated by the very exuberance of the vegetation which is always encroaching upon the gardens. Moreover, once cleared the soil rapidly loses its fertility. They therefore have to move, to seek out another territory where the processes of production can be reviewed. Consequently, the Bantu find themselves condemned to confront not only the virgin forest yet again, but also other Bantu groups which, being subject to the same constraints, have identical requirements. A Bantu agriculturist does not know the forest well and rarely ventures into its depths for fear of getting lost and dying there. If all these practical reasons are borne in mind, it is easier to understand why for the Bantu the forest remains a terrifying reality peopled by hostile spirits or supernatural beings.[9]

[8] Godelier 2011, p. 34.

[9] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Although Godelier does not write about the languages of the Pygmies and the Bantu, it is undoubtedly safe to conclude that they use quite different words or perhpas the same words with completely opposite meanings and value connotations (positive for the Pygmies, negative for the Bantu) to signify the same reality: the forest and everything inside it. Contrary to anything that might be "found within" language, the cause of these completely different conceptions of the same environment (and, therefore, surely different expressions in language as well) are to be found in the different ways of life of these two groups of people. "In the last analysis, this contrast is based on the existence of two technical and economic systems which depend for their functioning on opposite sorts of constraints, and have distinct effects upon nature".[10] The material conditions of life and the social relations of a society are the primary source of variations between languages. Although we have not clarified the nature of the relationship between society and language (and consciousness), it is at least a bit clearer why it is necessary to take the broader socio-historical context into account while trying to understand and develop a theory of language.

2.2. The "Speculative Myth" of the Evolution of Language

When did the human species start to speak? This question is, of course, unanswerable, simply because we do not have access to information which could give a definite answer. We can use the knowledge of evolution, anthropology, history etc. to speculate about it, but that is precisely the point – it will always remain a speculation. However, that does not mean that such an endeavour is not worthy of our time. "A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world".[11] In that sense, thinking about the origins of language is simultaneously to think about the origins of mankind. But even aside from that, these myths can help us better grasp what language is fundamentally related to within our human world. As Lecercle writes, "a myth does not need to be 'true' in the sense of positive science to be effective [...]. It is enough for it to be relevant to our philosophical concerns and, so far as possible, *correct*".[12]

[10] Ibid., p. 35.

[11] Williams 1977, p. 21.

[12] Lecercle 2009, p.149.

2.2.1 Tran Duc Thao

We can rarely find explicit accounts of language in Marx and Engels, especially if one was to search for a more-or-less developed theory. But the few notes and remarks that can be found, like the one from *The German Ideology*, are quite succinct: "Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men".[13] We are faced here with a tight interconnectedness of society, language and consciousness, and Marx and Engels state it unequivocally clear here: both language and consciousness arise from the need, the necessity of intercourse of man with others of his kind. While this short thesis says a lot (both explicitly and implicitly) we shall focus for now on the "myth" it implies: language emerged as part of the process in which humans started, out of necessity, to cooperate, organize and live together. Banding together, living in communities and speaking (and thinking) are two sides of the same coin.

This is precisely the guiding thread of Tran Duc Thao's version of the "speculative myth" in his book *Investigations into the Origin of Language and Consciousness*.[14] Tran uses the concept of "indicative gesture" and the approach according to which phylogeny and ontogeny of the human species are theoretically comparable in order to reconstruct the evolution of language in the human species on the basis of linguistic development of a child. "This is combined with a phenomenological thesis, that consciousness is consciousness of objects before it is self-consciousness [...], and with the Marxian thesis that consciousness has its source in language, a source that is material (in 'real life', in praxis), collective (the primitive group of hunters) and social (not only communal hunting, but the beginnings of communal work, with its division of labour)".[15] The indicative gesture is taken as the central concept because it expresses "the relation of objective externality, in which consists the fundamental intentionality of consciousness as consciousness *of the object* as opposed to the simply sensori-motor psychism of the animal".[16] The gesture appears in the development of the child before she learns to speak, where she either directly points at an object of desire or

[13] Marx and Engels 1845, p. 44.

[14] Tran 1984. I write his name here transcribed from Vietnamese Trần Đức Thảo (whereby Trần is his family name).

[15] Lecercle and Riley 2005, p. 121.

[16] Tran 1984, p. 5.

points at her mother and then toward the object, in each case indicating to her mother what she desires. A similar thing happens at the prehominid stage, in a hypothetical situation of hunting or a similar collective activity: "when the cry accompanies the indicative gesture, it takes, thereby, the meaning of object. It becomes the exclamation that defines the original form of verbal language and indicates the object as an object of work: the 'this here!'. The indicative gesture thus contains two moments, the gestural moment and the exclamatory moment".[17] After a certain amount of time and repetition of the same practice, the indicative gesture evolves into a full-fledged sign, and "*the sign has been internalized by the group*, in such a way that it becomes for the group *available experience* that subsequently can be used at will".[18] On the basis of the indicative gesture, therefore, both consciousness ("identically as *consciousness of the object* and *consciousness of the self*")[19] and the first, rudimentary forms of language develop.

> From this a number of theses on the origin of consciousness derive. (1) The immediate reality of consciousness is language (both verbal language and gestures). (2) Conscious perception is that perception which is directed towards the external object qua external (this is a materialist thesis: it recognises the externality of the object in relation to the subject, and its precedence). (3) The pointing gesture appears as a call to work, and its primary function is social-collective (the allegory of Freedom in Delacroix's famous picture makes exactly that gesture). (4) This gesture is then reversed by the subject, who points at himself (command becomes self-command: thus, the isolated hunter, separated from the rest of the group, exhorts himself; at this stage consciousness is still contingent and sporadic). (5) The dialectics of internalisation of the external sign constitutes consciousness as relationship to self. (6) Consciousness then becomes not only consciousness of the external object, but permanent self-consciousness. (7) When the gesture of indication thus interiorised by the individual is interiorised by the whole group, it becomes available to denote not only the self, but any object in its absence: it becomes a sign. (8) The generalisation of signs among the group in turn produces individual subjects.[20]

This remains a "myth", in the sense which we explained, but it is a quite plausible myth: although we cannot positively say if it is true, we can ascertain its *correctness*. It is also

[17] Ibid., p. 9.

[18] Ibid., p. 13.

[19] Ibid., p. 11.

[20] Lecercle and Riley 2005, pp. 121-122.

quite valuable for us since it shows a strong link of interdependence between collective, organized practice on the one hand, and language and consciousness on the other.

2.2.2. David McNally: The Corporeality of Language

A somewhat different "myth" can be found in David McNally's *Bodies of Meaning*, who has the simple historical advantage of significantly more and significantly better knowledge of human evolution in general since he writes thirty years after Tran Duc Thao. His findings are therefore even more convincing and interesting, since they are backed by quite a lot of references and concrete data. Although McNally and Tran converge in the point that language developed simultaneously with more and more complex forms of organized cooperation between humans, McNally tries to show that we should be careful with conflating language and consciousness.

McNally argues that fully human language developed relatively recently in human evolution, i.e. some 100 000 years ago. Toolmaking, on the other hand, existed long before that, up to 1.6 million years ago. It is certainly impossible to conceive of toolmaking without some form of conceptual intelligence or practical knowledge, not to mention other practices, like big-game hunting and caring for the injured.[21] Furthermore, we know today for certain cases of specific epileptic seizures that make the person unable to use or process language, but still maintain their capability of communicating without language. "The fact that practical knowledge [...] can persist without language and speech, and that the same is true for gestural communication, strongly suggests that large parts of the human brain are wired for forms of extra-linguistic knowledge" which is to say that "[t]he appearance of fully human language did not displace prior cognitive and communicative abilities, but built upon them. It follows that language is not identical with cognition or conceptual thought".[22]

However, we might say that this does not contradict Tran Duc Thao's story, since he clearly talks about pre-hominids and the appearance of the sign, i.e. the most rudimentary element of what we today call "language", whereby McNally writes of "fully human language", which is, of course, quite another thing. In fact, we might say that, in a certain way, McNally takes Tran's thesis of the internalization of the sign somewhat further with the concept of "bodily image-schemata". "Image schemata refer to recurring patterns in our lived

[21] McNally 2001, pp. 94-95.

[22] Ibid., pp. 95-96.

experience of space, time, objects, and their relations"[23] and enable a specific type of knowledge that McNally calls "embodied knowledge". The corporeality of this type of knowledge is what is essential, since they are nothing close to Kantian transcendental categories of reason.

> Pattern recognition is not simply about the "mind" organizing perceptual data into coherent wholes; rather, it is about the whole organism perceiving patterns that facilitate the coordination of its motor activity in the world. Such patterns are meaningful structures for organisms of a particular size with specific features (eyes, hands, legs, central nervous system, etc.), specific senses, and unique capacities (bipedalism, object manipulation, frequent sexual interaction, and so on). Meanings, then, are not the result of arbitrary mappings of concepts onto the world; instead, they derive from corporeal representations that inform the activity of organisms in the world. The human (and hominid) body is thus a 'semantic template', a site upon which meanings emerge in the course of practical activity.[24]

This also brings (another) one of Saussure's concepts into question, namely, the arbitrariness of language, or, more precisely, that part of that thesis which implies "that language is based upon a mental operation according to which the continuum of experience is divided arbitrarily into objects of thought".[25] The concept of bodily image-schemata "indicate the manifold ways in which the world of our experience [...] is deeply rooted in corporeal representation" and is therefore not arbitrary at all. All this brings us to two very important conclusions: firstly, "[h]uman language could only have evolved in accordance with the constraints and capacities of hominid perceptual and motor systems", and, secondly, "[l]anguage is built upon the same semantic template that structures our bodily experience".[26]

Another reason why we believe McNally does not fundamentally contradict Tran Duc Thao's version of the "myth", but in fact develops it further, is that McNally also considers gesture (although not only indicative, like Tran) fundamental in the development of language. Even at the moment when certain communally established vocal signs (i.e. words) started to develop, a linguistic syntax could not have developed by itself all of a sudden. It had to be based on other forms of syntax: primarily the syntax of gestures, which surely existed in some form (and which is used today in a developed form in sign language), but also the syntax of

[23] Ibid., p. 97.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 98.

[26] Ibid.

music and dance.[27] The question of syntax also brings us back to toolmaking again. Being able to construct sophisticated tools implied several capabilities that are also presuppositions for language: a very developed sense of spatial and temporal relationships; the ability to envision complex schemes and structures in advance and bring them into reality by combination; using tools to make tools: "[t]he use of a tool to make a tool prefigures an essential feature of human language: that unit activities are meaningful only in the context of a composite product. Tools that are helpful only at intermediate stages of construction are effectively meaningless on their own, just as a single unit of sound (a phoneme) is meaningless outside of a word, which is itself often meaningless outside an entire utterance".[28] Finally, human toolmaking is most specific for "heterotechnic cooperation", a feature not typical for apes, "where at least two people anticipate the action of the other(s) and perform a complementary action in order to produce a result that could not be achieved by a single individual performing the actions in a series".[29] This feature is essential for human cooperation and is the basis of human communities and social life in general. It incorporates individual practice into social practice. All of these abilities and capacities of humans surely led simultaneously (but were also the presuppositions) to the development of language.

While even with all the scientific data McNally uses we still cannot do more than speculate on the appearance of the vocal sign (the first "word"), it does allow us to approximate the period in which "fully human language" had to have had developed – and that is also the point where speculation is reduced to the minimum – which is within the last 100 000 years. Since language is linked with the activities we described, and since truly developed symbolic language surely appeared as part of and stimulated a wider flourishing of various other forms of symbolic activity,

> it seems clear that the 'cultural explosion' of the Upper Palaeolithic – ritual burial, jewelry, cave art, proliferation of new technologies and their regular improvement, and so on – was indicative of profound changes in cognitive life and material culture. And, given the depictive nature of early art, it is probable that a major increase in symbolization played a central role here. By enabling the use of symbols to represent things, fully human language made it

[27] „Once the ability to construct sounds to refer to extra-linguistic objects was sufficiently developed, there is no reason why a syntax already governing gesture and/or song could not have been used for words. As we have seen, gesture, toolmaking, and music all involve syntaxes of a sort, as unit activities are coordinated to produce a meaningful complex. And clearly speech has some advantages in this regard". (Ibid., pp. 106-107.)

[28] Ibid., p. 100.

[29] Ibid.

possible for humans to extend the limits of memory by creating an 'external' system for retrieving and disseminating information.[30]

Thus, Tran Duc Thao's story of the evolution of language is complemented by McNally's insightful contribution. Although Tran does seem to put an equation mark between language and consciousness, his myth actually tells a story of the simultaneous development of *rudimentary* (not yet "fully human") forms of language (the sign) and consciousness (consciousness of an external object *as external to the self*), which then eventually lead to the development of "fully human language", as McNally calls it. Still, McNally tried hard to prove, and was convincing in doing so, that language and consciousness should not be hastily conflated.[31] But one point is without a doubt confirmed both in McNally and Tran: language could not have developed without the development of a specifically cooperative way of life of humans, different from any other animal. Language and society are then primarily connected in that evolutionary sense, which all "myths" of the evolution of language confirm in one way or another.

> For the 'heave-ho!' theory of the origin of language [...] is not the only candidate: there is also the 'ding-dong' theory which attributes a musical origin to language, but also the 'come hither darling' theory in which humanity accedes to language in the context of sexual intercourse, which it prepares for and accompanies. These mythical theories, which at least have the merit of unbridled imagination, are also interesting and not manifestly less plausible than the usual theory, which I propose to call the 'pass me the leg of mammoth' theory. All these theories postulate both a co-operation in, and a division of, labour in the broadest sense.[32]

The important advantage and theoretical innovation of McNally's approach is that he effectively synthesizes all these "myths" by means of the corporeality of language and the concept of bodily image-schemata, thus making his version a lot more plausible and a lot less "mythical" than any other version. More importantly, it makes it the most interesting one, for "if the origin of language is to be sought in the exigencies of the division of labour, and if this myth is effective, it is because language is intimately involved in the division of society into antagonistic classes and in the struggles that produce this division".[33]

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[30] Ibid., p. 107.

[31] Although we have touched upon the relation between language and consciousness continually through this chapter, I will cover that specific topic thoroughly in chapter 3.

[32] Lecercle 2009, p. 146.

[33] Ibid., p. 196.

2.3. The Social Elements of Language

So what specific characteristics make language a profoundly social phenomenon? The myths of its evolution showed us at least one of them: the fact that humans cooperate and live in highly organized societies produces the need for such a form of communication which only language can fulfil; and, vice-versa, the fact that we can speak and utilize language to communicate enables our species to live in communities. The need for language arises only within society, but society itself would not be possible without language. As was mentioned in the introduction, this is a very old thesis, coming from Aristotle. However, its full significance still has to be continually reaffirmed today, as Marx himself was doing one and a half century ago.

> Man is a ζῷον πολίτικον in the most literal sense: he is not only a social animal, but an animal that can isolate itself only within society. Production by an isolated individual outside society – something rare, which might occur when a civilised person already dynamically in possession of the social forces is accidentally cast into the wilderness – is just as preposterous as the development of language without individuals who live *together* and speak to one another.[34]

Mainstream linguistics (discussed in chapter I, Saussure and Chomsky being two of the main representatives) seems to have often been confused by the fact that it is always one single person that speaks, and thus succumbed either to methodological individualism or to some other form of abstraction of language from society. "The linguistic experience is obviously individual (it is I who speak), but, in linguistic matters, this individuality is always-already collective, in the sense that my statements, my language(s), are the historical products of a collective conjuncture".[35]

2.3.1. History

The speaker is born into a language as she is born into a certain community. Speaking a language is not a consequence of social experience "triggering" the speakers biologically inherent capacity to speak, but an "end result" of a long process of learning the language and "inheriting" what the speaker's community has been "creating" for decades, centuries, even millennia. However, although it appears as such at first sight, language is neither a "result" nor is it simply "inherited". "Language cannot properly be said to be handed down – it

[34] Marx 1858, p. 18.

[35] Lecercle 2009, p. 87.

endures, but it endures as a continuous process of becoming. Individuals do not receive a ready-made language at all, rather, they enter upon the stream of verbal communication; indeed only in this stream does their consciousness first begin to operate".[36] Language is a historical process. By learning to speak, the speaker becomes a voice, a member of the community, and in this way she starts participating in the continual recreation of her language. Although this recreation is almost entirely an invisible process for our speaker and her fellow speakers, she is nonetheless a part of it, and by entering into this world she is constantly being formed and is forming herself into a particular voice, into *this* voice: a female's voice, a young or an old voice, a rich or a poor voice, etc. "The real communicative 'products' which are usable signs are [...] living evidence of a continuing social process, into which individuals are born and within which they are shaped, but to which they then also actively contribute, in a continuing process. This is at once their socialization and their individuation: the connected aspects of a single process".[37]

For these reasons, language is the expression not only of current life, but of past lives of an entire community. Traces of epochal historical events, of tragedies, struggles, contact with other communities, desires and hopes which had an impact upon the community are left behind in language, primarily in semantics, but also in syntax, phonetics and all other of its elements. "The history of a language is the history of a global social process, which must be envisaged from the point of view of the social totality: it is the history of a culture, of social classes in their struggles [...]. In other words, the history of language can only be the history of a form of total praxis".[38] Language is a process which connects the various times of a people, since traces of the past continue living in the present.

Gramsci has termed this fascinating phenomenon embodied in language "the metaphoricity" of language. All words bear traces of the past, but some more so than others – although these traces almost always remain hidden from the speaker, since she evokes them without knowing it.

> The whole of language is a continuous process of metaphor, and the history of semantics is an aspect of the history of culture; language is at the same time a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and civilisations. When I use the word 'disaster' no one can accuse me of believing in astrology, and when I say 'by Jove!' no one can assume that I am a worshipper of

[36] Voloshinov 1986, p. 81.

[37] Williams 1977, p. 37.

[38] Lecercle and Riley 2005, p. 117.

> pagan divinities. These expressions are however a proof that modern civilisation is also a development of paganism and astrology.[39]

By speaking its language, the community also gets "spoken" by it, in the "metaphorical" sense which Gramsci explains, where language appears as proof of certain previous socio-historical developments. The historicity of language thus has a dual side, and language has to be grasped in these terms, as simultaneously "constituting the community [...] and constituted by it, in that it sediments its history and expresses it".[40]

All these aspects cover the sense in which language is a profoundly *historical process*. It is never finalized or completed, it is continually reformed. But it is such only because it is *a living activity* of living people, and neglecting that link would strip language of its own vitality. "Language is not a pure medium through which the reality of a life or the reality of an event or an experience or the reality of a society can 'flow'. It is a socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already shared and reciprocal or may become so".[41] This implies a certain form of social practice.

2.3.2. Dialogue or the Social Practice of Language

Every word has a history of its meanings, some of which have not been used for a very long time and are familiar only to etymologists (like the original meaning of Gramsci's "dis-aster"), but some of which survived up to the present day and are the sole reason why a word is still living. Every word has a set of various more or less related (but sometimes outright contrary) meanings, and the reason why we understand which meaning is being referred to in a particular situation is because this is primarily defined by the concrete social and dialogic context in which this is happening.[42] In fact, contextuality is the condition of the possibility of meaning, it is its presupposition, from the micro- to the macro-semantic level. "A word derives its sense from the sentence, which, in turn, gets its sense from the paragraph, the paragraph from the book, the book from all the works of the author".[43] By itself, the word is only a dictionary entry, and essentially meaningless. In comparison, be it through creative

[39] Gramsci 2012b, p. 450. "'Dis-aster' refers to an unfavourable conjunction of the stars". (p. 452, footnote 99.)

[40] Lecercle 2009, p. 92.

[41] Williams 1977, p. 166.

[42] Of course, intonation and facial and bodily expression are also a significant part of it.

[43] Vygotsky 1986, p. 245.

genius of the speaker or mere accident, words can denote completely new meanings in a dialogue, which a dictionary would never ascribe to them.[44] Thus, "words, expressions, propositions, etc., obtain their meaning from the discursive formation in which they are produced".[45]

This implies a vast area and is the core of linguistic practice, and I will follow Bakhtin in calling it *dialogism*.[46] It is a concept used not only by Bakhtin, but also by Voloshinov, who elaborates on it in the following quote: "[d]ialogue, in the narrow sense of the word, is, of course, only one of the forms – a very important form, to be sure – of verbal interaction. But dialogue can also be understood in a broader sense, meaning not only direct, face-to-face, vocalized verbal communication between persons, but also verbal communication of any type whatsoever".[47] Dialogism therefore denotes the *social, contextual determination* of language, the point of which is to emphasize that only as social practice (again, as process), it becomes the living phenomenon we know, unlike the linguistic abstractions discussed in the previous chapter. Language is never a private matter, even when one writes a letter or a book. The reason is that language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention".[48] To emphasize again, since "[m]eaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener produced via the material of a particular sound complex"[49] and not the property of a word, language "is not an abstract system but a human practice, which emerges in social interaction, is transformed by it, and transforms it in turn", i.e. "it is *in* the world and *of* the world".[50]

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[44] As Bourdieu wrote: „The all-purpose word in the dictionary, a product of the neutralization of the practical relations within which it functions, has no social existence: in practice, it is always immersed in situations". (Bourdieu 2012, p. 39.)

[45] Pêcheux 1983, p. 111.

[46] Pêcheux's „discursive formation" is primarily focused on the effects of ideology on discourse, but Bakhtin's "dialogism" can be used to arrive at the question of ideology through a longer theoretical route, covering more questions on the way.

[47] Voloshinov 1986, p. 95.

[48] Bakhtin 2008, p. 293.

[49] Voloshinov 1986, p. 102. In fact, the entire structure of the utterance is significantly determined by the context of this interaction (p. 86).

[50] Lecercle 2009, p. 113.

Furthermore, the moment of practice is not contained merely in the fact that dialogue always implies a speaker, who would then be the sole "active" person, while the listener would simply passively pay attention to the sounds coming out of the speakers mouth. Listening is also an activity, part of the practice of language, because it implies interpreting, the effort to *understand*, which is not just a mental activity of the brain, but also an active "mapping out" of the meaning the other person is trying to convey, which eventually leads to some type of reaction (reply, interruption, counterargument, or even complete silence). "In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement".[51]

The practice of language obviously implies the involvement of at least two or more persons, which opens dialogism to a vast amount of other social factors. If, in that sense, "*word is a two-sided act*" then it is "determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*".[52] Thus, speech is also shaped by the different social backgrounds of the involved, by the relation of power between them (a subordinate worker does not talk to her boss as she would to her co-worker), by their levels of education, by their age, sex and so forth. These are all important aspects of language and show that it is, in fact, linked to wider social phenomena; as any practice, language is ridden with the traces and effects of existing social relations – something we already touched upon with Bourdieu's critique of Saussure, but which we will also turn to in more detail later in the chapter on language and class.[53]

[51] Bakhtin 2008, p. 282.

[52] Voloshinov 1986, p. 96.

[53] Bakhtin's notion of „dialogism" taken by itself is not without faults, and it is precisely the conclusions from this last paragraph that Bakhtin was not able to draw. In short, although Bakhtin's linguistic concepts are profoundly social, they suffer from a form of idealism which conceives them primarily from an ethical standpoint, and which thus fails to link them to wider social phenomena, i.e. social institutions. A critique of Bakhtin's idealism will be conducted in chapter IV.

2.3.3. Non-contemporaneous Temporality

The way language functions as metaphor in relation to its own and its society's history is not only limited to these two aspects (namely, language itself and social history), but is in fact an expression of the way social time in general works. This insight was the achievement of Marx, who broke with the unitary Hegelian conception of linear time and has multiplied it "according to the plural rhythms and cycles of a broken political temporality".[54] This broken temporality is expressed primarily in the functioning and movement of capital,[55] but is also characteristic of all aspects of modern society (in good part by the effects capital has on social relations), which is one of the things Gramsci focuses on in his *Prison Notebooks*. "For Gramsci, the present is necessarily non-identical with itself, composed of numerous 'times' that do not coincide but encounter each other with mutual incomprehension".[56] This is a simple consequence of social practices having each their own temporality, so the present, composed of these temporalities, is necessarily fractured. This can be seen, for example, "in the relations between urban centres and rural peripheries"[57] – life evolves at a different pace in the village than in the city. It is not only perceived differently, it is also *lived* differently, in concrete practice. Furthermore, "[o]n an international level, the hegemonic relationships between different nations consign some social formations to the past 'times' of others".[58] This can be evidenced with the different tempo of development in which certain nations find themselves, which is not, of course, an effect of any essentialist characteristic of a specific nation or people or geographic region (the "backwardness" of the East deployed from an occidental perspective being the most common example), but is a consequence of differing historical experiences.

"The present" is then determined by the conflict between these different temporalities, i.e. the social practices they are typical of. "Rather than being expressive of an essence equally present in all practices, the present for Gramsci is precisely an ensemble of those practices in their different temporalities, struggling to assert their primacy and thus to

[54] Bensaïd 2009, p. 71.

[55] Bensaïd elaborates the economic aspects of this broken temporality by dissecting capital's contradictory way of organizing social time. (Bensaïd 2009, pp. 71-81.)

[56] Thomas 2010, p. 283.

[57] Ibid., p. 285.

[58] Ibid.

articulate the present as an achieved rather than originary unity".[59] In an imperialist global historical context, the occidental perspective of time will impose itself as dominant (since it imposed itself as dominant militarily, politically and economically) and the specific temporality of the East will accordingly be seen as "backward". The same goes for the urban-rural relation, where the temporality of the city is dominant. This "non-contemporaneity of the present in Gramsci is a function and symptomatic index of the struggle between classes. The present, as the time of class struggle, is necessarily and essentially 'out of joint', fractured by the differential times of different class projects".[60] Therefore, "the present", as it is socially manifested in a conventional manner, is merely an end-result of class struggle, where one class succeeded at imposing itself as the dominant or leading class: "the notion of a unified present [...] is a function of the social and political hegemony of one social group seeking to impose its own 'present' as an unsurpassable horizon for all other social groups, an 'absolute horizon' not simply of knowing but also of praxis".[61] By imposing its temporality as the dominant one, the ruling class creates a unified present where all other practices and the perception of social relations are determined by it.

This is why language expresses social time. First and foremost, it is its metaphorical nature, already discussed above, which sediments the non-contemporaneity of social history. "Language itself, for Gramsci, gives ample evidence of the fractured nature of historical time, insofar as its constitutively metaphorical nature reveals layers or sediments of different historical experiences sitting together in an uncomfortable *modus vivendi*".[62] This is expressed within a language by the diversity of meanings of words, of expressions, various constructions etc. This is the most direct link between social time and linguistic time, where traces of times long past are still manifest in existing linguistic forms. Secondly, language expresses social time in the relationships between national languages, between dialects, where each has its own tempo of development, and its own historical times still captured in its present. As in class struggle, be it in its national or its international forms, these struggles between languages

[59] Ibid., p. 284.

[60] Ibid., p. 285.

[61] Ibid., pp. 285-286.

[62] Ibid., p 284. As Gramsci writes, language „is transformed with the transformation of the whole of civilisation, through the acquisition of culture by new classes and through the hegemony exercised by one national language over others, etc., and what it does is precisely to absorb in metaphorical form the words of previous civilisations and cultures". (Gramsci 2012b, pp. 451-452.)

leave traces and scars of victories and defeats, not only in the assimilation of foreign words, but also in the social status of languages and dialects. Thirdly, the various elements of language itself are structured according to different temporalities, which means that "the temporality of change in a given language is complex and uneven, because the various elements that make up a language develop at different speeds".[63] As Vygotsky termed it, "[b]oth the inner, meaningful, semantic aspect of speech and the internal, phonetic aspect, though forming a true unity, have their own laws of movement".[64] Morphophonology and semantics are often the first to reflect social change (things like current social trends of any form expressed in language), whereby syntax requires significantly more time to change than any other aspect of language. This is analogous to the way various parts of the social structure change, with various speeds and various autonomy of change – with the emphasis that the temporalities of and relations between the political conjuncture, the relations of production, the dominant religious and ideological forms etc. is far more complex.

Thus, "the temporality of language, which is certainly not captured by the usual dichotomy, 'synchrony vs diachrony', [...] is always out of joint, and language is the site for indefinite layers of sedimentation".[65] These are the reasons why language is the expression of social time: it is multi-layered, non-contemporaneous, contradictory and is ridden with relations of domination and subordination; that is, it is comprised of various layers each of which stems from a different historical time and each of which has its own internal temporality, which creates internal contradictions and whereby some layers are in a dominant position over others. Language truly "breathes" socially, but this link remains merely a formal one as long as we do not consider its true place within the social structure, as well as its role in the shaping of thoughts and actions of men – and show that the one (its place) is necessarily connected with the other (its role). If we wish to better understand living language, language as social practice – the only real form in which it exists – we need to better understand the society which it is a part of.[66]

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[63] Lecercle 2009, p. 153.

[64] Vygotsky 1986, p. 218.

[65] Lecercle and Riley 2005, pp. 71-72.

[66] I do not wish to leave the impression that the fundamental question already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter – namely, the determination of language by the material conditions of life and the social relations of production – has been forgotten. It has been left out intentionally, for now, since it will make more sense to discuss this issue later, when some other related and important issues will come to the forefront.

Chapter III

Language, Consciousness and Ideology

To discuss consciousness in general (and in relation to language in particular) is to open a theoretical Pandora's box. It is not just the age-old battle between idealism and materialism, but also a battle of various types of materialism, from the vulgar-economist version to the (equally vulgar) positivistic version, which is the dominant perspective today (at least when it comes to theorizing consciousness). It is not enough to simply repeat Marx's well-known quote: "[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness".[1] While the quote may serve as a guiding line to our own approach in this discussion, Marx had his own historical context and theoretical opponents, so it is necessary to consider the manifold implications of Marx's conception of consciousness and ideology.

3.1. Lev Vygotsky's Difficult Task

As it was pointed out with David McNally in the previous chapter, there are multiple reasons why it would be wrong to theoretically conflate language and consciousness. Lev Vygotsky was practically the first to devote his entire research to this question – the result of which is his book *Thought and Language* – and who tried to combat not only the "conflation-approach", but also the positivistic approach of his time. He did this in a theoretically truly inspiring way, staying faithful to his roots (his work is a work of psychology without a doubt), but never neglecting the various other aspects of the phenomena he was trying to understand and explain. That was the difficulty of his task: conceiving language and consciousness both psychologically and socially, in order to refute, at the same time, the theses of psychologism, vulgar materialism and a latent idealism present in the Bakhtin school, and preserve what I term the "interdependent autonomy" of both language and consciousness.

3.1.1. Contra Piaget

Vygotsky's method was common to more or less all psychologists of his time (and is definitely not obsolete today): the confirmation for study of language and consciousness was

[1] Marx 1859, p. 263. In the English translation in the MECW, „Sein" is translated as „existence". I preferred to change that to a version closer to the original. For the German original text, see: MEW, Band 13, p. 9.

sought in the development of a child, i.e. ontogeny. Accordingly, his primary theoretical opponent was Jean Piaget, one of the biggest names in developmental psychology of that time. Right at the start of the chapter on Piaget, Vygotsky does not refrain from a critically reserved statement on Piaget.

> Piaget [...] did not escape the duality characteristic of psychology in the age of crisis. He tried to hide behind the wall of facts, but facts 'betrayed' him, for they led to problems. Problems gave birth to theories, in spite of Piaget's determination to avoid them by closely following the experimental facts and disregarding for the time being that the very choice of experiments is determined by hypotheses. But facts are always examined in the light of some theory and therefore cannot be disentangled from philosophy.[2]

Piaget's approach suffered from one typical characteristic of positivism: by focusing exclusively on empirical "facts", he completely neglected meta-theory, refusing to conceptualize a philosophy of his approach, or at least a set of general propositions. Thus, he actually worked unknowingly under the auspice of an incoherent, contradictory philosophy of science.

In concrete terms, this manifested in Piaget neglecting the social factors of ontogeny (which, for us, is already a familiar story).[3] Piaget conceptualizes the development of consciousness in the child in three stages: (1) autistic thought, where there is no consciousness and the child exhibits merely subconscious behaviour; (2) egocentric thought, where the child succeeds in expressing desires in an undeveloped and simple way; (3) directed or logical thought, which is completely social.[4] The point here is that Piaget sees egocentric thought as more closely linked to autistic thought than to directed thought, since it still shows the child's incapability to adapt to the social world. However, Vygotsky shows that "[t]he cognitive function of egocentric speech, which is probably connected with the development of inner speech, by no means is a reflection of the child's egocentric thinking, but rather shows that under certain circumstances egocentric speech is becoming an agent of realistic thinking".[5] Accordingly, "[e]gocentric speech emerges when the child transfers social, collaborative forms of behaviour to the sphere of inner-personal psychic functions".[6] The child showing what it wants to his mother is the first, most basic, primitive social act, in that the child

[2] Vygotsky 1986, p. 15.

[3] Cf. Chapter I.

[4] Piaget 1959, p. 43.

[5] Vygotsky 1986, p. 33.

[6] Ibid., p. 35.

internalized a gesture learned by perceiving the social world around it. This brings us back to Tran Duc Thao's indicative gesture, and reconfirms that this gesture is profoundly social. Vygotsky's perspective is thus quite different from Piaget's, since his "schema of development – first social, then egocentric, then inner speech – contrasts both with the traditional behaviourist schema – vocal speech, whisper, inner speech – and with Piaget's sequence – from non-verbal autistic thought through egocentric thought and speech to socialized speech and logical thinking", which implies that "the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual".[7]

The reason why Piaget fails to see the social character of what he calls egocentric thought is that he cannot accept that the child's practical activity necessarily has effects for his development, i.e. he "argues that 'things do not shape a child's mind'. But we have seen that in real situations when the egocentric speech of a child is connected with his practical activity, things do shape his mind. Here, by 'things' we mean reality, neither as passively reflected in the child's perception nor as abstractly contemplated, but reality that a child encounters in his practical activity".[8] Furthermore, Piaget does not want to and cannot come to this simple conclusion, because he considers philosophizing dangerous, because it can bring theorists to unwarranted generalizations. But, as Vygotsky rightfully notes, "in spite of his express intention to avoid theorizing, Piaget does not succeed in keeping his work within the bounds of pure factual science. *Deliberate avoidance of philosophy is itself a philosophy*".[9]

Another consequence of Piaget's approach is a form of biologism, essentially still existing today in neuropsychology and similar reductionist approaches to consciousness. For Piaget, social factors "penetrate the child's psychological substance, but substance in itself is determined by autistic, biological factors. Piaget does not see a child as a part of the social whole".[10] This leads to a fatal conclusion, which presents the child as a being split in two irreconcilable halves: one biological, the other social, each with its own internal rules.

> The principal conclusion made here by Piaget, and further developed in his later works, portrays the child's life as existing in a dual reality. The first of these realities corresponds to the child's original, inherent, and natural intelligence; the second one appears as a product of

[7] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[8] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[9] Ibid., p. 41. My emphasis.

[10] Ibid., p. 45.

> the logical forms of thinking forced upon the child from outside. These two realities are incompatible; each has a logic of its own that 'protests loudly' at being coupled with that of the other.[11]

Thus, disregarding social practice proves again to be theoretically detrimental, and worse still, because of a positivistic conception of theory – similar to Saussure, who rather had a positivistic "ambition" than a conception, but that ended leading him in the similar direction in his linguistics.

3.1.2. The Interdependent Autonomy of Language and Consciousness

What, then, is Vygotsky's understanding of the relation between language and consciousness? We may recall McNally's concept of "bodily image-schemata", which denote a corporeal "capability" of pattern recognition, or, to put it succinctly, cognizing by perceiving corporeally. Bodily image-schemata have developed independently of language, but have contributed to its evolution, determining its structure. Vygotsky comes to a very similar conclusion by comparing the data both of phylogeny and ontogeny of his time. Both sets of data lead him to a set of conclusions:

> 1. In their ontogenetic development, thought and speech have different roots. 2. In the speech development of the child, we can with certainty establish a preintellectual stage, and in his thought development, a prelinguistic stage. 3. Up to a certain point of time, the two follow different lines, independently of each other. 4. At a certain point these lines meet, whereupon thought becomes verbal, and speech rational.[12]

Thought and speech can be conceived as "intersecting circles", which only partially overlap. The overlapping area signifies "verbal thought", but that does not "include all forms of thought or all forms of speech. There is a vast area of thought that has no direct relation to speech. The thinking manifested in the use of tools belongs in this area, as does practical intellect in general".[13] This would precisely be the area of McNally's bodily image-schemata, or at least of their traces. "Vygotsky does not conflate language and practical intelligence. Each is a distinctive cognitive activity with roots in animal behavior; what is uniquely human is the form of their convergence".[14]

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[11] Ibid., p. 46.

[12] Vygotsky 1986, p. 83.

[13] Ibid., p. 88.

[14] McNally 2001, p. 96.

So the development of thought and language do not coincide, but meet each other at one point, "even merge for a time, but they always diverge again".[15] What do these intersecting paths look like then? Essentially, the emergence of verbal thought is made possible primarily by the intellectual development of our organism, i.e. our body (which produces the capacity for bodily image-schemata), but the social practice of a child is what enables the development of the highly organised structure of language. At the moment when they merge into verbal thought, "the speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of his thinking", the consequence of which is that the further development of thought is now "determined by language, i.e. by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child".[16] Thus, what in effect happens is that the development of the child changes both pace and structure: "*[t]he nature of the development itself changes*, from biological to sociohistorical".[17] The development of verbal thought is composed of two components with differing temporalities and structures, but which intersect and interact in such a dialectical way that they enable its emergence, changing their relation of dominance as that happens.

Since bodily image-schemata is a form of thinking in complexes, while language is rather thinking in concepts, this contradiction manifests itself both ontogenetically and phylogenetically when "new phenomena or objects are named after inessential attributes, so that the name does not truly express the nature of the thing named", the result of which is "a ceaseless struggle within the developing language between conceptual thought and the heritage of primitive thinking in complexes".[18] An example from phylogeny Vygotsky gives are the two Russian words for moon, whose "different thought processes" are "clearly reflected in their etymology. One term derives from the Latin word connoting 'caprice, inconstancy, fancy'. It was obviously meant to stress the changing form that distinguishes the moon from the other celestial bodies. The originator of the second term, which means 'measurer', had no doubt been impressed by the fact that time could be measured by lunar phases".[19] Similarly, the child's first words signify an entire set of objects totally incompatible from an adult's perspective, since she relates them through complexes. As the child's

[15] Vygotsky 1986, p. 68.

[16] Ibid., p. 94.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 132.

[19] Ibid., p. 131.

linguistic capacities develop, her words start becoming more particular and less and less general, which shows how a way of thinking in concepts is becoming dominant. Therefore, the meaning of a single word changes throughout the development of the child. To make an example of our own, "ball" might firstly signify all objects the child plays with, whereby after some time, the meaning will refer only to the round object all adults call "ball".

> In mastering external speech, the child starts from one word, then connects two or three words; [...] in other words, he proceeds from a part to the whole. In regard to meaning, on the other hand, the first word of the child is a whole sentence. Semantically, the child starts from the whole, from a meaningful complex, and only later begins to master the separate semantic units, the meanings of words.[20]

However, Vygotsky warns us that "[i]t would be erroneous [...] to imagine that this transition from complexes to concepts is a mechanical process in which the higher developmental stage completely supersedes the lower one. [...] Different genetic forms coexist in thinking, just as different rock formations coexist in the earth's crust".[21] As we saw in the previous chapter, this is also the fundamental way how not only language, but also the present is structured: it is always composed of non-contemporaneous layers. "Developmentally late forms coexist in behaviour with younger formations".[22] Thus, the roots of language in both bodily image-schemata and social practice add another non-contemporaneous moment to language, since "our daily speech constantly fluctuates between the ideal of mathematical harmony and imaginative harmony".[23]

Finally, how do we then conceptualize the relation between word and thought? It would obviously be a major error to equate the two. In fact, if we were to define the relation statically, we would be repeating the reductionist error: "the relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought".[24] Furthermore, "the structure of speech does not simply mirror the structure of thought", which we learned through the difference of concepts and complexes, social practice and bodily image-schemata; "that is why words cannot be put on by thought like a ready-made garment. Thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech. It does not

[20] Ibid., pp. 218-219.

[21] Ibid., p 140.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p. 221.

[24] Ibid., p. 218.

merely find expression in speech; it finds its reality and form".[25] The grammar and syntax of words is not identical to the grammar and syntax of thoughts. Their identity is an eternal striving of human verbal expression. Their complete un-identity, however, does happen, which is "especially obvious when a thought process miscarries – when, as Dostoevsky puts it, a thought 'will not enter words'".[26]

But in spite of this never-to-be-achieved identity – in fact, precisely *because* of it – understanding language also implies delving deeper into consciousness. To think discussing language only without discussing consciousness is possible would be a type of reductionist formalism. How and what people talk, although it is not identical to, is definitely indicative of how and what people think. "Consciousness is reflected in a word as the sun in a drop of water. A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness".[27]

3.2. The Historicity of Sense Perception

We can further draw out the implications of Vygotsky's insights by showing how even sense perception is not purely biological, but also involves the dialectic between bodily image-schemata and social practice that Vygotsky so thoroughly explained. Writing about art, Walter Benjamin pointed this out in his *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*: "[d]uring long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well".[28] In the previous chapter, we have seen on the example of the Bantu and the Pygmies how social and historical factors significantly determine how a certain environment is perceived by different peoples. The different way of interacting with nature and the different social relations between individuals lead to different (in the latter case, completely opposite) ways of perceiving nature. But on the basis of other examples in anthropology, we can show that not only the way of perceiving, but also that even *what is being perceived and what is not*, i.e. sense perception itself, is determined by socio-historical factors.

[25] Ibid., p. 219.

[26] Ibid., p. 249.

[27] Ibid., p. 256.

[28] Benjamin 2007, p. 222.

In his *The Social Construction of the Ocean*, Philip Steinberg explores how different peoples perceive the ocean, or ocean-space, and links that with their specific way of life (their material conditions of life and their socio-economic relations). The modern Western societies perceive ocean-space primarily through the prism of its economic exploitability, i.e. a source of resources (food, oil) and a transport surface, which is an obvious corollary of capitalism.[29] The societies of the Indian Ocean between 5th century B.C. and 15th century A.D. conceived ocean-space merely as a "great void", a separating space between societies, a distance to be passed during trade or travel. It was a hostile space which exists in opposition to social space.[30] This, of course, still remains quite directly evident within the example of the Bantu and the Pygmies: the same environment (the rainforest) is ascribed different values and meanings in accordance to how the life of the communities relates to that environment.

However, things become particularly interesting with the example of Micronesia. The societies of Micronesia are different from the very start: they do not live only on land, but on the ocean as well, which is dictated by the geographic characteristics of the area which they inhabit, namely, an area of thousands of tiny islands separated by open sea. Micronesia spans "a portion of ocean-space approximately the size of the continental United States, but with a land-area of just over 900 square miles (2330 square kilometres)".[31] Living exclusively *on* and *of* land would be impossible. The Micronesian societies had to learn to live *with* the ocean in order to survive. For them, therefore, "the ocean is seen primarily as a resource provider, divided into distinct places, much as continental residents view their land-space. The sea provides food, transportation, communication, and even shelter during extreme storms when island homes must be evacuated".[32] Unlike the Western perception of ocean-space as a "non-place", for the Micronesians, "the sea is anything but 'empty'".

The primary role of the ocean for the Micronesians is a "connecting-space", not only for trading, but also – and maybe more so – for travel, be it of a private or communal character. The Micronesian "attitude toward the canoe resonates with the American attitude toward the automobile",[33] and the Micronesians will often embark on a journey of "island-hopping" of two to three weeks for no particular reason, perhaps merely wanting to visit other

[29] Steinberg 2001, chapters 4 and 5.

[30] Ibid, pp. 41-52.

[31] Ibid., p. 52.

[32] Ibid., p. 53.

[33] Ibid.

island-communities or individuals. The Micronesian perception of ocean-space is analogous to the Western perception of a highway: the ocean-space is full of "places", landmarks (a particular reef functions as a road-sign), routes, and it is not the traveller that is perceived as moving, but rather, the places themselves. This is the specific Micronesian "mental framework", as Steinberg calls it, in relation to ocean-space: "the canoe is represented as fixed in space while the islands, the stars, and the sea itself pass by in the reverse direction".[34] Of course, the knowledge of this spatial web of signs and highways is for the Micronesians social, communal knowledge: it is common to them as it is for us to learn to drive a car and to recognize the road-signs directing us to the destination which we want to reach. The way Micronesians experience travel on ocean-space is thus remarkably fascinating.

> Like the Western highway traveller, the Micronesian navigator notes previous routes travelled, present points of reference, and future landmarks ahead. He uses a comprehensive set of directions and routes memorized since childhood. He might, for instance, know that his destination island lies under Star A. Because of the specific ocean currents prevailing at this time of the year, he should aim for Star B. However, if, when Star C is at a certain point in the sky, he sees a reef on his right and *he feels a leeward ocean current on his boat*, he will know that he has drifted off course and that he should aim for Star D to compensate. But as long as he is over the reef, he may want to drop a line, because this 'rest area' is known to be particularly abundant in a prized variety of fish.[35]

Thus, the specific material conditions of life of the Micronesians did not determine only the specific social values they attribute to ocean-space (in contradistinction to the Western societies or the ones living on the Indian Ocean in the past); they also determined *how* they perceive movement and *what* they perceive while they are travelling. Micronesians can feel ocean currents on their boat – something Western navigators generally cannot. Of course, they both share the same bodily image-schemata and do posses the biological capabilities to develop such a mode of sense perception. But the reason why the Micronesians have developed it, and the Western peoples have not, lies in the social and historical differences between the two. This is merely to prove Vygotsky's dialectical approach to the relationship between biological and social factors, whereby the biological ones set the possibilities of development, but the social ones prevail in that they determine the selection and the direction of development – be it of "verbal thought" or of sense perception.

[34] Ibid., p. 56.

[35] Ibid., p. 54. My emphasis.

3.3. Valentin Voloshinov, the Dialectician

3.3.1. An Unfinished Dialectic

All theoretical works bare marks of the historical context in which they were made, but pertains to Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* even more than that is normally the case. It is hard to say if his work was motivated by the need to refute all the theories of language he held to be mistaken, or to formulate one that he deemed correct: a historical-materialist one. We have already seen what Voloshinov's critique of Saussure was,[36] but that is merely one of the currents he criticizes, which he names "abstract objectivism". The other is "individualistic subjectivism", whose main representatives are Croce and Vossler (and Humboldt being a proto-representative). The problem of both of these currents is that they approach language from diametrically opposite extremes, and therefore they both neglect an essential part of language: "where Saussure brackets the use of language, *parole*, and declares that it is not the subject of linguistics as science, Croce and Vossler do the opposite. They privilege *parole* and neglect those attributes which systematically relate individual speech expressions".[37] For them, language is merely a form of expression at the individual's disposal, completely determined by him and his "inner creativity". "Croce, Vossler and Humboldt all see language as the movement from something expressible that initiates in the inner depths of the psyche (whether individual or communal) and is expressed on the outer surface of perceptible sound that is language".[38] This implies a dualism of psyche (or "inner soul") on the one hand and language on the other. Just as abstract objectivism, individualistic subjectivism falsely divides "form and content".[39]

The various theories and philosophies of language of Voloshinov's time all commit the formally same mistakes: by starting from a rigid dichotomy, a static dualism, which they perceive as an irreconcilable contradiction, they end up bowing only to the one of the two moments of the antinomy, which they for certain reasons deemed more important or determinant. Abstract objectivism and individualistic subjectivism are not the only one

[36] Cf. chapter 1.1.5.

[37] Ives, 2004a, p. 69.

[38] Ibid., p. 70.

[39] Ibid.

Voloshinov mentions: idealism and psychological positivism,[40] "naive mechanistic materialism", biologism, behaviourism, reflexological psychology,[41] etc. all find themselves under the same critical razor. By submitting the basic presuppositions of these schools of thought to a historical-materialist critique, he exposes the dualisms of material/ideal, individual/social, psyche/ideology that underlie all of them. Voloshinov struggled to dissolve these dualisms by showing that they are only moments of a dialectic movement. "Voloshinov's point is not that these distinctions are entirely false. Rather, following Hegel and Marx in this regard, he sees them as having a limited truth, as describing 'moments' or aspects of real phenomena but as betraying their partiality and incompleteness whenever they are treated as self-sufficient terms which depict phenomena in their full complexity".[42]

However, as McNally notes, one antinomy managed to slip into Voloshinov's own conception of language. It is my opinion that the determinant factor for this is to be found precisely in the fact that he was struggling so hard to refute a specific approach to consciousness dominant at that time, namely, what he rightfully termed "psychological positivism" (which considered almost exclusively biological aspects of consciousness, neglecting social ones completely). He came to an unusually undialectical stance for him: biological factors bare no importance in the formation or functioning of consciousness. In effect, by trying to prove that "consciousness cannot be derived directly from nature"[43] (which was the thesis of psychological positivism), biology became an anathema for Voloshinov.

We have seen, through the contributions of McNally and Vygotsky,[44] that the formation of empirical complexes or bodily image-schemata is the precondition for the formation of consciousness, whose structure and way of functioning then determined the formation of language, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. Of course, these image-schemata, as was emphasized, develop through practice, but they are still fundamentally corporeal. Voloshinov refuses to come to this and introduces a distinction of natural

[40] For idealism, the locus of consciousness „is somewhere above existence and it determines the latter", whereby „[f]or psychological positivism, on the contrary, consciousness amounts to nothing: it is just a conglomeration of fortuitous, psycho-physiological reactions". (Voloshinov 1986, p. 12.)

[41] Voloshinov 1986, p. 13.

[42] McNally 2001, p. 119.

[43] Voloshinov 1986, p. 13.

[44] Cf. chapters 2.2.2. and 3.1.

phenomenon/sign, whereby the former is non-social, and the latter non-natural, and this distinction then "operates as a static opposition".[45] "The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group. If we deprive consciousness of its semiotic, ideological content, it would have absolutely nothing left",[46] i.e. there are no natural aspects of consciousness. Vygotsky and McNally showed that the natural is present in consciousness in the form of a "silently present" organizing principle, which surely is not the only one, nor the dominant one. In fact, as we saw, Vygotsky claims that social practice, particularly the practice of language, ascertains its dominance over the biological aspects in the development and functioning of consciousness very early on. But since Voloshinov is so driven to smash the central theses of psychological positivism (and partially individual subjectivism, which finds the centre of linguistic expression in the self), he is not ready to concede even on that point. "Only the inarticulate cry of an animal is really organized from inside the physiological apparatus of an individual creature".[47] Voloshinov leaves no room for doubts on his position on this matter.

> *The reality of the inner psyche is the same reality as that of the sign*. Outside the material of signs there is no psyche; there are physiological processes, processes in the nervous system, but no subjective psyche as a special existential quality fundamentally distinct from both the physiological processes occurring within the organism and the reality encompassing the organism from outside, to which the psyche reacts and which one way or another it reflects. By its very existential nature, the subjective psyche is to be localized somewhere between the organism and the outside world, on the borderline separating these two spheres of reality. It is here that an encounter between the organism and the outside world takes place, but the encounter is not a physical one: *the organism and the outside world meet here in the sign*.[48]

It is only through signifying activity that any experience is at all possible. An assumption which even at first glance seems implausible. But, nevertheless, Voloshinov maintains that "*experience exists even for the person undergoing it only in the material of signs*. Outside that material there is no experience as such".[49] Vygotsky showed that thought and language never completely overlap, they are never identical. If we visualize them as circles, there exists an area of their intersection, which is verbal thought, but there are always parts of thought which

[45] McNally 2001, p. 119.

[46] Voloshinov 1986, p. 13.

[47] Ibid., p. 93.

[48] Ibid., p. 26.

[49] Ibid., p. 28.

are non-verbal and parts of language which are non-intellectual. Thus, some thoughts are simply inexpressible, or at least, sometimes fail to be expressed. For Voloshinov, this is not possible. If all experience is lived through the sign, then it follows that "*any experience is expressible*, i.e., is potential expression. Any thought, any emotion, any willed activity is expressible. This factor of expressivity cannot be argued away from experience without forfeiting the very nature of experience".[50]

Therefore, in spite of – and, in my opinion, because of – his effort to refute theories based on antinomies which they were unable or unwilling to solve dialectically, Voloshinov, ironically, ended up in the same blind alley when he came to the question of nature and the human body. "Voloshinov does not absorb nature into society. But rather than showing their interrelationship – how society is naturally conditioned and nature socially mediated – he, too, draws rigid boundaries between the two. Some phenomena are natural, biological and animal in nature; others are social, historical, and human in character. The result is that each sphere serves as a limiting concept for the other: society is the nonnatural, nature is the nonsocial".[51] For us, this is an already familiar mistake of not recognizing the fundamental corporeality of language and consciousness. However, we are nonetheless greatly indebted to Voloshinov to this day not only for showing which approaches to language and consciousness "miss the point", but also in outlining the basic principles of a historical-materialist theory of language.

3.3.2. The Ideological Sign

Voloshinov starts with a short essay on the sign and a series of several very succinct theses. Every sign (not only a word, but any sign whatsoever) is a bearer of meaning, it represents something; meaning "is a function of sign".[52] Since "[e]everything ideological possesses *meaning*", it follows that "*[w]ithout sign there is no ideology*".[53] Signs are, of course, through and through social: they could not even be imagined outside of society, since they are born within society and can be bearers of meaning solely within concrete social practice. This is evidenced in the history of their use, which every sign bares the traces of (just as we have noted earlier with the metaphoricity of words). "The socio-historical embeddedness of symbolic tools implies that signs carry their previous use with them without having entirely

[50] Ibid.

[51] McNally 2001, p. 121.

[52] Voloshinov 1986, p. 28.

[53] Ibid., p. 9.

fixed meanings. Signs are in this view seen as an open meaning resource; their actual meaning can only emerge in situated, specific social interaction".[54] Obviously, words are signs themselves, since "[w]hat makes a word a word is its meaning",[55] and thus words bear the same characteristics of all signs: (1) they appear and function as *bearers of meaning within social practice*, i.e. their birth and their life are inextricably linked with social life; (2) since each evoked word has a meaning, words also represent a certain standpoint, certain values, beliefs, etc., i.e. they are *ideological*. "In actuality, we never say or hear words, we say and hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on. *Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behaviour or ideology*".[56]

If we bear in mind everything we have learned so far about language and consciousness, these Voloshinov's propositions stimulate one to try and relate the ideological aspect of language with consciousness. This is precisely what Voloshinov does. We can foresee Voloshinov's move by remembering Vygotsky's claim that, as a child develops, language becomes more and more dominant in forming consciousness and in determining how it functions. A person is being formed only insofar as the child starts manifesting its consciousness socially, i.e. in linguistic and social practice. "*[C]onsciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs*".[57] It is only then a *viable fact* because consciousness that is not socially expressed is nothing at all, that is, it is – and here Voloshinov is completely right against psychological positivism and commits no error of overemphasis – merely a set of psycho-physiological processes in the brain. "Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws".[58] This process is certainly not passive, in the sense that ideological content would simply be copied, as if the individual was a copy-machine. Obviously, if it were so, neither individuals, nor society as we know it, would exist. Thus, it is an active process, where meanings are analyzed, submitted to vigorous reinterpretation, maybe distorted etc. Every word, just as "every outer ideological sign, of whatever kind, is

[54] Bostad et al. 2004, p. 7 (Introduction).

[55] Voloshinov 1986, p. 26.

[56] Ibid., p. 70.

[57] Ibid., p. 11.

[58] Ibid., p. 13.

engulfed in and washed over by inner signs – by the consciousness. The outer sign originates from this sea of inner signs and continues to abide there, since its life is a process of renewal as something to be understood, experienced, and assimilated, i.e., its life consists in its being engaged ever anew into the inner context".[59] During this process of social expression, where words and their meanings are being internalized, the ideological content of words also becomes internalized, in a specifically individual way. "Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction".[60] Thus, with Voloshinov, we come to language as the concrete link between social practice and an individual, between society, its specific socio-ideological contours and the formation of a persona. "*The individual consciousness is a social-ideological fact*".[61]

Voloshinov emphasizes that meaning, and, accordingly, its ideological content, are not fixed in the word for all time. They are always historically and socially variant and fundamentally dialogical (linguistically intersubjective): "linguistic expressions do not have pregiven, invariant meanings, but can best be characterized as relatively open meaning resources which have sedimented and crystallized in social practices of a given community and that attain a specific meaning only when used in intersubjective action in which the interlocutors try to adapt to each other's unique perspectives".[62] No word has one meaning, not even at one point of time. Instead, it is the social situation within which it is evoked that determines its meaning. "The meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context. In fact, there are as many meanings of a word as there are contexts of its usage".[63] However, this does not mean that language would be a poststructuralist "sea of differences",[64] and that the word would cease to be a single entity. Besides, if any word could mean anything, it would be the same as if every word would mean nothing. What gives a word its unity is not only "the unity of its phonetic composition", but also the specific "set of meanings" ascribed to it, which is best exemplified by the dictionary word. We might, with Lähteenmäki, call this set of meanings of a word its specific "meaning potentials", from which a certain meaning is being

[59] Ibid., p. 33.

[60] Ibid., p. 11.

[61] Ibid., p. 12.

[62] Lähteenmäki 2004, p. 96.

[63] Voloshinov 1986, p. 79.

[64] McNally 2001, p. 115.

formed during the practice of speech. That does not mean, however, that a word is reducible to its meaning potentials. On the contrary, a word is solely the living meaning which emerges within speech, and which the word carries. In short, "when we say that actual meanings are emergent from meaning potentials, we mean that actual meanings that arise – or are jointly created – in the interaction between social agents are necessarily novel and unique and, therefore, cannot be reduced to meaning potentials, although meaning potentials are constitutive of actual meanings".[65]

What determines the meaning potentials of a word are the social contexts in which it was and is being used. "Contexts do not stand side by side in a row, as if unaware of one another, but are in a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict".[66] The most common contexts of a word's usage are in conflict because the meaning specific to each of those contexts is always trying to assert itself as the only valid one, be it on the basis of logic, reason, political correctness, aesthetics, etc. The outcome of this conflict is then further determined by the social and historical context in which it takes place. "Every context, in other words, is intercontextual; it refers to other contexts of meaning. It follows that language is a dynamic field of unique contexts, competing and conflicting evaluations and accents. Yet these contexts, evaluations and accents are not radically separate; they are in continual interaction, and this interaction constitutes the linguistic sphere".[67]

It is this linguistic sphere, then, with all its dynamics, that is the site of the formation of individual consciousness. Saying that this formation is ideological should be superfluous by now, since we tried to show, following Voloshinov's insights, that it is ideological by definition. By conceiving the word as a sign, the sign as a bearer of meaning, meaning as inherently ideological, Voloshinov conceptualized the word as ideological sign and language as, effectively, an ever-changing ideological process. What is even more important, Voloshinov linked the formation of consciousness with language, and, by that, with social practice. Thanks to that theoretical move, Voloshinov set the stage for a materialist perspective of language as world-view.

[65] Lähteenmäki 2004, p. 100.

[66] Voloshinov 1986, p. 80.

[67] McNally 2001, p. 115.

3.4. Language as World-View

We suddenly find ourselves in a completely new theoretical horizon: by fighting our way through the misconceptions of mainstream linguistics and the dominant philosophy of language, by showing, in contradistinction to them, that language is a social practice and a historical process, and, finally, that it plays an essential role in the formation of consciousness and the bearing of meanings, i.e. ideology, we can start delving deeper into the numerous implications of these insights. The first one could be formulated as follows: "the way one speaks indicates not only the way one thinks and feels, but also the way one expresses oneself, the way one makes others understand and feel".[68] Language is not only a set of values and beliefs, but also a specific way one approaches the world, by expressing oneself in that language, and by perceiving the world through it. Language possesses this dual character because it is a "bridge" between the individual consciousness and society, being a product of both at the same time.

This conception of language as world-view can be found both in Gramsci and in Bakhtin, with a remarkable amount of very similar formulations between them. This starting point is a very important point of convergence between Gramsci and Bakhtin, as I will try to show, but, as we shall see, one of them was not as successful in tracing all the further implications of it as was the other, which will inevitably bring us to their points of divergence. But to start with the first point, it really is not difficult to find places in both authors which come down to the claim of language as world-view (and many have already showed this).[69] For example, in his *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin writes the following: "[w]e are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion".[70] In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci writes something astonishingly similar. He claims that language "is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content", and, a bit further, that in language, "there is contained a specific conception of the world".[71] Both of them emphasize what language is not: for Bakhtin, it is not "a system of abstract grammatical categories"; for Gramsci, it is not "a totality [...] of words grammatically devoid of content". What they are both emphatically distancing themselves from is the

[68] Gramsci 2012a, p. 129.

[69] Cf. Ives 2004a, Brandist 1996a and 1996b, just to name a few.

[70] Bakhtin 2008, p. 271.

[71] Gramsci 2012b, p. 323.

abstractions of Saussurean linguistics, which we have dealt with in chapter 1.1. The reason behind this is to be found precisely in their understanding of language as a living socio-historical process, which is completely incompatible with the conception of language as static and synchronic system.[72] If we are then to focus further on these two references and try to see how both of the authors conceive of what language *is*, we shall start unravelling the threads of this new horizon achieved by the concept of language as world-view.

(1) Language is "ideologically saturated" (Bakhtin); a "totality of determined notions and concepts" (Gramsci). "Determined" here stands for socially and historically determined, i.e. precisely "ideologically saturated", in the sense which Voloshinov taught us all words are saturated. (2) Language as "a world view, even as a concrete opinion" (Bakhtin); "a specific conception of the world" (Gramsci). How a person talks is indicative of how she thinks and how she perceives the world in accordance to those thoughts, as Vygotsky taught us. We see, therefore, that both for Bakhtin and Gramsci, language refers to, belongs to and explains both social and individual phenomena. At the one hand, language is a social and historical process, always changing the contours of its specific ideological saturation; on the other hand, it is a practice, it lives only because certain people use it, whereby they themselves are also spoken by it (expressed through it). It is these two sides that language as world-view always encompasses at the same time.

> It seems that one can say that 'language' is essentially a collective term which does not presuppose any single thing existing in time and space. Language also means culture and philosophy (if only at the level of common sense) and therefore the fact of 'language' is in reality a multiplicity of facts more or less organically coherent and co-ordinated. At the limit it could be said that every speaking being has a personal language of his own, that is his own particular way of thinking and feeling.[73]

So language simultaneously opens the door both of a social problematic and an individual one, but exactly in the sense that the social and individual are most vividly connected and even entangled to incomprehension *within* language. If a person speaks a certain language, she does so because she was born in and lives in a certain society or a social group. With this group she shares not only her language, but also (in most cases) her world-

[72] I have showed in chapter 1.1.4., *pace* Carlucci, that there are no significant „similarities" between Gramsci and Saussure, but that, quite on the contrary, their conceptions of language almost completely diverge. If the reader was not convinced then, I hope that the forthcoming chapters will definitely succeed in that.

[73] Gramsci 2012b, p. 349.

view. We can now finally make explicit the problems which the concept of language as world-view entails: on what basis does the difference between the various languages of various social groups emerge?; are these linguistic differences in some way related to social differences?; if they are related, how does the higher or lower social status of groups reflect itself on the social status of their language?; are the dialects of a national language somehow indicative of the classes which compose that nation?; what is the role and history of national languages, and what can we learn from them?; are specific practices of specific social groups somehow related to their language?; how do various languages interact when they are in contact?; and so on and so forth.

But the most important question, of which all the former ones are sub-questions, is what can language teach us of the relationship between people's thoughts, expressed in their language, and their actions? Does the way a person talks (and, consequently, how she thinks and feels) somehow explain the way she acts in life, and vice-versa, do a person's actions (her practice) somehow explain the way she talks and what she thinks? Finally, is there a certain dominant way most people speak and think in the modern societies of contemporary history?

> In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting. We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man. The question is this: of what historical type is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs?[74]

What can language tell us of the "mass humanity" of today? Obviously, this involves a plethora of further problems and requires additional research of wider social phenomena. But that is precisely what we aimed for, just as Bakhtin and Gramsci did, in their own ways. "Languages are philosophies – not abstract, but concrete, social philosophies penetrated by a system of values inseparable from living practice and class struggle".[75] Through showing the various mechanisms of dynamics within language and how social stratification manifests itself in language (by which language is a part of class divisions and class conflict) in the following chapter, our next step then will be to situate language within the social structure.

[74] Gramsci 2012b, p. 324.

[75] Bakhtin 1984, p. 471.

Chapter IV

The Class Dialectics of Language

There is at least one blatantly evident internal linguistic division of every national language which is based on a social division: that of the educated and the uneducated. Although we both speak English, a native English woman or man employed as a manual worker would most probably have difficulties understanding parts of this text (even if she or he found the reason and time to try and do so, which is also a question of class), while I myself, even though English is a foreign language for me, obviously find no difficulties in such a task. If we think just a bit more about such divisions, we will find every language is full of them. To remain within the example of the English language, there's numerous dialects only within England that belong not only to people of different habitats or geographical origin, but also to people from different social backgrounds – Cockney English perhaps being one of the most famous examples.

But it is not only in the fact that language reflects social divisions that it is of a class character. It is also – and perhaps even more importantly – the fact that language is a site of various struggles: the struggle to understand and to be understood, the struggle to be heard at all in the first place, the struggle over meanings of words, the struggle over dominance and over social status of a language, etc. All of these struggles lead one way or another to class struggle,[1] and that is the reason why it is important to conceive of language as a part of class conflict. Given all that we discussed so far, a historical-materialist approach to language should enable us "to determine the place in the overall social structure from which a voice [...] is raised".[2] That is the issue of this chapter in particular, and, essentially, the remainder of this text in general.

4.1. The Prospects of the Bakhtin Circle

If it was not already evident in the previous chapters, Valentin Voloshinov and Mikhail Bakhtin saw language as pertaining to class divisions within society, and they developed a

[1] Of course, only if one is ready to accept the existence of classes and its validity as a theoretical concept. We cannot go into this problem in this text, but if the reader is interested, we would refer him to the following two brilliant books: Bensaïd 2009, pp. 95-200; Wood 1998.

[2] Lecercle 2009, p. 109.

great deal of concepts trying to account for and explain that fact. While I shall not be discussing other authors of the Bakhtin Circle here, I feel it is a matter of intellectual correctness that this chapter is named after them. Voloshinov and Bakhtin were a part of a wider intellectual circle, and their ideas were heavily influenced by others within the circle (sometimes reworked from their original versions or even directly "borrowed" without changes). The members of the Bakhtin Circle, alongside Bakhtin and Voloshinov, were, at various times, Mariia Iudina, Matvei Kagain, Ivan Kanaev, Pavel Medvedev, Lev Pumpianskii, Ivan Solertinskii and Konstantin Vaginov.[3] Of course, the Circle was not a homogeneous school of thought – the listed authors dealt with various topics, and often approached same topics from different angles. However, as we shall see in the following parts of the chapter, their theoretical background is common to them, which justifies the reference to the Circle. It was primarily Bakhtin's works that became well-known in the Western world, when Bakhtin himself was already quite old, and so the Circle was named after him, while the other members somewhat undeservedly fell into the background or became completely forgotten. Only in the last few decades has this intellectual and historical error been corrected by numerous authors within "Bakhtin Studies".[4]

4.1.1. Heteroglossia and Speech Genres

The notion of linguistic stratification, although definitely one of the central concepts of Bakhtin's works, was not precisely something completely original at the time. "While Bakhtin's idea of the social stratification of language has often been invoked to suggest his exceptional insight and innovative thinking about language, the idea of social stratification of language was widely discussed in Russia by the late 1920s and early 1930s".[5] That being said, the notion of linguistic stratification opens the path towards linking language to wider social phenomena. However, the problem is that Bakhtin himself failed to do precisely that, because his philosophy in general suffered from a form of idealism which conceived of the various linguistic concepts from an ethical standpoint, rather than a materialist one (materialist in the sense in which Gramsci's notions are materialist, i.e. they are all situated within concrete social institutions and practices and specific social relations). Thus, from an outline of

[3] Brandist 2002, pp. 5-6.

[4] Cf. Brandist 2002; Brandist, Shepherd and Tihanov (eds.) 2004.

[5] Brandist and Lähteenmäki 2011, p. 74.

Bakhtin's understanding of linguistic stratification, it is necessary to move towards a more critical standpoint which can lead us to class conflict.

Bakhtin arrives at the concept of linguistic stratification not by analyzing language *per se*, but analyzing the novel as a specific literary genre, linked to specific social and historical circumstances. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel", he writes how

> [t]he internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.[6]

Leaving the question of the novel aside, we can see from this reference that linguistic stratification, for Bakhtin, is something immanent to every language, irrespective of history or society. The consequence of this internal stratification is that "language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word [...] but also – and for us, this is the essential point – into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so forth".[7] We are already acquainted with this from Voloshinov's assertion of the ideological character of language. But now, for Bakhtin, this becomes an internal characteristic of language: a certain division between "variants" of a language. This is what Bakhtin terms *heteroglossia*, the existence of simultaneous dialects and versions of a language within every language, each of them belonging to a specific social group or historic time. "[L]anguage is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given bodily form".[8] There are obviously different underlying "principles" of every language of heteroglossia, and while that is a point of divergence between them, there is also a point of convergence: "all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making them unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the

[6] Bakhtin 2008, pp. 262-263.

[7] Ibid., pp. 271-272.

[8] Ibid., p. 291.

world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values".[9] This way, Bakhtin reaffirms the concept of language as world-view, but, what is new for us, he links the various world-views of the languages of heteroglossia to the existence of various social groups.

But what about the "underlying principles" of these languages which are the basis of their uniqueness, what are they exactly and how do they appear in real language? Bakhtin writes that each of the languages "is grounded in a completely different principle for marking differences and for establishing units"[10] within speech. Obviously, this formulation is very vague, and we can merely suppose that this principle is related to the formation of utterances ("establishing units"). Luckily, Bakhtin wrote later a text on this issue, clarifying what he meant. In his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres", Bakhtin coins the term "speech genres", which essentially stands for this "underlying principle" from the earlier essay in "Discourse in the Novel". All utterances, claims Bakhtin, both oral and written, are realized within "various areas of human activity". Each of these areas of activity "develops its own *relatively stable types*" of utterances, which "we may call *speech genres*".[11] Thus, speech genres are specific patterns (or principles) of formation of utterances which emerged and are used within their corresponding areas of human activity. Merchants on a flea market, soldiers in an army, gardeners, politicians, miners, teachers – they all have their specific speech genres which utilize the national language in a unique way, differing them from all the other people by the fact that they "belong" to their social group by the "private" linguistic knowledge they all share. Of course, this also means that "[t]he wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex".[12]

However, although it might seem so at first glance, speech genres are not forms of speech typical only of specialized professions. Bakhtin's point is not that *some* activities develop speech genres, but that *all* activities have their corresponding speech genres. The way we speak with our family at home, the way we speak in the school or on the playground as a child – all of these are speech genres, which we master and abide to their internal rules

[9] Ibid., pp. 291-292.

[10] Ibid., p. 291.

[11] Bakhtin 1986, p. 60.

[12] Ibid.

unconsciously just as we do with our mother-tongue. "We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical forms of construction of the whole. Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skilfully in practice, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence in theory".[13] Furthermore, it is not merely that we always speak in certain speech genres, but we also learn our mother-tongue in the framework of speech genres.

> We know our native language – its lexical composition and grammatical structure – not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us. We assimilate forms of language only in forms of utterances and in conjunction with these forms. The forms of language and the typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and in close connection with one another. To learn to speak means to learn to construct utterances [...].[14]

And, obviously, to learn to construct utterances means to learn to do so according to various speech genres.

We can summarize Bakhtin's understanding of the issues explained in this part as follows: really existing social stratification (into groups of all sorts – be it on the basis of class, gender, age, race, geographical origin or any other existing category of division within societies) manifests itself in language as heteroglossia – the coexistence of various socio-ideological languages of social groups. These languages acquire their own uniqueness by developing speech genres, which are specific principles for the formation of utterances within specific social activities. In a sense, the speech genres are the *differentia specifica* of the languages of heteroglossia. Understood in this way, the languages of heteroglossia are often also counterposed to each other, sometimes latently, sometimes manifestly, as is always the case, for example, with political groups of the opposite political spectrum. The reason for this is that each language of heteroglossia embodies a certain world-view. As these conflicts play out on the ideological battlefield, these languages change, adapt and evolve according to the outcomes of these battles; if victorious, they acquire a quasi-"divine" social status and enjoy significant power, or, if defeated, they outright disappear. Thus, for Bakhtin, heteroglossia "is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what ensures its dynamics";[15] it is a cause

[13] Ibid., p. 78.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Bakhtin 2008, p. 272.

of movement which never stops as long as society exists, just as a human's heart does not stop pounding as long as the human is alive.

4.1.2. Multiaccentuality and Refracturing

Voloshinov came to a very similar conceptual framework of the expression of social diversity in language in his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. As we know today thanks to the research in "Bakhtin Studies" (as we have already mentioned), this similarity is not a mere coincidence, but is proof of the influence the members of the Bakhtin Circle had on each other: their concepts were formed as a result of an exchange of ideas and long discussions within the Circle. The similarity is most evident in Voloshinov's understanding of the socially contextual determination of utterances. Like Bakhtin, Voloshinov finds a common denominator of all social practices in the fact that they produce each their own type of social "etiquette", that is, a specific form of behaviour, which he terms *behavioural genres*.

> Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular kind of organization of audience and, hence, a particular repertoire of little behavioral genres. The behavioral genre fits everywhere into the channel of social intercourse assigned to it and functions as an ideological reflection of its type, structure, goal, and social composition. The behavioral genre is a fact of the social milieu: of holiday, leisure time, and of social contact in the parlor, the workshop, etc. It meshes with that milieu and is delimited and defined by it in all its internal aspects.[16]

Of course, these behavioural genres also include a certain form of speech, termed "behavioural speech". The structure of this speech is determined by the particular social situation in which it is evoked, as well as by its audience.[17]

> So, for instance, an entirely special type of structure has been worked out for the genre of the light and casual causerie of the drawing room where everyone "feels at home" and where the basic differentiation within the gathering (the audience) is that between men and women. Here we find devised special forms of insinuation, half-sayings, allusions to little tales of an intentionally nonserious character, and so on. A different type of structure is worked out in the case of conversation between husband and wife, brother and sister, etc. In the case where a random assortment of people gathers – while waiting in a line or conducting some business – statements and exchanges of words will start and finish and be constructed in another,

[16] Voloshinov 1986, p. 97.

[17] Ibid., p. 96.

> completely different way. Village sewing circles, urban carouses, workers' lunchtime chats, etc., will all have their own types.[18]

Thus, like Bakhtin's speech genres, Voloshinov's behavioural genres imply a specific principle for the formation of utterances. The difference is that Bakhtin emphasizes how this is linked to various *social groups*, while Voloshinov's emphasis is more on the *social context* of the utterance.

However, this does not mean that Voloshinov neglects the aspect of social groups in language. On the contrary, he is perhaps even more emphatic than Bakhtin in showing how language is also a question of class conflict, more so than just a relatively simple question of "social groups" having their own languages. These different languages are not, of course, full-fledged languages of their own, but variations of a national language. What makes these variations unique are not only their speech genres, but also, and maybe even more so, the fact that they ascribe different, and sometimes completely opposite, meanings to the same words.

> Different social groups and classes use the same signs, the same words, the same language system, Voloshinov notes. Since a single language or sign system is used by groups with radically different circumstances and life activities, signs become inflected with different and competing meanings as these groups struggle to express their life situations, their outlooks, their aspirations. Conflicts between groups and classes thus interpolate every sign.[19]

This was an aspect that was implicitly glimpsed at in Bakhtin, but that was not clearly formulated as it is here in Voloshinov. Granted, Bakhtin clearly stated that the languages of heteroglossia each represent a unique world-view, but there is more at hand than just that. The consequence of this "heteroglotic" situation is that various classes will ascribe quite incompatible meanings to the same word: for one, "justice" or "freedom" will be equated with the concept of the free market, while for another group, these two words might be something realized through and within the social state. These various *accents* that social classes ascribe to the same words led Voloshinov to coin the term *multiaccentuality*, which stands for this intersecting of various socio-ideological accents within every sign, and thus every word.

Multiaccentuality then also enabled Voloshinov to join the polemic against vulgar materialism. If words are intersected by multiple accents, that necessarily means that language cannot simply *reflect* reality, as in a mirror, since a word would have to have a definite, stable and undisputed meaning to be able to reflect reality in such a simple way. Instead, Voloshinov

[18] Ibid., p. 97.

[19] McNally 2001, p. 114.

claims that signs *refract* reality, that is, "it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view".[20] The difference between mere reflection and refraction being then that "[r]eflection is non-distorting, whereas refraction is perception from a particular standpoint (i.e., distortion)".[21] (This way, Voloshinov dealt a blow both to the theory of reflection,[22] as well as to the deterministic interpretations of the base-superstructure metaphor in Marxism.) Every class will strive to assert its own accents as the dominant ones or the only acceptable ones, so as to achieve a *social dominance* over other classes, by holding a monopoly over the production of meaning. Thus, refraction is determined "[b]y an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community, i.e., *by the class struggle*".[23]

The word "capitalism" does not have the same meaning for the ruling classes embodied in the centrist parliamentary parties of Europe, as it does for the groups that wish to abolish capitalism. However, since the former are the dominant forces within modern society, they are the ones that *lead* in imposing the dominant meaning of that word.

> Voloshinov sees meanings as connected to the activity of "organized social groups" struggling to accent signs in ways conducive to their organization and self-expression. Ruling classes and dominant groups attempt to impose uniaccentual signs, a single set of meanings that reflect and refract a dominant set of interests. Oppressed groups, on the other hand, struggle to accent signs differently and, in so doing, express a distinct (and often oppositional) set of interests and meanings.[24]

For example, the word "socialism" is generally quite a controversial word, and is almost never used in mainstream media or by the representatives of the ruling classes positively. In the West, and especially in the USA, it primarily functions as a means of denunciation of political opponents, signifying the abolition of the "fundamental freedoms" of Western democracy and a tendency towards planned economy (which is, naturally, perceived as a catastrophic concept). Of course, Barack Obama never did anything remotely socialist as the president of the USA, but he is nevertheless very frequently labelled as a socialist by the republicans. In the former socialist countries of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, where the events of recent history are used by the ruling classes in such a way so as to depict, in short,

[20] Voloshinov 1986, p. 10.

[21] Ives 2004a, p. 80.

[22] Whose most notable representative was Georgi Plekhanov.

[23] Voloshinov 1986, p. 23.

[24] McNally 2001, p. 116.

everything that was ever bad or wrong with the former regimes of those countries as "socialist", the "socialist" label is very often being used by right-wing forces to describe the rule of local social-democratic parties, which do not have even anything remotely social-democratic in their political profile, let alone socialist. In Germany, people often use the term "das S Wort" ("the S word") for socialism, whereby, again, what is mostly referred to is the historical experience of the dictatorship of the communist regime in East Germany. It is without a doubt, of course, that this regime truly was extremely oppressive and totalitarian, but the point is that that is currently the only thing that – for a significant amount of people, at least – socialism stands for. These are all examples of ruling classes imposing extremely uniform accents to certain words which are in fact full of oppositional and radically alternative meanings to current social reality – but it is precisely because of this that it is important for the ruling classes to ensure the negative uniaccentuality of such signs. As Voloshinov writes, "[i]n the ordinary conditions of life, the contradiction embedded in every ideological sign cannot emerge fully because the ideological sign in an established dominant ideology is always somewhat reactionary and tries, as it were, to stabilize the preceding factor in the dialectical flux of the social generative process".[25]

Therefore, refraction and multiaccentuality go beyond Bakhtin, because they do not simply express social stratification in a form of linguistic stratification. They embody *class conflict within language* and show that language is a part of this constant ideological and political struggle. "What signs reflect and refract [...] is not a singular socioeconomic fact, but a dynamic process of social interaction between groups and classes whose possibilities are multiple. [...] In this spirit, [Voloshinov's] notion of the *multiaccentuality* of the sign is designed to capture the dynamics of complex structured social processes".[26]

4.1.3. Intra-Dynamics

Both Bakhtin and Voloshinov take the same starting point – the involvement of language in social divisions, which it in part expresses and in part perpetuates – whereby Voloshinov's multiaccentuality is a more refined and developed version of Bakhtin's heteroglossia. However, Bakhtin attempts to broaden heteroglossia by developing several mechanisms whose goal is to account for this dynamics "of complex structured social processes" in more detail. He focuses primarily on mechanisms within language, which we shall discuss here, but

[25] Voloshinov 1986, pp. 23-24.

[26] McNally 2001, p. 114. As we shall see later, Voloshinov shares numerous points with Gramsci in this regard.

he also has some insights in relation to the dynamics between national languages, which we shall discuss in the next section of this chapter.

(a) Centrifugal/Centripetal Forces.

For Bakhtin, there always exist in language two opposing forces, fundamental in the sense in which heteroglossia is fundamental: they are *immanent* to language at any historical moment. The forces that tend to produce "verbal-ideological centralization and unification" are called *centripetal*, while the forces that work in the opposite direction of "decentralization and disunification"[27] are called *centrifugal forces*. The centripetal forces correspond to the formation of a unitary (national, standard) language; national language "constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization".[28] But these forces are not merely linguistic, but also socio-ideological, and they thus correspond to particular groups: the ruling classes whose goal is to maintain the established social order and either win over to their side or completely defeat the opposing social forces. Consequently, the centrifugal forces correspond to the multiplicity of dialects within a language, who maintain heteroglossia and are in opposition to any kind of linguistic unification. Furthermore, the centrifugal forces are characteristic of oppositional, marginalized and subversive social groups which oppose the existing social relations.

But this dichotomy is not rigid, and does not imply that utterances evoked from the ruling classes are always only centripetal, unifying and centralizing in nature, and that the ones evoked from the subordinated groups are always only centrifugal, disunifying and decentralizing. "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance". Because every utterance participates in some form of a unitary language, it possesses centripetal elements, but because it is always unique, it possesses centrifugal elements and participates in heteroglossia. That is why the utterance is "a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language".[29]

It is through the prism of this dichotomy then that Bakhtin conceptualizes national language as a product of the centripetal forces. National language is, for him, regressive by

[27] Bakhtin 2008, p. 272.

[28] Ibid., p. 270.

[29] Ibid., p. 272.

nature, since it always possesses a tendency against heteroglossia and strives to impose a one-dimensional verbal-ideological unity upon a nation and the richness of its languages of heteroglossia (dialects) and corresponding world-views.[30]

> A unitary language is not something given [*dan*] but is always in essence posited [*zadan*] – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity – the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, 'correct language'. A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms.
>
> But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language, or else defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia.[31]

Thus, for Bakhtin, the function of national language is not to ensure that people of various social and geographical backgrounds understand each other, but to create a "monoglossia", a uniform world-view which would be universally valid for all people. However, the centripetal forces represented in national language can never succeed in their goal to completely unify language. Complete unification simply is not possible, it can be and is an eternal goal of the centripetal forces to which they strive, but they can never achieve it. "Language [...] is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language".[32]

Bakhtin's famous "case-study" of the relationship between the centripetal and centrifugal forces is his *Rabelais and His World*, where he discusses the phenomenon of carnival as a sort of concentrated material manifestation of centrifugal forces at work, where parody, irony and laughter are used against everything sacred and established. He chooses

[30] This will be very important for us later in this chapter, when we shall compare Bakhtin's view of national language with that of Gramsci.

[31] Bakhtin 2008, pp. 270-271.

[32] Ibid., p. 288. The not so subtle critique of Saussure here indicates one of the primary reasons why Saussure's linguistics fails to account for *living* language: language is never a static, unitary system, because it is the „uninterrupted process of historical becoming" that makes it what it is.

Rabelais as his "role-model" of the carnivalesque because he is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, representative of the (French) Renaissance, and because "the Renaissance in general and the French Renaissance in particular was marked in the literary sphere first of all by the fact that the highest potentials of folk humor had attained the level of great literature and had fertilized it".[33] In short, it was an era when the popular penetrated high culture, an event whose mouthpiece was Rabelais. Bakhtin's "point is that before the renaissance, there was ideological struggle between 'official culture' and 'unofficial culture'. But such interactions were fragmentary and ineffectual and left both sides basically unchanged. With Rabelais's novels and the social changes that made them possible, the real confrontation, interaction, and interchange among the various aspects of these two worlds occur".[34] And so, through Rabelais, Bakhtin attempts to show that carnival is a symbolic dethroning of the ruling order and everything related to it by a plethora of social practices which use irony, humour, laughter and parody to ridicule everything sacred and noble. The carnival sets the world upside-down and for a brief moment allows the people to materialize an utopia created by them, on their terms and according to their desires. Dolls of kings and popes are burned, a symbolical dethroning of both figures; the corporeal aspect of human existence is liberated both from the shame and asceticism of the nobility and the clergy: bodies are unrestrained and spontaneous, people fart, burp, urinate, defecate, smell and have sex, and they eat and drink as much as they can, which depicts the abundance of the future utopian society; death and birth are both simultaneously glorified as two sides of the same coin, whereby the old dies and new is born. In short, for Bakhtin, the carnivalesque subverts the existing social relations, institutions and sources of power, and it is in Rabelais that one can find evidence of this embodied in literary form. Carnival is a festival of centrifugal social forces, a popular oasis which often lasted for weeks, even months, to which the representatives of the centripetal forces had no access.

(b) Authoritative/Internally Persuasive Discourse

Just as Voloshinov (and Vygotsky), Bakhtin too considers the formation of consciousness a profoundly "linguistic" process, in that language functions as the form in which ideological content is being internalized. "The ideological becoming of a human being [...] is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others".[35] How these words are selected is determined

[33] Bakhtin 1984, p. 136.

[34] Ives 2004a, p. 92.

[35] Bakhtin 2008, p. 341.

by two fundamental types of discourse: *authoritative* and *internally persuasive*. In Bakhtin's conception of this dichotomy, these discourses are not merely sources of information, direction, rules and models, but they determine a person's world-view and practice. Although a word can possess characteristics of both discourses, this is rarely the case.

> Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word [...] despite the profound differences between these two categories of alien discourse. But such unity is rarely a given – it happens more frequently that an individual's becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society [...].[36]

The individual consciousness then becomes an arena of a continuous struggle between these two discourses, the state of which determines its development. "The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness".

The two discourses themselves truly are fundamentally different in nature. It is not merely a matter of their origin, that is, if they come from a true social authority (as Bakhtin mentioned, a father, a teacher – or in that line – a priest, etc.) or not, but in how they approach the person, with what "attitude", so to say. "The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher". Authoritative discourse *asserts itself* on the basis of its already acknowledged authority of the past – a matter of tradition, not of choice. "It is, so to speak, the word of the father".[37] Furthermore, it is not the word itself that authoritative discourse centres on; its goal is achieving a subordinate, disciplined and unquestioning "state of mind" in the person's consciousness, a complete submissiveness.

> It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance. Therefore, authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. It enters our

[36] Ibid., p. 342.

[37] Ibid.

> verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority.[38]

Such a discourse is, Bakhtin continues, obviously extremely rigid and completely inflexible: "its semantic structure is static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it".

Internally persuasive discourse approaches the person in a completely opposite manner, as expected. It demands nothing from her, it has no hidden motives or agendas. It becomes a discourse at all precisely because the person acknowledges it as such *by herself*, and because she finds something stimulating in its words. The words of internally persuasive discourse appear as words long sought after that express the person, her thoughts or feelings, her world-view, in ways which she did not know possible. These words trigger an interplay of further questions and ideas, they themselves become objects of rigorous scrutiny and critique, whereby they encounter words of other internally persuasive discourses.

> In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions, it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*.[39]

Thus, the dichotomy of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse opens yet another field of struggle within language, which happen within individual consciousness itself. It is a struggle "between one's own and another's word",[40] a struggle for "hegemony" between various world-views, which manifests itself in every utterance of a person.[41] That is

[38] Ibid., p. 343.

[39] Ibid., pp. 345-346.

[40] Ibid., p. 354.

[41] In counterdistinction to the various approaches in mainstream linguistics, „[t]he utterance so conceived is a considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that

also how language should be analyzed – within the framework of the socio-ideological struggle of competing world-views, which is in fact a struggle between various social groups, i.e. a class struggle.

> When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions – this is the false front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested *use* to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker's position (profession, social class, etc.) and by the concrete situation. *Who* speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the words actual meaning.[42]

4.1.4. Inter-Dynamics

Bearing in mind Bakhtin's extremely positive conception of language diversity, that is, heteroglossia, and centrifugal forces, it is interesting to see how he understands the possible outcomes of contact between languages (particularly national languages). Although not as much is to be found on the topic of linguistic inter-dynamics as that of intra-dynamics in Bakhtin, he still offers an interesting concept to accord to this phenomenon. Bakhtin's opinion is that contact between cultures (and thus contact between languages) enriches both cultures (and languages) because it enables them to see themselves from the viewpoint of each other, whereby they preserve their own standpoint within themselves. Perhaps somewhat confusing at first glance, Bakhtin calls this event "creative understanding", which is valid for all such situations of "foreign contact" between two entities, not only for cultures. "*Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture".[43] Consequentially, this holds true especially for culture, as through creative understanding it transcends the limits of its own epistemological horizon, enriching by the horizon of the foreign culture.

> It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another,

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articulates the intention of the person uttering it, which is to see the utterance as a direct, single-voiced vehicle for expression". (Ibid., pp. 354-355.)

[42] Ibid., p. 401.

[43] Bakhtin 1986, p. 7.

> foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths.[44]

When it comes to languages, Bakhtin terms this type of contact *interillumination*. By coming into contact, languages relativise each other by de-privileging their social status, their self-perception, their unquestioned unity etc. This is so because, when the two languages see themselves in the light of the other, "novelness" arrives – which is Bakhtin's term for the simple fact that words and meanings are exchanged, born anew and destroyed as the result of the contact – whereby "two myths perish simultaneously: the myth of a language that presumes to be the only language, and the myth of a language that presumes to be completely unified".[45] When there is no contact between cultures and languages because they are "closed" or "deaf to one another", then they both remain limited because they consider themselves absolute.

Obviously, Bakhtin's account of the contact between languages is very limited and idealised. We can easily imagine other possible outcomes of a contact than just a positive one (which is the point of "interillumination"). Bakhtin did write about parody as one example of "illumination" where languages are in conflict, but where the parodied language is not destroyed.[46] Considering how Bakhtin conceived of the centripetal/centrifugal forces and the heteroglossia/monoglossia (expressed in national language) dichotomies, it is interesting that he failed to describe situations when one major language (and culture) conquers a minor language (and culture) and completely assimilates or even annihilates it in the process. Today, as a consequence of globalization, we are witnessing the disappearance of languages constantly, so much so that this issue is one of the points of the United Nations human rights policy. We can speak of "languages of imperialism"[47] today, but not, unfortunately, with the help of Bakhtin, who shined much more, as we saw, within the framework of national language.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Bakhtin 2008, p. 68. This summary of interillumination is based on the glossary in Bakhtin 2008, p. 430.

[46] Ibid., p. 364.

[47] Cf. Lecercle 2009, p. 5.

4.2. The Limits of the Bakhtin Circle

There are quite a few concepts and theses within the Bakhtin Circle one should restrain from simply adopting. Although very innovative and insightful in some regards, in others, there are numerous problems that appear as the result of the Circle's internal theoretical limitations. It was particularly during the period of the sudden surge in popularity of Bakhtin in the West that Bakhtin's (and the Circle's) concepts were somewhat uncritically introduced and "recycled" (one of the consequences of which was the aforementioned overemphasising of Bakhtin's "geniusness" to the detriment of the other members of the Circle).[48] The "weak spots" of the Bakhtin Circle in general, and Bakhtin in particular, were of an idealist character, whose sources can be traced primarily in the various intellectual influences and schools of thought which the Bakhtin Circle looked up to.

4.2.1. Influences

One of the schools of thought Bakhtin was inspired by was the Marburg School, i.e. a neo-Kantian current in Germany. "Bakhtin adopted from the Marburg School the notion that the object of the human sciences is the person as understood by the German tradition of jurisprudence". One of the central tenets of this approach was that "[o]nly the legal subject is capable of bearing rights and obligations and is defined solely as such a bearer. All questions of the physical nature of human beings, their openness to economic pressures and the like, were ruled to be beyond the concerns of the human sciences by the Marburg philosophers, and so it remains in Bakhtin's own philosophy".[49] This, as we shall see later, prevented Bakhtin in linking the various phenomena he found in language (like heteroglossia and linguistic stratification) to social institutions and the social structure in general.

Another influence was Simmel's "life-philosophy" ("*Lebensphilosophie*") which envisioned a particular relationship between life and culture as life's "theoretical object". Life, for Simmel, "goes beyond itself" by producing objectifications of life that are more than life, which then become independent and thus become what Simmel calls "objective culture". This culture attains ever more independence and thus comes into conflict with "subjective

[48] One of the reasons for this was also the fact that Bakhtin had a tendency not to use references in his works, so this "absence of any obvious intellectual parallels and of any reference to sources led some to see Bakhtin as a totally original thinker of truly monumental genius who anticipated whole schools of thought" (Brandist 2002, p. 3).

[49] Brandist 2002, p. 16.

culture", which is a term for the unity between life and objective culture achieved in social interaction. This brings us then to the "tragedy of culture", which manifests itself in the fact "that subjective culture cannot keep up with the development of objective culture, on which it is dependent, with the result that the latter becomes something alien and restricting for the development of personality".[50] The relation between life and culture was, as we partially already saw, an important topic in the Bakhtin Circle, if not even in the centre of it.

Phenomenology played a role in the development of the Bakhtin Circle's epistemological notions, and it was the Munich phenomenological current in particular that was most influential in that regard. For them, consciousness is empirical, since it intends objects, which are "fundamentally different from the putative object beyond consciousness. The former is 'given' to consciousness in a particular way and is always the object of a cognitive act". In spite of that somewhat anti-realist assumption, the Munich phenomenologists were realists in the sense that they claimed that "the truth of a proposition depends on the state of the world".[51] This had a particular impact on the Bakhtin Circle's approach to language. "In intentional acts of a discursive type the speaker infuses the linguistic structure with meaning according to his or her perspective or 'intentional horizon'".[52] This led to the formation of the theory of speech acts, which in turn influenced Bakhtin and especially Voloshinov.

Although there were other influences on the Bakhtin Circle,[53] they were not as significant on its intellectual formation as the three schools of thought described above: "neo-Kantianism, life-philosophy and phenomenology are all-important ingredients of the work of the Bakhtin Circle. However, their influence should not be understood mechanically. The influences are cumulative rather than serial" in the sense that they "combine aspects of each [trend] in a rather original fashion".[54]

Finally, when it comes to the Bakhtin Circle's relationship towards Marxism, which is definitely "[o]ne of the most significant and contentious issues surrounding the work of the Circle", it is important to note that "the members of the Bakhtin Circle did not share a

[50] Brandist 2002, p. 19.

[51] Ibid., p. 20.

[52] Ibid., p. 21.

[53] Among others, the Gestalt theory was important for Voloshinov, while religion had a minor influence on Bakhtin's thought. Cf. Brandist 2002, pp. 22-24.

[54] Brandist 2002, p. 24.

monolithic attitude towards Marxism, and the types of Marxism that were dominant in the 1920s are quite different from the narrow dogmatism of the 1930s and 1940s". Some of the members of the Circle were oriented towards Marxism and sincerely interested in it more so than others. "Voloshinov and Medvedev were, by the mid-1920s, sincere if not 'orthodox' Marxists, and their works of the late 1920s reflect an attempt to integrate Marxism into a perspective framed by neo-Kantianism, life-philosophy and phenomenology. Bakhtin's own work was, however, somewhat different, being much more firmly rooted in philosophical idealism and engaging with Marxism in a much more oblique fashion". In spite of that, even in the case of Bakhtin, "the relationship [towards Marxism] should not be neglected or oversimplified",[55] as various interpreters of Bakhtin's work did, particularly Michael Holquist. Bakhtin's relationship to Marxism is ambivalent, because he accepts and affirms some of its aspects, but disapproves of and criticises others. Concretely, for Bakhtin, Marxism is "an ally in the struggle against abstractly rationalistic and positivistic conceptions in philosophy and cultural theory, but the connections it establishes between cultural and economic phenomena are to be replaced with connections between culture and ethical philosophy".[56] The latter decision, as one can tell, stems from Bakhtin's idealist roots in the Marburg School. It is precisely this part of Bakhtin's theoretical background that is the cause of most of the problems we shall encounter in his thought.

4.2.2. Ethics Instead of Social Theory

Some of Bakhtin's most important concepts are in fact dichotomies representing ethical principles, which are strictly separated into the "good" ones and the "bad" ones, and then, in one form or another, ontologised. The first such dichotomy we are introduced to in Bakhtin's work is the one between monologic and dialogic principles in Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.[57]

> From this point onwards we are presented with a contrast between two compositional *methods* or, more exactly, two *logics* which underlie culture. In a rather typical move for a neo-Kantian of the Marburg type, these principles are abstracted as methodological principles that exist

[55] Ibid., p. 25.

[56] Ibid., p.. 32-33.

[57] Bakhtin 1999.

> outside historical time: mono*logic* and dia*logic* principles. The former is a logic of causality and determination, the latter is a logic of unrepeatability and freedom.[58]

Dostoevsky is, for Bakhtin, a representative of the dialogic principle, just as the novel as literary form is its best expression or cultural manifestation. The difference between monologic and dialogic principles, aside the essential one described above, is that the author of a monologic work "implicitly claims to have direct access to the extradiscursive world, and this is reflected in the structure of the work. The work does not attempt to present a plurality of fully valid perspectives with which the authorial perspective engages as an equal", as is the case in dialogic works, but is dominated by the author's world-view. "In the monologic work the author's ideas are not represented, but either govern representation, illuminating a represented object, or are expressed directly without any phenomenological distance".[59] The author of the monologic work, on the contrary, does not involve himself in the work in such a manner, but instead, he expresses with the diversity and richness of its characters, who think, act and develop freely of the authors world-view, and by that translates the fundamental plurality of consciousness existing in reality into the literary form of the novel – which Bakhtin calls "polyphony". These concepts announce Bakhtin's future ideas of heteroglossia and speech genres, but they also show that these ideas are, from the very beginning, placed into the Procrustean bed of a strict good/bad duality, i.e. of a primarily ethical epistomological horizon.

The same goes for Bakhtin's concept of linguistic stratification and the corresponding dichotomy of the centripetal and the centrifugal forces in language. For Bakhtin, these phenomena are ethical, in the sense that the centrifugal forces, which maintain the internal stratification, and thus the heteroglossia of a language, are always opposed to the centripetal forces, which strive towards a centralised, uniform linguistic and ideological unity. The only moment when these forces are linked to any social structures is when they are ascribed to the subaltern classes in the case of the former, and the ruling classes in the case of the latter. Social relations and institutions "remain 'bracketed out' of Bakhtin's account of discursive stratification. What are actually institutional questions relating to economic and political structures now acquire an ethical significance that renders the relations between forms of

[58] Brandist 2002, p. 94.

[59] Ibid., p. 99.

social organisation and modes of discursive interaction unclear. Decentralising forces are always ethical and centralising forces unethical".[60]

Likewise, the notion of "speech genres", which are both proof and a manifestation of heteroglossia, function in a similar manner. Speech genres are, expressed in Simmelian terms, a bridge between subjective and objective culture, between "the unrepeatable context of utterance and the impersonal, or supra-personal realm of objective culture".[61] The problem is, the underlying logic by which these genres are selected in concrete situations is bound to the individual's capability to evaluate the social context, to recognize the corresponding speech genre pertaining to it, and to know how to use this speech genre effectively. "Bakhtin is not, however, concerned with institutional factors. Instead, the notion of discursive *genres* allows him to remain firmly within the realms of aesthetics and ethics where social factors are limited to questions of intersubjectivity".[62] The questions of social institutions, social power, authority, etc., are again left out.

The central concept of Bakhtin's approach to language, dialogue, is also seriously flawed. For Bakhtin, dialogue is not merely a starting point from which to conceive of language as social practice, and which would then lead to other social phenomena related to language, as we tried to show above.[63] "Bakhtin relies heavily on 'dialogue' as a primary element in literature, first and foremost, but also as a metaphor for ethical behaviour, as an epistemological premise, and ultimately as human ontology".[64] But what is worse, this ontology is based on an underlying principle of a free linguistic "marketplace", which suffers from the same naïveté as Habermas' communicative theory of language. This is evident in the case of internally persuasive discourse, which is what determines our ideological formation.[65] However, Bakhtin never actually clarifies what it is that decides which internally persuasive discourse achieves dominance in a person's consciousness and by what factors is this internal struggle between such discourses determined in the first place. Nowhere is it stated that, perhaps, an internally persuasive discourse becomes dominant because it possesses more

[60] Ibid., p. 114.

[61] Ibid., p. 162.

[62] Ibid., p. 163.

[63] Cf. chapter 2.3.2.

[64] Ives 2004a, p. 74.

[65] Cf. chapter 4.1.3.

"truth" or is, in some way, more "convincing" compared to other discourses. What Bakhtin instead does is that he

> provides a utopian model of a 'marketplace' of discourses in which discursive 'proprietors' are free to act and enter into exchange. The market provides the conditions for 'equity' (*Gerechtigkeit*) in that speakers are equal as (discursive) commodity owners and must be recognised as such. In the market no-one is supposedly forced to buy or sell, but each does so freely, the better bargain ultimately winning out. Through the unrestrained exchange of discursive 'commodities' there arises a relational logic, dialogism, which on the one hand is descriptive, but on the other is a standard of objective judgement. This becomes a sort of immanent legality of social relations, which guides ideological becoming, rather as Adam Smith's 'hidden hand' guides the development of a market economy in a progressive direction.[66]

Just as Habermas, Bakhtin reduces dialogue to an ideal speech situation (although Bakhtin does not state this explicitly, while Habermas does), which means it is abstracted from private interests and relations of power (among other things) which are always inscribed in every speech situation. It is as if all participants of dialogue always act according to some form of morality and/or rationality (which is especially the case in Habermas), and abstract from their social and material conditions of life whenever they engage themselves in speech practices. "Both Bakhtin and Habermas grant to the structures of norms and morality a questionably large degree of autonomy from the social conditions of particular forms of political rule".[67]

We already touched upon the issue of the market as a metaphor for linguistic phenomena or language in general in the chapter on Saussure,[68] but it is worth further discussing it here. "One of the many reasons the market is a bad model for democratic freedom is that the consumer choices of subordinate classes reflect their economic subordination",[69] just as, we might add, the consumer choices of the ruling classes reflect their

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[66] Brandist 2002, p. 186.

[67] Ibid. As Brandist notes on the same page, there are more similarities between Habermas and Bakhtin than just this one. "Though no enthusiast for the market, Habermas, like members of the Bakhtin Circle, is a progressive traditional intellectual aiming to revise further an already heavily revised Marxism in the direction of a neo-Kantian metaethics. Like Bakhtin, Habermas seeks to defend the Enlightenment project, radicalised according to the development of communicative (dialogic) over instrumental (monologic) reason. Habermas, like Bakhtin, also treats society exclusively as a 'moral reality', and his 'unavoidable idealisation' that is the 'ideal speech situation' [...] certainly sounds like Bakhtin's free market of discourse".

[68] Cf. chapter 1.1.2.

[69] Brandist 2002, p. 187.

economic domination. The reason the subordinate classes' general material conditions of life are very often bad, sometimes tremendously so, is simply that they cannot afford anything better. The not so rare cynical "comment" directed towards the poor – "get a job!" – fails to see that getting a job (especially a good job) is, in most cases, not a matter of personal choice (or the will to do so), but a matter of external conditions which are not under the person's control, but which nonetheless determine her life.

> Similarly, workers regularly vote for governments opposed to their own interests not so much because they simply accept the 'mono-logic' of their rulers and believe in the legitimacy of the status quo as because they are intellectually subordinate. This is a matter not of interests (*Willkür*) clouding reason (*Wille*), but of a fragmentation of social consciousness that prevents the development of a coherent perspective on society as a whole. The result is an inability on the part of subordinate classes to recognise and articulate their own interests, leading them to affirm those ideas that exercise social prestige.[70]

Accordingly, the same applies to language. It is not simply a matter of choosing an adequate, or appropriate, or most beautiful, or most coherent discourse, but a matter of not knowing of or not being able for or not having access to a better "choice". The point is, on the contrary, that there often is no real "choice" of how a person speaks or thinks at all, or at least, that this choice is reduced to a minimum.

"Thus, Bakhtin was to regard questions of linguistic and wider cultural centralisation as ethical rather than political questions by treating the institutional structure of society as the expression of ethical principles".[71] The causes of this lie in the described theoretical influences of the Bakhtin Circle, which locked them into a framework not intended for the issues which they dealt with.

> While deeply sociological, the Circle's work is constructed on the basis of a philosophy that was designed to deal with forms of individual interaction with the result that when the various members of the Circle moved on to the discursive interaction of social groups, they were stretching categories not designed for such an application. This leads [to] the effacement of institutional factors in favour of a subtle analysis of forms of discursive relations: dialogue. Dialogue, in turn, becomes a term that is given an almost impossible load to bear.[72]

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., p. 115.

[72] Ibid., p. 176.

Therefore, the limits of the Bakhtin Circle (and Bakhtin in particular) are precisely the questions of a wider social-theoretical analysis which a historical-materialist approach to language would imply.

4.2.3. Idealized Carnival

These limits are most evident in Bakhtin's approach to the phenomenon of carnival or carnivalesque culture. To begin with, "*Bakhtin does not base his discussion of popular festive culture on sustained historical research*. Instead, carnival is for Bakhtin a sort of 'proto-genre' described in terms of anthropology. This 'genre' reappears in different guises throughout the history of literature; indeed, specific and identifiable generic forms are considered to have existed in various manifestations at all points of history".[73] Instead of conceiving carnival as a set of specific practices, which he could have identified had he based his research on valid historical data, Bakhtin focuses exclusively on the positive and subversive aspects of carnival and subsumes them into the carnivalesque genre as its sole traits. "Carnival is therefore not a historically identifiable practice but a generic category",[74] which, furthermore, is deemed entirely progressive, i.e. an ethically positive generic category – which is, as we now know, a theoretical *cul-de-sac* Bakhtin often finds himself in. That is also the reason why carnival is identified with centrifugal forces – carnival is a concrete example of decentralising, diversifying and oppositional forces.

Carnival was not as one-dimensional as Bakhtin makes it seem: it was not a uniform set of values and beliefs, but was full of various and often opposed ideas. But "Bakhtin often writes as if carnival represents a fully formed world view, a deeply oppositional set of beliefs and social practices that contest official culture right down the line. He tends to describe these two cultures as if they constituted radically different modes of being-in-the-world".[75] Here we encounter again the same ethical duality which seems to run through Bakhtin's entire work: bad, official culture on the one hand, and good, oppositional, carnivalesque culture on the other. Carnival cannot have any negative traits, because this black-and-white opposition would then crumble.

Because he was led by such a strict ethical dichotomy whose goal was to account for social phenomena which are much more complex in reality, one might say that "Bakhtin's

[73] Brandist 2002, p. 137.

[74] Ibid., p. 138.

[75] McNally 2001, p. 149.

most notable area of neglect", stemming from this problem "is the relationship and tensions among different social groups within the 'masses'. This is lost in his preoccupation with the opposition between the masses and 'official culture', including the aristocracy and the church".[76] The social groups that represent these opposing cultures are then necessarily also pulled down the same reductionist path. The ruling classes – the representatives of the centripetal forces – and their centralizing, unifying and homogenising practices are bad; the subordinate classes – the representatives of the centrifugal forces – and their decentralizing practices are good. Such a view not only distorts the fundamentally incoherent and fractured structure of the subordinate classes and their individual consciousness, but also implies that any attempt to organize the common people and awaken the revolutionary elements within them is always superficial, simply because the people *always already* are opposed, unified against the official culture. As McNally notes, with such an approach, Bakhtin exhibits

> a romantic populism in which the common people are seen as forever subverting the dominant social order. Such a view flattens out the real tensions and contradictions of popular cultures. Rather than seeing them as complexes of oppositional and dominant values, it simply glorifies them as full-fledged alternatives to oppressive and hierarchical world views. A populism of this sort abdicates the need for struggle on the terrain of popular culture – and not simply against the dominant culture – if a genuinely radical, not to say revolutionary, political project is to be constructed.[77]

But even the supposed complete opposition of carnival to the ruling classes and official culture which Bakhtin presupposes, is not actually historically accurate. Bakhtin describes carnival as a social phenomenon completely forbidden for the ruling classes, where they did not, nor would dare to, appear. However,

> carnival was not sealed off from the upper classes of medieval and early-modern Europe. Monarchs, nobles, clergy, and middle-class professionals all participated in carnival festivities. Rather than two cultures closed off from one another, it is more accurate to see early-modern Europe as consisting of two distinct cultural traditions, only one of which was accessible to the poor, while the ruling class participated in both.[78]

In fact, carnival never resulted "in any rupture in the overall pattern of social life", which "led some commentators to emphasize its licensed character as a ritual permitted by authority".[79]

[76] Ives 2004a, p. 85.

[77] McNally 2001, p. 149.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., p. 150.

And, certainly, this was the case. But one should not fall for the opposite extreme, namely, claiming that carnival was *nothing but* an authorized place for the subordinated classes to burn through their discontent, which then effectively only strengthened the existing social order: "while providing for a ritualized blowing off of steam, carnival also nourished contestational attitudes and sustained utopian aspirations; it reinforced the dominant order, *and* it hinted at another of equality and abundance".[80] Unfortunately – and to return to the main point here – Bakhtin did not realize this. The carnival of Bakhtin is oppositional through and through, leaving absolutely no room for official culture; a sort of a social oasis where, for a short period of time, the impossible was happening.[81]

Carnival was not even entirely progressive in nature, but contained a notable amount of regressive and even oppressive beliefs and practices towards other social groups. For example, while it is true that carnival celebrated pregnancy and birth and worshiped the pregnant female body, "we ought not to lose sight of the restraints these also entailed for women. For just as pregnancy and childbirth were protected, so were contraception and abortion punished, and miscarriages monitored for any evidence of self-induced abortion. There is little doubt that the health and welfare of the child was given priority over that of the mother".[82] Thus, women were not always treated well, since they were perceived primarily as bearers of new life, whereby it was the new life itself, not the bearers, that was worshipped. Women were "breeders who ought to sacrifice themselves, where necessary, in order to bring forth new life". In that sense, "Bakhtin's 'turn to the body' suffers from a failure to interrogate the specific constructions of gendered bodies and relations that run through the popular culture he celebrates".[83] The same was true of other marginal social groups, like Jews, Muslims or Roma people.

> Carnivalesque images often portrayed Jews and Muslims as dogs or pigs, rather than human beings. Similarly, although rituals of inversion often enabled women to dominate and humiliate men, witch trials, too, had a carnivalesque character [...]. In addition, older unmarried women were often forced to pull a plow through the streets at carnival as a reminder that they ought to take a husband. Carnivalesque activities displayed a propensity to

[80] Ibid., p. 151.

[81] Indeed, one begins to wonder how Bakhtin thought such a practice would at all be possible without a certain amount of approval from the ruling classes.

[82] McNally 2001, p. 148.

[83] Ibid., pp. 148-149.

identify outsiders, "others" of ostensibly exotic and sinister origin, as the source of disease, famine, and social tensions.[84]

Finally, the marketplace, one of the central medieval social phenomena Bakhtin analyses in *Rabelais and his World*, an exemplary carnivalesque place, is likewise significantly simplified in his account. Bakhtin applauds the forms of speech specific for the marketplace, namely, hawking and advertising cries, which were quite more expressional, gestural and often freely vulgar. "Such speech forms, liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idiom, become themselves a peculiar argot and create a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally",[85] writes Bakhtin. These speech forms were, just as Rabelais' novels, ironic, vulgar and ridden with laughter. But they were also places of commodity exchange, and the goal of the speech forms on the marketplace was precisely to sell these commodities, which were produced by someone somewhere. But Bakhtin does not show any interest for this aspect of the marketplace. He does not "even begin to ponder the lives and speech patterns of those who worked the fields, the workshops and proto-factories (not to mention those who were subjected to colonialism) to produce the commodities which circulated within the marketplace. As a result, he offers us a metaphor of the market as an ideal space, as the site of free, familiar, and ironic speech among equals".[86] The back-story of the marketplace – the story of the places of exploitation and oppression – is left aside.

Bakhtin's approach to carnival in *Rabelais and his World* best depicts where the contradictions of Bakhtin's inherited presuppositions, both theoretical and methodological, inevitably lead to when the task is to conceptualize a concrete social phenomenon, a social practice. This work, along with his other works on novelists (the texts on Dostoevsky and Goethe), bears

> the marks of the same irreconcilable tension between the static model of eternal principles derived from neo-Kantianism and its heirs and the developmental and totalising model derived from Hegelian philosophy [as Bakhtin's early works]. Thus each genre has an eternal essence which remains identical, but which unfolds in historical time, never reaching a conclusion. Life and culture remain constant opposites, but they develop historically. Laughter has a history, but it remains constant. These contradictions are not easily negotiated.[87]

[84] Ibid., p. 154.

[85] Bakhtin 1984, p. 188.

[86] McNally 2001, p. 156.

[87] Brandist 2002, p. 155.

Because of this, Bakhtin values the appearance of the carnivalesque in Rabelais' novels as a truly historical event, where the struggle between popular and official culture entered a new stage (or, at least, a new form). However, this view "drastically overestimates the power of the novelistic as if the entry of laughter into the world of literature could automatically defeat official seriousness, fear and superstition. Consequently, he underestimates the sociomaterial and ideological pressures which reproduce domination (and which do not collapse with the appearance of Rabelais)".[88] As we shall see later, it is precisely for these reasons that Gramsci is the best "corrective" of Bakhtin's idealist faults.

4.2.4. Beyond Bakhtin: Authoritative and Internally Persuasive Hegemonic Principles

Although Bakhtin's insights about language definitely offer a very intriguing perspective, seeing how he fares after a critical reassessment of his philosophy, it seems it would be ill advised to simply adopt his concepts without any adjustment. As Craig Brandist notes, "[t]he fundamentally idealist nature of Bakhtin's critique must be recognised if his work is to be developed and applied productively".[89] Since we have showed the idealist elements in Bakhtin in the previous two parts of this chapter, we can now offer a first reworked concept (and, at the same time, the last part of our critique) which will lead us to wider social questions related to language which Bakhtin did not adequately solve (or even pose).

The dichotomy of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse Bakhtin develops offers a very promising approach to the dissemination of traditional knowledge (of the church, of the state, of the authority of any kind, of "experts", etc.) and the development of original knowledge (which is not imposed, but is freely accepted and embraced).[90] Furthermore, this is directly related, as we saw, with the formation of consciousness. If authoritative discourse is dominant in a person's consciousness, she is likely to be a "good subordinate", so to say, while the person whose consciousness is formed through internally persuasive discourse is a lot more likely to think critically and coherently of the world in which she lives. In short, authoritative and internally persuasive discourse are the forms by which specific world-views

[88] McNally 2001, p. 154.

[89] Brandist 2002, p. 155.

[90] I term the second type of knowledge „original" because, although internally persuasive discourse is someone else's at the beginning, the central point of it is that it stimulates the formation of the person's own ideas and thoughts, not expressed or found in internally persuasive discourse at the moment of its assimilation – hence "original" knowledge.

are transmitted and consciousnesses are formed. But Craig Brandist proposes that "[w]hat is being described" with authoritative discourse "is not a type of discourse, but a hierarchical relation between discourses", i.e. "a relation of subjugation of one discourse to another", whereby internally persuasive discourse describes "a liberation [of thought/consciousness] through structuration".[91] The two discourses, as Bakhtin described their interrelation, are in constant struggle for dominance, which essentially signifies they are a part of class struggle and that, consequently, they themselves are of a class character, the authoritative discourse pertaining to the ruling classes. But, as Brandist shows, this leads us to further implications that go beyond Bakhtin: a necessary reformulation of these two concepts which liberates them from their primarily ethical character and enables us to apply them to a much wider set of social phenomena.

> If each discourse articulates a world-view and discourses struggle to establish their superiority as a necessary corollary of the class struggle, then a discourse becomes hegemonic when one social class's world-view is accepted as kindred by other social classes. This does not mean the struggle for hegemony consists merely of a conflict between two preformed ideologies but a conflict of *hegemonic principles*. Discourses seek to bind other discourses to themselves according to two basic principles: either by establishing a relation of authority between the enclosing and target discourses [authoritative discourse] or by facilitating the further advancement of the target discourse through the enclosing discourse [internally persuasive discourse].[92]

By such a reformulation, the explicative potential of the concepts are broadened, and they start referring to *hegemony*: social domination, social power, and, even more importantly, the political mechanisms of achieving and maintaining hegemony – which leads us to Gramsci (we shall demonstrate the usefulness of this reformulation in the following chapters). "In Gramsci's prison writings the above divergent hegemonic principles coincide with the exercise of hegemony by the bourgeoisie and proletariat".[93] Thus, we are brought to an understanding of language which sees it not only as an expression of class struggle, but as directly involved in the struggle for power in capitalist society.

[91] Brandist 2002, p. 185.

[92] Brandist 1996a, p. 103.

[93] Ibid., p. 104.

4.3. Language and Power in Bourdieu

We can make a short *intermezzo* between the Bakhtin Circle and Gramsci with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of language, which has a lot of similarities to both and thus brings them close together. The concepts similar to that of Bakhtin are better developed, and, at the same time, they offer a glimpse of the problems Gramsci was interested with. We might describe the passage from Bakhtin, through Bourdieu, to Gramsci as the passage from an undeveloped concept of language as class struggle, through the concept of language as social power, to the concept of language as hegemony proper, i.e. language as part and parcel of a hegemonic political project of a class.

Similar to Bakhtin and Voloshinov, Bourdieu starts with the proposition that "the relations of communication *par excellence* – linguistic exchanges – are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized";[94] i.e., in the relations of communication, the class relations of society are actualized. The reasons for this are multiple, but the first and most essential one is that language embodies a struggle between world-views – which was already Voloshinov's claim, as we saw – whereby, obviously, these world-views pertain to their specific classes, or the class positions of the speakers. "The word or, *a fortiori*, the dictum, the proverb and all the stereotyped or ritual forms of expression [...] imply a certain claim to symbolic authority as the socially recognized power to impose a certain vision of the social world, i.e. of the divisions of the social world". This is where Bourdieu goes somewhat further in elaborating what the class character of language really is compared to Bakhtin: it is not merely a struggle between world-views of the existing classes; the point is that the outcome of this struggle – who is the victor and who is the loser – determines how the existing class division of society will be perceived and interpreted (or not perceived and not interpreted). In short, it is a struggle over the legitimacy of the existing social relations. But the various classes never start as equals (which is, as we have seen in the last part of this chapter, something Bakhtin overlooked), since "[i]n the struggle to impose the legitimate vision [...], agents possess power in proportion to their symbolic capital, i.e. in proportion to the recognition they receive from a group".[95] This means that the ruling classes find themselves always-already in an advantageous position in comparison to the subordinate classes.

[94] Bourdieu 2012, p. 37.

[95] Ibid., p. 106.

A further implication of this is that the various versions of the same language – Bakhtin's speech genres – never start from an imaginary "zero starting point". The linguistic practices of the ruling classes possess most "prestige", authority and legitimacy, and it is, therefore, according to them and their standards that the other linguistic practices are valued: "[a]ll linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e. the practices of those who are dominant. The probable value objectively assigned to the linguistic productions of different speakers and therefore the relation which each of them can have to the language, and hence to his own production, is defined within the system of practically competing variants".[96] Thus, there always exists a certain *hierarchy* of speech practices, whose structure is determined by the dominant speech practice (the socially most "prestigious" one), which is, in return, the speech practice of the socially dominant class, which possesses the material means for the production of "prestige". That is why – to make a full circle and return to the class character of language – we can say that "[t]o speak is to appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups".[97]

Language is, therefore, not a means of communication, but an expression of social power and a way of confirming this power: "utterances are not only (save in exceptional circumstances) signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also signs of wealth, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and signs of authority, intended to be believed and obeyed".[98] This means that speaking implies not merely a capability to successfully express oneself, but also the capability to impose what is being expressed as plausible, truthful, acceptable, valuable, etc. to others. "The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be listened to, likely to be recognized as acceptable in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak. Here again, social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality".[99] Thus, linguistic competence, unlike anything Chomsky would understand by that term,[100] could be defined as social in a twofold sense, namely, not only as the competence to produce meaningful

[96] Ibid., p. 53.

[97] Ibid., p. 54.

[98] Ibid., p. 66.

[99] Ibid., p. 55.

[100] Cf. chapter. 1.2.

utterances, but also the competence to recognize the specific social situation in which these utterance are formulated. This type of "competence, which is acquired in a social context and through practice, is inseparable from the practical mastery of a usage of language and the practical mastery of situations in which this usage of language is socially acceptable. The sense of the value of one's own linguistic products is a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social space".[101] Naturally, since this competence is "acquired in a social context and through practice", it is not equally attainable for all people, since the amount of various contexts are limited by the class positions of individuals, as well as the unequal access to education (which is just one of the moments of a class position). "The different agents' linguistic strategies are strictly dependent on their positions in the structure of the distribution of linguistic capital, which can in turn be shown to depend, via the structure of chances of access to the educational system, on the structure of class relations".[102] Therefore, "what expresses itself through the linguistic habitus is the whole class habitus of which it is one dimension, which means in fact, the position that is occupied, synchronically and diachronically, in the social structure".[103]

We encounter, again, the confirmation of the dominant class position within language in the form of a dominant linguistic practice. It is the ruling class that will with most ease impose its world-view as the most legitimate one, and which will have most success in doing so. The subordinated classes are, then, perceiving the social structure, the existing class divisions, and their own class position through the prism of the ruling class' world-view, and they will have a similar attitude towards these issues as does the ruling class – the important difference, of course, is that the one benefit from the existing state of affairs in society, whereby the others do not, and are, in fact, the ones being exploited. This entails a certain form of "internal censorship" within the subordinate classes, because their speech and, consequently, their thought are limited to very specific forms and to a very specific content, which are, needless to say, uncritical in their understanding of the existing social relations. "Censorship is never quite as perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorized to say: in this case he does not even have to be his own censor because he is, in a way, censored once and for all, through the forms of

[101] Bourdieu 2012, p. 82.

[102] Ibid., p. 64.

[103] Ibid., p. 83.

perception and expression that he has internalized and which impose their form on all his expressions".[104]

This mechanism, which in our case (that of modern capitalist society) appears as a mechanism of strengthening the dominance of the already dominant social forces through language, is what Bourdieu terms *symbolic power*.

> Symbolic power – as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization – is a power that can be exercised only if it is *recognized*, that is, misrecognized as arbitrary.[105]

When saying that it is misrecognized as arbitrary, Bourdieu is primarily alluding to the proponents of the theory of "the illocutionary force" of words, that is, of language in general. But it is not only an element of some of the theories of language (and a very important one), it is also a way in which language will often commonly be perceived, for example, as the ability of the speaker to "express the truth" of things, regardless of *who* the speaker is, *to whom* and *where* she speaks, etc. In line with Bakhtin's authoritative discourse, Bourdieu explains in detail what is necessary for discourse to appear and function as such in the first place, namely, what constitutes the moments of "recognition".

> The specificity of the discourse of authority [...] consists in the fact that it is not enough for it to be *understood* (in certain cases it may even fail to be understood without losing its power), and that it exercises its specific effect only when it is *recognized* as such. This recognition [...] is granted, in the manner of something taken for granted, only under certain conditions, namely, those which define legitimate usage: it must be uttered by the person legitimately licensed to do so, the holder of the *skeptron*,[106] known and recognized as being able and enabled to produce this particular class of discourse [...]; it must be uttered in a legitimate situation, that is, in front of legitimate receivers [...]; finally. it must be enunciated according to the legitimate forms (syntactic, phonetic. etc.).[107]

With Bourdieu, we learn that language is inextricably linked with power, but with power rooted in social relations. With Bakhtin, the class character of language was left

[104] Ibid., p. 138.

[105] Ibid., p. 170.

[106] As Bourdieu explains, the *skeptron* is, in Homer, passed to the orator who is about to speak.

[107] Bourdieu 2012, pp. 111-113.

standing at ethical dichotomies which do not actually explain much and which idealize the complexity of social groups and social practices. Bourdieu brings us closer to the core of the issue by showing that what Bakhtin calls the "internal stratification" of language is not merely an expression of social stratification, but that it is both *produced* by it, and, more importantly, *reproduces* it in turn: "objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic relations of power, in visions of the social world which contribute to ensuring the permanence of those relations of power".[108]

However, there are some minor issues in Bourdieu we can object to, even though he offers a significant theoretical improvement in relation to Bakhtin's idealism (and especially to the ethical approach to language in general, which is also specific to Habermas). An "analytical weakness of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power is that it is not interested in the trenchant and fundamental transformation of history brought about by the emergence of antagonistic classes and the state".[109] As we shall see in the next chapter, it is precisely the transformation of the state which is related to profound changes in the structure of society, both as its consequence, and as its cause. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power seems to leave these questions aside. Since we are interested in language in the context of *capitalist* class relations and the *capitalist* state, we must account for the process of their historical formation, as that will tell us a lot about language itself as an historical phenomenon. Secondly, "Bourdieu is not very interested in investigating how habitus could create impulses of transformation, nor whether there are other possible sources for these impulses. [...] It thus remains unclear how Bourdieu would conceptualise the contradictions in common sense, and how he could identify what Gramsci called a 'good sense'".[110] As was evident above with the position of the subordinate classes, it is as if the symbolic power wielded by the ruling classes leaves no room whatsoever for rebellion of any kind, be it spiritual, intellectual, or let alone practical. They can never set themselves free from the dominant world-view because they are "censored once and for all"[111] by the internalized forms of perception and expression. It is true, common sense is uncritical and fragmented, but it is our goal to see what could comprise the "good core" of common sense upon which a "good sense" could emerge, and where space

[108] Ibid., p. 238.

[109] Rehmann 2013, p. 230.

[110] Ibid., p. 238.

[111] Bourdieu 2012, p. 138.

for revolutionary activity could be found. For those reasons, we have to speak of (and with) Gramsci.

4.4. The Gramscian Point of View

Until now, we have referred to Gramsci only occasionally and have not discussed his theses on language thoroughly. The reason is, Gramsci's writings on the topic come both as a critical reassessment and a synthesis of the aforementioned authors, while also going beyond them and offering significantly more insights than any one of them, particularly in regard to conceptualizing social institutions and the social structure in general.[112] As Peter Ives writes, "Gramsci's overcoming of the errors of both the idealist and positivist approaches to language yields a theory of language as a historical institution that changes continuously".[113] To continue where we left, the similarities between Gramsci's point of view and that of the Bakhtin Circle are immediately evident. We already outlined Gramsci's understanding of language as world-view and the historical metaphoricity of language,[114] but these are not the only threads Gramsci, on the one hand, and Bakhtin and Voloshinov, on the other, share.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci writes: "[o]ne might say that every social group has a 'language' of its own".[115] This is clearly a class position, one that we are, by now, very well familiar with. If we bear in mind that, for Gramsci, language also contains "a specific conception of the world",[116] we get the same correlation as in Bakhtin and Voloshinov: the fact that various social groups (classes) speak differently is inextricably connected to their specific world view, i.e., their class position (we immediately recall Bakhtin's speech genres and Voloshinov's multiaccentuality). However, Gramsci does not end his sentence there, but he continues: "[o]ne might say that every social group has a 'language' of its own, yet one should still note that (rare exceptions apart) there is a continuous adhesion and exchange between popular language and that of the educated classes".[117] This is already something we cannot find in Bakhtin, since in Bakhtin, the relationship between centrifugal (popular

[112] Since this entire text is "Gramscian" in its core, as I mentioned in the Introduction, the remainder of it will focus primarily on Gramsci, his analysis of language and society, and the possible further concepts, theses and conclusions one can develop from them.

[113] Ives 2004a, p. 23.

[114] Cf. part 3.4. and part 2.3.1, respectively.

[115] Gramsci 2012a, p. 120.

[116] Gramsci 2012b, p. 323.

[117] Gramsci 2012a, p. 120.

language) and centripetal forces (official language) is pretty oppositional, and there is little room for any kind of "adhesion".

To clarify what Gramsci means, we have to turn to a note from the *Prison Notebooks* titled "How Many Forms of Grammar Can There Be?". At first glance of the note, the answer is apparently "two": an "immanent" or "spontaneous" grammar – corresponding to popular language – and a "normative" grammar – corresponding to official language. But the contrast between the two is not at all strict as in Bakhtin; on the contrary, Gramsci places these two forms of grammar in a dialectical relationship. "Immanent" grammar is "'immanent' in language itself, by which one speaks 'according to grammar' without knowing it"[118] (that is to say, one speaks in accordance to the forms of speech one has internalized, immanent grammar thus being best embodied in the language of one's community), which is why it is also "spontaneous",[119] just as all men have a specific world-view, i.e. they think and act according to a "spontaneous" philosophy.[120]

> Besides the 'immanent grammar' in every language, there is also in reality (i.e., even if not written) a 'normative' grammar (or more than one). This is made up of the reciprocal 'censorship' expressed in such questions as 'What did you mean to say?', "What do you mean?', 'Make yourself clearer', etc., and in mimicry and teasing. This whole complex of actions and reactions come together to create a grammatical conformism, to establish 'norms' or judgements of correctness or incorrectness.[121]

Normative grammar is thus not immediately official language, but firstly any type of language which forms within a social group, i.e., even a dialect. Gramsci then continues: "[b]ut this 'spontaneous' expression[122] of grammatical conformity is necessarily disconnected, discontinuous and limited to local social strata or local centres".[123] As modern societies are formed – which corresponds to the formation of the nation in 19th century – a process of unification of the various local normative grammars begins, and a national language is formed. Of course, this "minor" linguistic process (the formation of the national language) is

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[118] Ibid., p. 180.

[119] As Ives notes, Gramsci uses "immanent" and "spontaneous" grammar synonymously. (Ives 2004a, p. 40.)

[120] More on "spontaneous philosophy" in the next chapter.

[121] Gramsci 2012a, p. 180.

[122] Spontaneous not in the sense of spontaneous grammar, but in the sense of the spontaneous formation of normative grammar.

[123] Ibid.

necessarily connected to political phenomena, since, essentially, it is a part of a much wider political process (the formation of the nation under the banner of a dominant social class).

> One could sketch a picture of the 'normative grammar' that operates spontaneously in every given society, in that this society tends to become unified both territorially and culturally, in other words it has *a governing class* whose function is recognized and followed. The number of 'immanent or spontaneous grammars' is incalculable and, theoretically, one can say that each person has a grammar of his own. Alongside this actual 'fragmentation', however, one should also point out the movements of unification, with varying degrees of amplitude both in terms of territory and 'linguistic volume'. Written 'normative grammars' tend to embrace the entire territory of a nation and its total 'linguistic volume', to create a unitary national linguistic conformism.[124]

There are several points worth stressing here: firstly, there are multiple spontaneous grammars (each person has its own), as well as multiple normative grammars; secondly, the relationship between the two forms of grammar truly is dialectical because "[s]pontaneous grammar is the historical product of the interaction of past normative and spontaneous grammars", while "[n]ormative grammar is created from spontaneous grammars" by a process of establishing norms and forming a grammatical conformism; thirdly, we see why the moment of history in linguistic phenomena – in this case, the formation of a unified national language as part of a wider process of political unification under the leadership of a ruling class – is fundamental for understanding language itself. This is something we noted is missing in Bourdieu, and especially Bakhtin. Because, if we have "popular language" on the one hand, which is fragmented and disconnected, and "a unitary national linguistic conformism" on the other – i.e. national language – which is formed as part of a governing class' political project, then this apparent dichotomy is not at all ethical, as in Bakhtin, but profoundly political, because the fundamental question becomes "what is this political project and what part does language take in it?".

We are already equipped with the means to, at least partially, answer that question. What Bakhtin termed "centripetal forces", and whereby he described them as a regressive phenomenon which strives to extinguish the existing heteroglossia in a language, are actually specific *classes* with their specific *political interests*. Voloshinov was far better in explaining this, by showing that it is the ruling classes which strive to impose a single meaning upon words in order to eliminate or delegitimize those meanings which, in one way or another,

[124] Ibid., p. 181. My emphasis.

bring the existing social relations into question. This is then not a matter of a "good-bad" dichotomy, but a matter of politics. Unlike Bakhtin, "Gramsci is not simply equating spontaneous grammar with the grammar of subaltern languages and suggesting that it must be freed from the oppressive normative grammar of the leading social group. Quite the contrary – just as the history of the subaltern social groups is by definition fragmentary, so too is spontaneous grammar. The act of unifying it, of creating a normative grammar, is that of becoming a 'state'".[125] In the case of the capitalist state, the goal of this unification is, obviously, the preservation of capitalist social relations and the capitalist state, whereby the relationship between the classes of capitalist society is expressed in "the relationship between spontaneous grammar and the prevailing normative grammar"[126] – a relationship of *hegemony*. By analyzing the historical phenomena we just briefly mentioned here (the formation of national language, which is a part of the process of the formation of the nation, which is itself a part of the formation of capitalism), we can analyze the character of capitalist hegemony and theorize an alternative proletarian hegemony – which is the only possible next step if one does not wish to remain stranded in ethical dichotomies. By that, we enter, through the sphere of class, to the *sphere of politics*.

[125] Ives 2004a, p. 44.

[126] Ibid., p. 50.

Chapter V

Language and Social Structure

By analysing the class character of language, we were constantly pressured into analysing other problems, which appeared related in such a manner to the question of class that it was finally evident that one cannot fully understand the class character of language without embarking into the wider problematic of *hegemony*. Furthermore, hegemony itself requires us not only to understand class relations and its dynamics, but primarily to understand the historical processes within the social structure in general, and the mechanisms of its (r)evolution or perpetuation in particular. Thus, the question of concrete social institutions and social practices comes to the fore – by that, we mean, of course, *capitalist* institutions and practices. In this way, we follow what seems to be a theoretical logic of explication which imposes itself upon us, since simply by starting from a social and historical concept of language, we necessarily arrive at the issues we just described. As Gramsci wrote, "[e]very time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony".[1] In a sense, just as the exposition of Marx's *Capital* – which starts from the commodity in order to arrive at capitalist production and reproduction – is dictated by the internal logic of the subject at hand, so discussing language, from a historical-materialist perspective, commences from the way it appears in society, in order to dialectically arrive at the place of language within the social structure.

As we hope to show (and hope to already have showed in part), understanding language and developing a historical-materialist theory of it is important for understanding why people think and act the way they do, and, consequentially, it is important for Marxism as a whole. This does not mean we are proposing that language is or should be the *primary focus* within Marxism, which would essentially comprise a form of naive linguistic reductionism within Marxist theory. "The importance of language is not at the expense of other social structures, and moreover, [...] its importance is not based in a firm demarcation between language and non-language structures. On the contrary, language is crucial to

[1] Gramsci 2012a, pp. 183-184.

Gramsci because it cannot be separated from all other aspects of social life".[2] On the other hand, there are also tendencies within Marxism which assert the primacy of political economy, and in such a manner that all other issues (language among them) are either of lesser "relevance" for Marxism, or completely irrelevant – within the currents of economic determinism – since all ideological phenomena are merely the expression of the economic base of society. Although such currents within Marxism do not hold significant merit today as they did during the time when dogmatism reigned in "official" Marxism (of the Second International, but especially of Stalinism), the "base-superstructure" metaphor is still a pretty controversial topic and thus requires us to discuss it as an entry point for discussing language and social structure. What is in fact at hand in this metaphor is a specific concept of ideology, which has wide implications for other aspects of historical-materialism. With clarifying this issue, we not only get rid of some "spectres" within Marxism, but also exclude the chances of being misinterpreted either as idealist or as vulgar materialist.

5.1. The Problem of Ideology

If Marx somehow could have known what the repercussions of the metaphor of base and superstructure would have been, he probably would have been a lot more careful with its use in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,[3] either adding a substantial further elaboration of what he meant, or devoting himself to it in his later works. Since neither happened, and since both Marx and Engels used the term "ideology" in apparently different ways during their lives, what resulted was a century and a half long history of misunderstandings and theoretical conflicts within Marxism revolving solely around the question "what constitutes ideology and what is its relation to the social structure?". The base/superstructure metaphor is merely a prime example of this long-lasting debate. As Jan Rehmann writes:

[2] Ives 2004a, p. 33.

[3] Probably one of the most quoted places in Marx's *ouvre* (largely precisely because of the disputes it caused after Marx's and Engels' deaths), we quote it here at length. "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness". (Marx 1859, p. 263.)

> [t]he fact that Marx and Engels deployed the term 'ideology' in different contexts and in different ways resulted in three primary tendencies being derived from their works in subsequent theoretical writings: firstly, an *ideology-critical* approach, represented in particular by György Lukács and the Frankfurt School, which interpreted ideology as 'inverted' or 'reified' consciousness; second, a 'neutral' concept of ideology, formulated in particular by Lenin and predominant in 'Marxism-Leninism', which understood ideology as a class-specific conception of the world and therefore also considered Marxism to be an 'ideology'; and third, a conception that ranged from Antonio Gramsci to Louis Althusser [...], which understood the ideological as the ensemble of apparatuses and forms of praxis that organise the relation of individuals to the self and to the world.[4]

Since one's conception of language is undoubtedly affected by one's conception of ideology, this is a discussion we have to take part in.

Marx's and Engels' conception of ideology can in fact be deduced already from their early works if one reads them attentively and tries to avoid rash conclusions. For example, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels confront the idealism of the philosophies of Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner. Referring to them, they outline their understanding of ideological phenomena.

> In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. [...] It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.[5]

The similarity of the last sentence to the one from Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* is particularly striking,[6] signifying that this general stance was something Marx had not abandoned in his later works. But as Jan Rehmann rightly notes, this place in *The German Ideology* caused numerous objections from various Marxists,[7] all revolving around the problematic implications of the wording in this quote, in particular the words

[4] Rehmann 2013, pp. 21-22.

[5] Marx and Engels 1845, pp. 36-37.

[6] "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness." (Marx 1859, p. 263.)

[7] Like Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Louis Althusser and the German *Projekt Ideologietheorie*. Rehmann 2013, pp. 22-23.

"reflexes" and "echoes". One could very easily read this as a linear causal relationship between life (base) and ideology (superstructure).

Raymond Williams' critique of this paragraph is particularly interesting because if his reading of it is true (namely, if it truly corresponds to Marx's and Engels' opinion), then his accusations are completely justified. Williams writes that the "decision not to set out from 'what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived'" is "at its worst an objectivist fantasy" which implies "that the whole 'real life-process' can be known independently of language ('what men say') and of its records ('men as narrated')".[8] For Williams, the polemical thrust in *The German Ideology* led Marx and Engels to rightly argue against idealism's faults, but also to commit an opposite theoretical error, namely, of separating ideology from "real life" and asserting the primacy of the later both in reality and in theory. This, in return, justifies the "elaboration of the familiar two-stage model (the mechanical materialist reversal of the idealist dualism), in which there is *first* material social life and *then*, at some temporal or spatial distance, consciousness and 'its' products. This leads directly to simple reductionism: 'consciousness' and 'its' products can be nothing but 'reflections' of what has already occurred in the material social process".[9]

But, as Rehmann points out, in the same work, Marx and Engels show that one should not conceive of these two "spheres" in such a way. In order to offer arguments against the German "philosophy of consciousness", they write about five aspects of social activity, which are as follows: (1) the production of the means to satisfy the most basic material needs, such as food, shelter and clothing; (2) by satisfying these needs, humans create new needs, like the need for tools; (3) by propagation, the human species forms particular relations between men and women, like the family; (4) by "the production of life" in the twofold sense of one's own labour and propagation, a specific form of co-operation between individuals emerges; (5) man possesses consciousness with which "the four moments mentioned so far were put into practice".[10] There are two important points here. Firstly, Marx and Engels write that these five aspects are not to be taken "as different stages", but as moments which "have existed simultaneously since the dawn of history and the first men, and [...] still assert themselves in

[8] Williams 1977, p. 60.

[9] Ibid., p. 61.

[10] Rehmann 2013, pp. 24-25. The elaboration of these five moments can be found in Marx and Engels 1845, pp. 42-44.

history today".[11] Secondly, Marx and Engels clearly emphasize that consciousness is *practical*.

> The 'mind' is from the outset afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men.[12]

Clearly, the apparent separation of "real life" and ideological phenomena is not present in Marx and Engels; what we encounter, in fact, is a dialectical unity of the two, which is why language and consciousness are also practical. "It is obvious that this line of argument has nothing to do with an 'objectivist fantasy' (Williams) of human life devoid of meaning and language. Nor is it a demonstration that language and consciousness only have a 'secondary' status. Instead, Marx and Engels argued against the idealist concept of a 'pure' consciousness and pointed out that *consciousness has its social form in language*".[13]

Following Rehmann, if we read *The German Ideology* this way, it hints at what Marx also wrote in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, and, indeed, it is wise to read the two together (especially since they were both written in 1845). There, the first thesis starts with the claim that "[t]he chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object*, *or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively".[14] It is the materialism that Marx criticises both in the *Theses* and in *The German Ideology* (together with Engels) that is "objectivist", because it fails to conceive of reality and sensuousness as practice. Since Marx distances himself from such a materialism – in fact, from "all previous materialism" – he obviously intends to propose a new materialism, which does not suffer from the same "defect". This goal is achieved precisely by conceiving of consciousness as fundamentally practical in the sense described in the previous paragraph: Marx and Engels "argued that consciousness could *only* be understood as an integral part of life-practices, and, therefore, as a composite of social relations".[15]

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[11] Marx and Engels 1845, p. 43.

[12] Ibid., pp. 43-44.

[13] Rehmann 2013, p. 25. My emphasis.

[14] Marx 1845, p. 3.

[15] Rehmann 2013, p. 25.

Of course, the criticisms directed towards *The German Ideology* still do posses some validity, because one can indeed find some words and formulations which leave enough room for a reductionist, i.e. "objectivist" reading of Marx's and Engels' theses. It is

> undeniable that descriptions of ideology as 'false' or 'inverted consciousness' suggested – similarly to the terms 'echo' and 'reflex' – a concept of ideology as a volatile epiphenomenon, a 'castle in the sky' without any materiality and efficacy of its own. It is evident that such terminology could become a hindrance to an analytical reconstruction of the object. But the criticism misses the anti-objectivist and praxis-philosophical thrust of the overall argument in both the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology*.[16]

One of the reasons which very well explains why some of the wording in *The German Ideology* (and other early works as well) is problematic is that Marx and Engels polemicised with their theoretical opponents and thus were writing within their terminological framework, attempting to use the old terms not to adopt them, but to critically invert them.[17] What is at stake in this polemical work is the thesis that "consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real" solely from the moment "when a division of material and mental labour appears"[18] in society. This "standing on its head" of consciousness and ideology is then inverted "on its feet" by the theoretical insight of the division of material and mental labour and by reasserting that consciousness is, in fact, always consciousness of a practice, and, in that sense, is practical itself. Furthermore, the division of material and mental labour implies certain social relations and a history of their (trans)formation – in short, a certain materiality one needs to take into account.

We can now adequately discuss what the concept of ideology entails, and also, what is wrong with the two of the three Marxist interpretations of ideology described at the beginning of this section, namely, the concept of ideology as "false consciousness" and the neutral concept of ideology. The former finds its justification in the term *camera obscura* used by Marx and Engels, whereby it is then simply concluded that ideology is a form of illusion, i.e. a "false consciousness". But although this term was used initially for describing the philosophies which they criticised, it also denotes (and particularly in their later works) the "material arrangement" of ideology in social institutions and practices. "The fact that *The*

[16] Rehmann 2013, p. 26.

[17] Ibid., p. 32.

[18] Marx and Engels 1845, p. 45.

German Ideology combined, here, a category that was usually employed for describing a world-view or philosophical tradition (namely 'idealistic') and a category for a material and institutional reality ('superstructure') is symptomatic for the transition from a traditional discourse of consciousness to a historical-materialist ideology-theory".[19] The former is still somewhat present in Marx and Engels' early works, because a critical distancing from it was first necessary, while it is completely absent already from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and onwards in favour of the later. Thus, "as soon as one takes Marx and Engels's complex arrangement of gender, class, and state into consideration, one can see that they had in fact undertaken a decisive shift towards an ideology-theory that, instead of clinging to a naive concept of 'false consciousness', conceived of the ideological as a material and institutional arrangement in society".[20] This is something the main proponents of the concept of ideology as "false consciousness" (Lukács and the Frankfurt School) failed to realize and thus never attempted to elaborate a theory of the various social practices or apparatuses in capitalist society.[21]

The neutral concept of ideology is based on the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* we already referred to above, namely, the part in which the conflict between the forces of production and the relations of production is outlined and where it is distinguished "between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production [...] and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out".[22] Following the young Lenin's interpretation of this paragraph, the ideological was reduced to ideas and "was then considered 'neutral' in the sense that it functioned as a medium allowing the expression and representation of different, even opposing, class-interests".[23] This then became "common sense" in Marxism-Leninism. But the point of this Marx's statement was "not how class-interests were reflected in 'ideological forms', but rather in and by what ideological forms the people involved become aware of and 'fight out' the contradictions between productive forces and relations of production".[24] The consequence of this misinterpretation was that Lenin

[19] Rehmann 2013, p. 31.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Cf. Rehmann 2013, chapter 4.

[22] Marx 1859, p. 263.

[23] Rehmann 2013, p. 55.

[24] Ibid., p. 56.

considered Marxism a "scientific ideology" of the working class, which somehow, unlike other ideologies, has access to "objective truth". Furthermore, by reducing ideology solely to ideas, the materiality of the ideological was completely neglected, and the ideological struggle was conceived merely as a struggle for the domination of certain ideas, but not also as a struggle between opposing social practices (for example, those of the established social institutions and those of the revolutionary social forces). Finally, since the capitalist state is the prime example of the materiality of ideology (as we shall see in this chapter through Gramsci's work), the process of the "withering away" of the state in socialism is a crucial moment of a wider process of the "withering away" of ideology – which is something one cannot understand if one conceives ideology merely as a set of "ideas". Besides, "the *Communist Manifesto*'s goal of 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' implied a society not only without antagonistic classes but also without submission to 'superior' ideological powers connected to state-domination".[25]

The Marxist "tendency" in regard to ideology that best traces the steps of Marx and Engels and further develops their legacy is the third one from Rehmann's list, namely, the one associated with (amongst others) Gramsci. It does not fall into the trap of "false consciousness", nor into the one of "neutral" ideology. For Gramsci, ideology always has an effect of submission, and its materiality is embodied – first and foremost, but not exclusively – in the integral state. We could succinctly describe the integral state as the organic ideological materiality of the capitalist relations of production. By tracing the development of the integral state as part of the process of the consolidation of capitalist social relations, one also arrives at the formation of the nation, and, by that, of national language, the dominant "form" of language in societies today.

5.2. The Integral State: The Materiality of the Ideological

Gramsci's approach to ideology can best be grasped by his "reworking" of the base-superstructure metaphor. Following Marx from the 1859 "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where Marx writes that the "totality of [the] relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social

[25] Ibid., p. 62.

consciousness",[26] Gramsci develops the metaphor in a non-reductionist direction by reading it in an innovative way. Firstly, since Marx later writes about "ideological forms" which comprise the superstructure, Gramsci chooses to speak not of *a* superstructure or *the* superstructure, but of *superstructures* in the plural. "These are conceived [...] as forms of social practice, or forms in which men know their conflicts based in the economic structure of society and fight them out",[27] which follows Marx's formulations. Furthermore, "Gramsci radicalizes the base-superstructure metaphor by taking it literally: if the superstructures arise upon the economic structure, the former is then in fact coextensive with the latter, in a three-dimensional perspective, overlaying it".[28] That way, there is no room for any interpretation of the base-superstructure metaphor which would lead to the vulgar materialist one-dimensional causality, where base determines superstructure, or where the superstructure would somehow mechanically "reflect" the composition of the base. Instead, conceived in the aforementioned Gramscian sense, "the superstructures are agonistic forms that compete to become the essential form of appearance of a content that is itself contradictory – that is, they seek to resolve the contradictions in the economic structure of society of which they are the (more or less adequate) comprehension, either by pacifying and effacing them, or by emphasising their unstable nature and driving them to a moment of crisis".[29] In this way, the superstructures constitute a dialectical unity with the existing relations of production, which Gramsci terms "historical bloc". In the historical bloc, "precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces".[30] We shall see why the concept of the integral state cannot be properly understood without this a bit later.

It is best to "jump into" Gramsci's concept of the integral state from a historical perspective, not only because "the preconditions for the concept of the integral state were first elaborated on historiographical terrain", but also because it is much easier to follow the same path, from history to "a fully fledged concept", than vice-versa. "This is to say that the integral state is not, in the first instance, a normative proposition, a theoretical abstraction to

[26] Marx 1859, p. 263.

[27] Thomas 2010, p. 171.

[28] Ibid., pp. 171-172.

[29] Ibid., p. 172.

[30] Gramsci 2012b, p. 377.

which reality is expected to adjust. Rather, it is a theoretical intervention into a determinate political conjuncture".[31]

As is known, from a Marxist perspective, the transition from one form of social organization to another is caused by the conflict between the forces of production and the relations of production – the potential of the former is being limited by the restrictions of the latter, to put it very shortly. By the 18th century, in Europe, the feudal social relations were limiting the forces of production which have so developed that they signalled a new mode of production – that of capitalism. Since the feudalist ruling classes – the aristocracy and clergy – representing the "old", feudal mode of production had no interest in changing the existing social relations, they entered into conflict with the class representing the "new", capitalist mode of production – the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie's goal became the seizure of power in order to revolutionise social relations and bring them in line with the forces of production, which essentially meant the seizure of the state. "The state is the instrument for bringing civil society into line with the economic structure, but the state has to 'want' to do that, i.e. the representatives of the change that has already come about in the economic structure have to be in control of the state".[32] With the French Revolution of 1789 and up until the formation of the last nation-states in Europe by the 1870s, the process of the bourgeoisie's seizure of state power was finished. But what it entailed was not only a transformation of civil society and the social relations of production, but also a fundamental transformation of the state itself.

One of the major advances of the bourgeois revolutions was a "revolutionising of the nature of the 'political' and its concrete institutional forms",[33] which Gramsci praised and which were of particular interest for him. The previous ruling classes relied almost exclusively on coercion to maintain their rule and functioned essentially as a closed "caste", since it was impossible for peasants or serfs to become members of the aristocracy. The bourgeoisie's revolution of the political sphere is contained in the fact that it presented itself as, in principal, open to all, and that it did not rely only on force, but on consent with which it acquired the legitimacy to stay in power.

> The revolution which the bourgeois class has brought into the conception of law, and hence into the function of the State, consists especially in the will to conform [...]. The previous ruling classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an

[31] Thomas 2010, p. 140.

[32] Gramsci 1995, p. 167.

[33] Thomas 2010, p. 143.

> organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e. to enlarge their class sphere 'technically' and ideologically: their conception was that of the closed caste. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed; the State has become an 'educator', etc.[34]

Thus, the state was not comprised any more merely of the army and the judiciary, it "was no longer merely an instrument of coercion, imposing the interests of the dominant class from above. Now, in its integral form, it had become a network of social relations for the production of consent, for the integration of the subaltern classes into the expansive project of historical development of the leading social group".[35]

Gramsci terms this new form of state "the integral state", because it is comprised of "two major superstructural 'levels'" (which is the reason we needed to discuss Gramsci's interpretation of the base-superstructure(s) model): "the one that can be called *'civil society'*, that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of *'political society'* or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to *the function of 'hegemony'* which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of *'direct domination'* or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government".[36] One should not be confused with Gramsci's apparent equating of the state with political society; what is at hand is in fact precisely transgressing the old conception of the state (which was limited solely to political society and its functions) with the new one, which possesses dual functions (consent and coercion).[37] The integral state is "a dialectical unity of the moments of civil society and political society. Civil society is the terrain upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership or hegemony over other social classes. Such hegemony is guaranteed, however, 'in the last instance', by capture of the legal monopoly of

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[34] Gramsci 2012b, p. 260.

[35] Thomas 2010, p. 143.

[36] Gramsci 2012b, p. 12. My emphasis.

[37] In fact, the problem here is the same as with Marx and Engels' terminology in *The German Ideology*, where they used old terms and concepts in order to transgress them and reach new ones, which resulted in some confusions, as we have seen. Here, Gramsci is trying to describe the "level" of political society in the new integral state with the old concept of the feudal state, the function of which was precisely only coercion. Gramsci's theory of the state did cause some confusions as well, the most famous text on the topic being Perry Anderson's "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci" (cf. Anderson 1976). Fortunately, these confusions have been rectified, in the Anglophone world, by Peter Thomas (2010, chapter two).

violence embodied in the institutions of political society".[38] Or, as Gramsci succinctly writes, "the general notion of State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that state = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion)".[39]

The dialectical unity of civil society and political society is expressed in the dialectical relationship between their functions: consent (hegemony) and coercion (domination), respectively.[40] "Hegemony in civil society functions as the social basis of the dominant class's political power in the state apparatus, which in turn reinforces its initiatives in civil society".[41] In other words, the consent produced in civil society legitimizes the "monopoly of force" and the functioning of political society; in turn, when bourgeois hegemony enters into a crisis and oppositional political projects emerge, the repressive force of political society is finally utilised (which, in "normal" circumstances, remains "dormant") and secures not only that the ruling classes remain in power, but also that the hegemony in civil society is again reinstated. Thus, coercion and consent "'counterbalance' each other in a unity that depends upon the maintenance of a precise, 'unbalanced' equilibrium between its two poles: force must not appear to predominate too much over consent, but the 'proper relationship [*giusto rapporto*]' between them in reality involves more weight on the side of the former".[42]

However, this does not mean that simply seizing state power would be enough to become the ruling class and assert hegemony in civil society as well. As Gramsci writes,

> the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to liquidate, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can and indeed must already exercise 'leadership' before winning

[38] Thomas 2010, p. 137.

[39] Gramsci 2012b, p. 263.

[40] Göran Therborn has objected that "the modalities of class rule cannot be pressed [...] into the straitjacket of force-and-consent" because it does not "embrace the complex functioning of ideology", which "tells us not only what is right but also what exists and what is possible, thus structuring identities, knowledge and ignorance, ambitions and self-confidence" (Therborn 2008, p. 242.). I hold this critique untenable, because, as we shall see in more detail later, Gramsci was profoundly interested precisely with how ideology structures "identities, knowledge and ignorance" etc. His concept of "common sense" was the centre or the object of such "structuring" processes, whose end-purpose was to be found in the production of consent.

[41] Thomas 2010, p. 144.

[42] Ibid., p. 165.

> governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power).[43]

Gramsci applies this to (and in part, seeks to "test" his theory on) the historical context of Europe after the First World War, when socialism was the strongest oppositional political force in most countries. As the years unfolded, history showed that only the Russian socialists would indeed succeed in gaining power, while their European brethren failed (or, for various reasons, did not or could not attempt an armed seizure of power at all). Gramsci's concept of integral state, and the dialectical unity of civil and political society and consent and coercion, turns out to be an excellent theoretical framework for explaining the success of the former and the failure of the latter. There was no proper bourgeois revolution in Russia, and feudal social relations still prevailed. This meant that the state was still limited merely to the function of coercion, and did not develop into an integral state with a strong civil society. Consequentially, taking over state power did, indeed, mean becoming the ruling class. This did not apply, however, to the West. "In Russia, the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks".[44] Thus, in the West, a prerequisite for a socialist revolution and the seizure of state was an ideological struggle within civil society, where enough "space" had to be won, in the form of revolutionary social institutions and groups, to make the overthrowing of the state politically plausible and realistically possible.[45] In developed capitalist countries, therefore, civil society "has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.)",[46] as well as, we might add, to sudden and politically immature armed upheavals.

With the integral state, rule is not composed any more just of the "old" principle of coercion or force, but also of the "new" principle, dialectically united in a "stable

[43] Gramsci 2012b, p. 57.

[44] Ibid., p. 238.

[45] This leads Gramsci to differ between "war of position" and "war of manoeuvre", whereby the former corresponds to the ideological and political struggle within civil society, and the latter to direct conflict in a form of an armed uprising.

[46] Gramsci 2012b, p. 235.

disequilibrium", of consent.[47] In Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, hegemony "emerges as a new 'consensual' political practice distinct from mere coercion (a dominant means of previous ruling classes) on this new terrain of civil society".[48] That the state's function now also entails the production of consent, means, more importantly, that what is at hand is "intellectual and moral leadership". It is in that sense that Gramsci writes of the "ethicity" of the modern state: "every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes".[49] By the concepts of hegemony and the integral state as "educator", Gramsci unites two insights we find in Marx. On the one hand, the insight that the state has transformed and developed the capacity to form and influence civil society at an unprecedented depth. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx writes of France, "where the state enmeshes, controls, regulates, superintends and tutors civil society from its most comprehensive manifestations of life down to its most insignificant stirrings, from its most general modes of being to the private existence of individuals".[50] On the other hand, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, he writes that "the educator must himself be educated".[51] As Gramsci shows, it is the state that has become the educator of the masses through the transformation it has underwent during the bourgeois revolution of the political. Obviously, it is the actions of men that determined what kind of educator this new form of state will be, and, consequently, what kind of men it will "educate". This is a political question, a question of hegemony.

Although, at first instance, hegemony appears as corresponding to civil society and the production of consent, it becomes clear now that it is so dialectically intertwined with the second function of the modern integral state – that of coercion, corresponding to political society – that it cannot in fact be simply "located" within just one of these two "superstructural levels", as Gramsci calls them.

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[47] It is worth noting that the concept of hegemony was not "invented" by Gramsci, but was first coined in Russia and conceptualized by Lenin. Gramsci built upon this legacy, but also developed it a lot further. On the relation of Gramsci to Lenin, see Thomas 2010, part 6.2.3.

[48] Thomas 2012, p. 144.

[49] Gramsci 2012b, p. 258.

[50] Marx 1852, p. 139.

[51] Marx 1845, p. 3.

> [H]egemony is a particular practice of consolidating social forces and condensing them into political power on a mass basis—the mode of production of the modern 'political'. Gramsci leaves no doubt that the exercise of hegemony, initially elaborated within civil society, also impacts upon that other superstructural 'level' of the integral state, 'political society or State'. [...] A bid for 'civil hegemony' has to progress towards 'political hegemony' in order to maintain itself as itself.[52]

This also means that hegemony should not be grasped negatively, as a necessarily repressive concept, but neutrally (that is, exactly the opposite as with the case of ideology). In the capitalist conjuncture, Gramsci shows, we can differ between two hegemonic projects: that of the bourgeoisie, which formed itself and achieved dominance by the 19th century; and that of the proletariat, whose time is yet to come, and whose goal is precisely to overthrow the bourgeois hegemony.

5.3. National Language and Dialects

5.3.1. The Historical Formation of National Language

The consequences of the definite victory of capitalism and the class consolidation of the bourgeoisie were not only visible in the transformation of the state, but also – to backtrack to what primarily interests us – in the changes within European languages. Clearly, uniting a vast amount of people under one banner and into one state was not something simply mechanically achievable by a purely diplomatic act of unification of the various principalities (where it was the case that the territory of the state-to-be was divided among such political entities, as was the case in Italy and Germany). Even where there was an already existing "unified" political entity like the French kingdom, which then "merely" had to be transformed into a bourgeois integral state, there was, amongst the people, no developed sense of belonging to the same group other than merely all being "subjects" of the French crown. The people spoke in various vernacular dialects, and there was no "standard" or "official" language approximately up until the French Revolution. Of course, people did not start to speak French over night, by some official decree issued by the National Assembly (although that is not as far from the truth as one would suspect) – this was a long process, simultaneous with the development of capitalism, which began in the 14th century in the case of France, where the Parisian dialect gained more and more popularity – for obvious social, political and

[52] Thomas 2010, p. 194.

economical reasons – and became the language of the educated.[53] When the need for an official French language appeared, the Parisian dialect was simply the best candidate. But even then, at the end of the 18th century, the overwhelming majority of the people did not speak what could be called "French", but spoke their local dialects.

This merely signifies the wider process of the creation of the nation in 19th century Europe which language was a part of. National language, as we understand the concept today, was one of the products of this process. The construction of the nation and the nation-state were historically necessary for the full and free development of the capitalist market, just as the primitive accumulation and the general abolition of feudal social relations (the most important one perhaps being the serf's transformation into a "free" seller of his labour power), which Marx describes in the first volume of *Capital*,[54] were before them. The national language was not only a way of ensuring the easier functioning of the national capitalist market (the corresponding national legislation, communication in general and commercial communication in particular, etc.), but it was also part and parcel of the new national identity. Creating a national identity (just as the creation of the integral state) was part of an immense political project, conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies, of general political, economic, cultural and ideological unification, which lasted for many decades. The creation of national identity was truly publicly "set" as a goal to be achieved, which is portrayed by the famous quote of the Italian politician and novelist Massimo d'Azeglio, who wrote: "we have created Italy; now we must create Italians". The statement was also historically true, since it so happened that the political unification of Italy preceded any social or cultural unification (as well as any linguistic one), which was yet to be achieved.[55]

Thus, national language, being itself a part of this political project, did not emerge somehow "spontaneously", but presupposed and was the result of innumerable social and political changes introduced by the ruling classes, which proves that "the formation of a linguistic (national or international) unity is nothing other than the result of the convergent

[53] Cf. Bourdieu 2012, pp. 46-48.

[54] Marx 1867, part VIII, pp. 704-764.

[55] Which was a problem that persisted up to Gramsci's time – he wrote about it extensively not only in prison, but also during the years of his revolutionary activity during and after the First World War. The most notable lines of division within the Italian subaltern classes he was concerned with were those of north-south and urban-rural (which, on a national scale, basically corresponded to the first one).

action of real intellectual and productive forces".[56] The official language was introduced in schools (the attendance of which became compulsory for all children): as Bourdieu writes, in the process of the "imposition of an official language, the educational system plays a decisive role", helping "to devalue popular modes of expression, dismissing them as 'slang' and 'gibberish'".[57] The official language became (if it was not in some way already) the language of the administration, thus becoming necessary for personal success and a sought-after career amongst the lower classes. Entry into the labour market in general was more and more limited by the worker's knowledge of the official language. In short, "[c]reating a national language has always and everywhere been a political project; the national state needs one language, just as it has often required one church, one army and one monetary system. [...] [T]he notion of 'the national language' is largely a cultural and socio-political artefact, not something descriptive of empirically existing, spoken, linguistic activities", at least not until the process of its imposition ended, when it does become "materialized in writing and to some extent also in speech".[58] That is to say: the fact that national language was created in a long socio-historical process that ended by the 19th century – and not existing for centuries or even millennia before today, as every national myth claims – does not change the fact that it has become a part of our social reality.

What becomes evident, therefore, is that national language is inextricably connected to the nation-state. This is the case not only because both were a part of the same political project of unification we described above, but also because – since this project cannot actually end, but is a process of a constantly reaffirming hegemony – it remains constantly linked with the state. As we previously saw, in the integral state, the institutions of political society "secure" those of civil society. The same applies to national language: it is endorsed by all official institutions; its "official" status is only guaranteed by the official policy of the official institutions and experts officially administered to claim so. That is the way in which it is decided what "standard" language is, and, by that, simultaneously, what the norm for valuing other "unofficial" "sub"-languages is.

> The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses. It is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language. Obligatory on official occasions and in

[56] Rosiello 2010, p. 33.

[57] Bourdieu 2012, pp. 48-49.

[58] Linell 2004, p. 119.

> official places (schools, public administrations, political institutions, etc.), this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured.[59]

Evidently, both the content and the form of official language are in control of the ruling class – not in the sense that there would be a group of mysterious people issuing official decrees on what can and cannot be said, as in Orwell's *1984*, but in the sense that the reproduction of standard language is bound to the sections of the integral state which are, from a class perspective, limited to the ruling elite. It is never the people that decides how official language should look like, of what elements of existing dialects should it be composed, how it should be pronounced, etc. "The recognition of the legitimacy of the official language has nothing in common with an explicitly professed, deliberate and revocable belief, or with an intentional act of accepting a 'norm'. It is inscribed, in a practical state, in dispositions which are impalpably inculcated, through a long and slow process of acquisition, by the sanctions of the linguistic market".[60] Official language is taught, one is corrected how not to speak and instructed how to speak, official language is listened to on the radio or the television, it is read in books or newspapers, etc. Its legitimacy is imposed, not accepted. We thus come to the conclusion that "[i]ntegration into a single 'linguistic community', which is a product of the political domination that is endlessly reproduced by institutions capable of imposing universal recognition of the dominant language, is the condition for the establishment of relations of linguistic domination".[61]

5.3.2. A Critique of Political Naivety: Why Standard Language Matters

One might be tempted to continue, then, that Bakhtin was right – there is nothing positive about national language. It is merely an undemocratic imposition upon the people. Gramsci offers a quite different perspective, which might very well be a consequence of significantly different socio-historical contexts in which these two minds wrote. As Ives notes, "Bakhtin is absorbed with Stalin's centralisation of everything involving culture and language. Gramsci is preoccupied with the disorganization and chaos of a working-class movement that ended in defeat".[62] Indeed, the historical defeat of the Italian working-class from the hands of the fascist reaction hit Gramsci as a revolutionary involved in this struggle, effectively ending for

[59] Bourdieu 2012, p. 45.

[60] Ibid., p. 51.

[61] Ibid., p. 46.

[62] Ives 2004a, pp. 72-73.

him with his imprisonment. Gramsci decided to try and understand the failures of the Italian communists and the obstacles that they have not noticed. He found that one of the main problems with the Italian subaltern classes (both the workers of the north and the peasantry of the south) was their internal division, both in the sense of a social and political division between various groups (stemming from the north/south, worker/peasant and other regional and class "oppositions") as well as in the sense of an ideological division, a fragmented consciousness. A factor that played a role in both of these was precisely language, and among other things which Gramsci sorted into the "problem of language" (which we shall discuss below) was the *de facto* non-existent national language.

> In Gramsci's Italy, the fascist party had capitalized on the regional economic unevenness of the country which was 'juridically fixed' by the absence of a universally utilized national language. The division of the national proletariat, and to a greater extent peasantry, into regional dialect areas obstructed the formation of a united, revolutionary class alliance of the sort that had facilitated the revolution in Russia. Thus the process whereby the revolutionary party could gain political hegemony was intimately tied up with the overcoming of linguistic provinciality [...].[63]

Yes, dictionaries and grammar books existed, but the vast majority of people simply were not fluent in "standard" Italian. Sometimes, as in the case of Gramsci's homeland Sardinia, the linguistic differences between the members of the subaltern classes coming from various areas of Italy were so insurmountable that they could not understand each other at all. But this quite pragmatical issue was merely the surface of the problem. If we remember that every language is a world-view, the problem is actually far more serious.

> If it is true that every language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture, it could also be true that from anyone's language one can assess the greater or lesser complexity of his conception of the world. Someone who only speaks dialect, or understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilised and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interests will be limited, more or less corporate or economistic, not universal.[64]

Thus, what is at stake is not merely an incapability of purely *linguistic* understanding, but an incapability of understanding each other's *world-view*. Even if the members of the subaltern classes had translators for one another at all circumstances – a somewhat silly hypothetical

[63] Brandist 1996a, p. 101.

[64] Gramsci 2012b, p. 325.

hyperbole, but it proves my point – they would fail to grasp "where the others come from". Each dialect represents one in its own way provincial world-view, a specifically "economistic" standpoint which is capable only of grasping its own point of view. In short, subaltern classes which speak predominantly in dialects means subaltern classes which think predominantly in a limited, provincial, economically "private" way. If a class (indeed, any class) cannot create a universal political standpoint which unites it, it cannot have any realistic ambitions to become the ruling class. In post-WWI Italy, this was precisely the case with the subaltern classes. So Gramsci concludes: "[w]hile it is not always possible to learn a number of foreign languages in order to put oneself in contact with other cultural lives, it is at the least necessary to learn the national language properly".[65]

Gramsci shows us, therefore, that there is quite a positive aspect in a national language, which is extremely important from a political standpoint, since it offers the subaltern classes a means to unite themselves, not only in expression, linguistically, but also in thought and action, "ideologically", that is, politically. However, this does not mean that he considers dialects languages of a lesser value compared to the standard language.

> Gramsci rejects the conception of dialect as expression of uncontaminated popular genuineness that is typical of romantic and populist ideology. He thinks that popular masses – to the extent that they organize themselves to become hegemonic class – must overcome every sectarianism of dialects in order to gain a more powerful communicative instrument, capable of expressing the new culture and of exercising new hegemony. For Gramsci, this does not mean that one has to negate the realities of dialects: he has never argued that dialects must disappear [...].[66]

It is completely erroneous to interpret Gramsci's critique of "someone who only speaks dialect" as a critique of *dialects in general*, instead of, as is literally written, a critique of *people who only speak dialect*. In that sense, Jean-Jacques Lecercle is wrong in claiming, after quoting exactly the same paragraph we quoted above, that Gramsci "is hard on" dialects and that we can "find in him a form of linguistic Jacobinism".[67] In continuation to that paragraph, Gramsci wrote something which undoubtedly clarifies that his stance is that of knowing *as much languages as possible*, be they dialects, the national language, or foreign languages. It is indicative that Lecercle leaves it out of his reference: "[w]hile it is not always possible to

[65] Ibid.

[66] Rosiello 2010, p. 40.

[67] Lecercle 2009, p. 83. As Carlucci notes, Lecercle is not the only one to hold such an opinion. See Carlucci 2013.

learn a number of foreign languages in order to put oneself in contact with other cultural lives, it is at least necessary to learn the national language properly".[68] Thus, Gramsci is not advocating the national language to the detriment of dialects, but simply the knowledge of both as a way of broadening people's world-views and preventing provincialism and sectarianism. If one is not convinced by that particular quote, one might simply look into Gramsci's letters written while he was in prison. In a letter to his sister Teresina, on the 26th of March 1927, Gramsci suggests that she should let her son, Franco, speak Sardinian. The arguments he offers prove that his stance on non-standard languages is not negative at all – on the contrary.

> It was a mistake, in my opinion, not to allow Edmea [Gramsci's niece] to speak freely in Sardinian as a little girl. It harmed her intellectual development and put her imagination in a straitjacket. You mustn't make this mistake with your children. For one thing, Sardinian is not a dialect, but a language in itself, even though it does not have a great literature, and it is a good thing for children to learn several languages, if it is possible. Besides, the Italian that you will teach them will be a poor, mutilated language made up of only the few sentences and words of your conversations with him, purely childish; he will not have any contact with a general environment and will end up learning two jargons and no language; an Italian jargon for official conversation with you and a Sardinian jargon learned piecemeal to speak with the other children and the people he meets in the street or piazza.[69]

Therefore, "[a]lthough Gramsci certainly stressed the negative consequences of an insufficient degree of national linguistic unification, his attitude towards local and minority languages, to Sardinian in particular, was neither hostile nor dismissive".[70] Unlike Bakhtin, Gramsci is extremely well aware of the political consequences of the lack of national linguistic unification, for the reasons we mentioned previously. Bakhtin's arguing for diversity as an immanently positive social phenomenon lacks precisely the political wisdom which Gramsci gained as a revolutionary who talked to and with the masses and tried to organise them. Bakhtin's idealism prevented him in seeing that extreme linguistic diversity more often separates the masses, than unites them, and that there is nothing particularly subversive in the linguistic practices of the subordinate classes if these practices merely reflect their intellectual inferiority – but he did not possess the theoretical apparatus to break from such a naive conviction.

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[68] Gramsci 2012b, p. 325.

[69] Gramsci 1994, Volume I, p. 89.

[70] Carlucci 2013, p. 11.

> In other words, an exclusive concern with diversity (difference, plurality, autonomy and so on) would result, *de facto*, in an acceptance of the world as it is, and would essentially have relegated Gramsci within the liberal horizon, while the implementation of unity was needed to conceive and organise the transition beyond this horizon.
>
> Gramsci's concept of hegemony overcomes this impasse by implying that there can – and probably will – be diversity in a culturally and linguistically unified world. The tension between the two poles – unification and diversity – can never be entirely resolved. History does not destroy, it simply rearranges. Unity does not mean uniformity and there may be a deeper level of autonomy and diversity in a future unified world than there is within the present conflict-ridden and divided humanity.[71]

We are in the realm of politics, and we cannot descend back into the Bakhtinian realm of ethics. What is "bad" is not the imposition of a national language *per se*, but the intellectual submissiveness of the subaltern classes which is in good part perpetuated precisely by maintaining the exclusivity of dialects and the "repressive" character and artificiality of the standard language.

Consequentially, the strict dichotomy of *either* diversity *or* unification – as Bakhtin perceived the issue – is theoretically completely false and politically very harmful. The point of a revolutionary political project would be to envision a process of unification which would not be undemocratical as the one currently prevailing in most nation-states, coming from above and completely ignoring the linguistic reality and diversity of the speakers who are supposed to speak the standard language. While it is necessary to advocate linguistic unification, it is also very important to bear in mind that "imposed unification is only an exterior form of integration, and does not bring about the progressive political potential of real unification".[72] Expressed in Gramsci's terms of normative and spontaneous grammar we discussed above, the point is that, "[i]nstead of trying to impose a normative grammar on people, [...] it would be more ethical and more pragmatic to develop a normative grammar that did not have to manage these various frictions but instead was itself the product of their resolution".[73] Thus, such a wider hegemonic project would have to include a process of democratic linguistic unification in which the members of the subaltern classes would participate as much as possible and in which the diversity of existing dialects would be taken into account in the formation of a standard language (instead of simply imposing an already

[71] Ibid., p. 17.

[72] Ibid., p. 162.

[73] Ives 2004a, p. 51.

finished and constructed language). Furthermore, it should be taken into account that, even after such a democratic process of linguistic unification is "successful", it in fact never ends, since the language will necessarily undergo changes through the linguistic practice of the speakers – these changes should be embraced and welcomed, not written off as "incorrect". Finally, there should be no illusions of a "linguistic recipe" for progressive change, or a blind faith that a concrete outcome of this process is bound to happen. As with all social change, such things are not predictable. The point is, then, to envision linguistic unification truly as a process in which it is possible merely to intervene in the hope of achieving certain goals, whereby it is, of course, of utmost importance, that one is aware of as much aspects of this complex process as possible, in order for the intervention to be "rational". In Gramsci's words, since this process

> occurs through a whole complex of molecular processes, it helps to be aware of the entire process as a whole in order to be able to intervene actively in it with the best possible results. One need not consider this intervention as 'decisive' and imagine that the ends proposed will be all reached in detail, i.e. that one will obtain a *specific* unified language. One will obtain a *unified language*, if it is a necessity, and the organized intervention will speed up the already existing process. What this language will be, one cannot foresee or establish: in any case, if this intervention is 'rational', it will be organically tied to tradition, and this is of no small importance in the economy of culture.[74]

This is to say that such a process of linguistic unification cannot but be a part of wider political activity and strategy. The "progressive political potential" of such a linguistic unification would then imply not only a higher level of political organisation and unification of the subaltern classes, but also a development within them of a much more coherent and critical (and hopefully revolutionary) world-view. "This is why language policies should be taken seriously by all those who are interested in facilitating the spread, and the taking root, of new values and attitudes".[75]

Thus, contrary to Bakhtin and similar perspectives, "the essential dichotomy turns out to be – beyond the one between diversity and unification – the one between bureaucratically imposed unification (according to a pre-determined 'rational' model or theory) and open-minded unification, allowed by the existence of adequate and necessary conditions and obtained through the active participation of large and diverse sections of population". Carlucci

[74] Gramsci 2012a, p. 183.

[75] Carlucci 2013, p. 144.

rightfully terms this process "*hegemonically obtained unification*".[76] Again, this process of unification is necessarily a part of a wider political project, as the formation of national language as part of the formation of bourgeois hegemony demonstrates. If this problem is left aside, the process will continue in its current state, the existing "normative grammar" will remain as it is, namely, the grammar of the ruling classes. A revolutionary counter-hegemonic project should incorporate this process into itself and change the course it currently has.

> Written normative grammar [...] always presupposes a 'choice', a cultural tendency, and this is always an act of national-cultural politics. One might discuss the best way to present the 'choice' and the 'tendency' in order to get them accepted willingly, that is, one might discuss the most suitable means to obtain the goal; but there can be no doubt that there is a goal to be reached, that adequate and suitable means are needed, in other words that we are dealing with a political act.[77]

Our goal now is to better understand hegemony itself, not only to be able to outline the effects of bourgeois hegemony, but also to understand what a proletarian hegemony would have to entail (as well as to see what the role language plays in both of those is and should be).

5.4. Hegemonizing "Common Sense": The Production of Consent

5.4.1. Traditional and Organic Intellectuals

In order to continuously reproduce the consent of the masses, a massive apparatus has to be employed in the realm of civil society, which Gramsci simply terms the "hegemonic apparatus" of a class. In a sense, it is the organizational backbone of a class through which it secures its political power. "A class's hegemonic apparatus is the wide-ranging series of articulated institutions (understood in the broadest sense) and practices – from newspapers to educational organisations to political parties – by means of which a class and its allies engage their opponents in a struggle for political power. [...] The hegemonic apparatus is the means by which a class's forces in civil society are translated into power in political society".[78] It therefore comprises one aspect of the dialectical unity of the integral state, since it enables "a condensation of the social forces in civil society" into "the 'official' politics of 'political society'",[79] which then secures with force (if necessary) the preservation of the hegemonic

[76] Ibid., p. 17.

[77] Gramsci 2012a, p. 182.

[78] Thomas 2012, p. 226.

[79] Ibid., p. 227.

apparatus in civil society (the police and the army protect the judiciary, which applies the existing laws, which maintain the existing social relations and mode of production). As we can see, the hegemonic apparatus is a key part of this dialectic.

Of course, this apparatus is not some kind of social *perpetuum mobile*; it has to be run by concrete people and regulated with a clear separation of their functions and a corresponding hierarchy of practices. This role is fulfilled by the intellectuals, which, for Gramsci, are not merely, as we would perhaps understand the term today, highly educated "public figures", specialists in their particular field, etc., but also functionaries of all types in general, which do not at all have to be publicly visible in order to function as intellectuals. "Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields".[80] In the process of its coming to power, the bourgeoisie created not only the integral state, but also all sorts of functionaries which would run it, both in civil society, keeping its hegemonic apparatus alive, as well as in political society, as the generals and officers in the army, policemen, judges, etc.

> The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. These comprise:
>
> 1. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
>
> 2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.[81]

The intellectuals are thus the "missing link" between civil society and political society, who ensure its dialectical unity and continual functioning. Since most of these intellectuals are principally "unrelated" to the popular notion of "politics", their positions acquire social

[80] Gramsci 2012b, p. 5.

[81] Ibid., p. 12.

prestige and are perceived by the masses as good job opportunities, which is a way of attracting members of other classes into them.[82]

> As the 'non-commissioned officers' of 'fundamental' social groups or classes, the intellectuals are thus mediating moments of transmission of a class's hegemonic project from one 'attribute' of the integral state to another,[83] the agents of the condensation of social forces into political power. They function not simply as constructors of the 'trenches' that characterise the complexity of a fully developed modern state-formation; with the seemingly 'non-political' organisation they undertake in the realm of civil society, they function as points of prestige and attraction for a class's hegemonic project and embody those trenches themselves, as 'functionaries' of the superstructures, or 'agents' of the state in its integral sense as 'organised disequilibria'.[84]

But these are only one type of intellectuals, namely, *traditional intellectuals*. Since they appear as "apolitical" and are, in most cases, employed on the basis of their competence in their particular field, instead of on the basis of political opinions or membership of a party,[85] they also start to perceive themselves, and are perceived from others, as a specific type of "workers" doing intellectual labour. "Since these various categories of traditional intellectuals experience through an 'esprit de corps' their uninterrupted historical continuity and their special qualification, they thus put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group".[86] This is how some of them can become the type of "intellectuals", understood in the contemporary sense, as "unbiased public figures" who are entitled "opinion makers" since they are not affiliated with any political party, but always speak from "an experts perspective". Representatives of neoliberal think-tanks, experts in "foreign policy" backing military invasions, conservative economists arguing for austerity measures, etc., are good examples of such figures.

However, behind such a separation of "intellectuals" doing intellectual work and those (workers, farmers, etc.) doing only manual work, lies a faulty criterion of distinction between

[82] This is also, as we mentioned, one of the ways in which official language, used by these functionaries, also acquires prestige.

[83] I.e. from civil society to political society and vice-versa.

[84] Thomas 2012, p. 413.

[85] Of course, this pertains primarily to the lower echelons of functionaries, which remain employed in the same institutions regardless of the results of parliamentary elections. Naturally, political corruption and nepotism are a common phenomenon, more or less so depending on the country in question, but the main principle according to which these functions are filled – in principle – is the one of "competence".

[86] Gramsci 2012b, p. 7.

them and other social groups. "The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations".[87] The point for Gramsci, thus, is not the apparent "essence" of the activities of traditional intellectuals, but the function their activities have in the wider social context, i.e. the place this particular type of labour occupies in existing social relations. "Professional philosophers or traditional intellectuals are distinguished not by their intellectual activity per se, but because of how such activity functions within society, the effect it has on presenting a specific world-view".[88] Besides, it would be silly to claim that manual workers and farmers do not use their intellect in their labour: obviously, one has to use both his mind and his hands to do any type of manual labour properly. In fact, for any type of activity, we have to use our intellect in one way or another. "All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals".[89] And the function of traditional intellectuals is, simply put, to produce consent in the subaltern classes in order to maintain the existing state of affairs in society.

The second type of intellectuals are called *organic intellectuals*. They are "organic" because they are members of their particular class, but unlike traditional intellectuals, they do not "forget" this link, they never hide their class origin, but, on the contrary, openly declare it. Furthermore, since they are the intellectuals of the subaltern classes, their function is completely different from the function of traditional intellectuals.

> The organic intellectual is not only organic in relation to the community into which she was socialized, but also 'organic' in the sense that her function is to organize, and this includes organizing language. This is also true of the 'traditional intellectual', the difference lying in what is being organized and for what purposes. A traditional intellectual simply refines and adjusts the already created organization of the world view of the dominant class. In contrast, an organic intellectual must organize more thoroughly that which is in chaos. In order to create a more coherent world-view, she must work with conflicting perspectives and ideas that do not correspond to lived experiences.[90]

[87] Ibid., p. 8.

[88] Ives 2004b, p. 74.

[89] Gramsci 2012b, p. 9.

[90] Ives 2004a, pp. 45-46.

The "mode of being" of the organic intellectual, writes Gramsci, consists in "active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator".[91] Thus, the traditional intellectual perpetuates the "intellectual and moral leadership" of the ruling classes by perpetuating the intellectual subordination of the subaltern classes, while the organic intellectual, coming precisely from those classes, tends to fight against such a state of affairs and to organise the subaltern classes both intellectually and politically. In other words, what is at stake here, is a struggle for so-called "public opinion", a struggle for the world-view of the masses, or, in Gramsci's terms, a struggle for "common sense".

5.4.2. The Struggle for "Common Sense"

With "common sense" (*senso comune* in Italian) Gramsci is referring to the "spontaneous philosophies" of the subaltern classes: that they are "spontaneous" is nothing positive, but, on the contrary, is supposed to indicate that they are incoherent, seemingly random, contradictory, uncritical and unconscious. Thus, "common sense" does not have the same meaning as the English idiom, which signifies a "sound mind", so to say. As we have shortly outlined previously,[92] these spontaneous philosophies contained in "common sense" are linked with spontaneous grammar, and, just as the grammar, the languages of the subaltern classes, every person has its own "spontaneous philosophy", which is also why "all men are 'philosophers'". "Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the 'folklore' of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is".[93] In short, "the Gramscian notion of 'common sense' can be understood as popular social thought or as the common beliefs and opinions held by ordinary people. In some ways, common sense can be understood as the mentality or psychology of the masses".[94]

In his note entitled "The Study of Philosophy", after again emphasizing that philosophy is not at all an activity limited to certain specialists, but exists in some form or

[91] Gramsci 2012b, p. 10.

[92] Cf. Part 4.4.

[93] Gramsci 2012b, p. 419.

[94] Green and Ives 2010, p. 293.

another in every man, Gramsci lists the elements in which the spontaneous philosophy of each person can be traced. "This philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. 'common sense' and 'good sense';[95] 3. popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of 'folklore'".[96] All of these imply that, essentially, one's spontaneous philosophy is one's world-view, and it is expressed in one's language, in the collective "common sense", and in folklore. Since it is relatively difficult to draw a strict line of demarcation between these elements, it is easier to categorically organize them on two levels: the concept of "spontaneous philosophy" or world-view should be conceived on the level of a *person*, while the concept of "common sense" and folklore should be conceived on the level of a *social group* or *class*. Language expresses *both* – as we learned with Vygotsky, Voloshinov and others, language is both an expression of consciousness, but also the expression of its concrete social background. Thus, in order to determine how hegemony functions, and what the specific effects of bourgeois hegemony are, we need to proceed from common sense to the person.

We now understand what the function of traditional intellectuals is: their social function in civil society, although they might not be aware of it, is to maintain the internal contradictoriness and fragmentation of common sense, to perpetuate its uncritical and incoherent character, and to preserve those social practices which benefit the *status quo*. The mass of workers, peasants, women and other social groups in a similar social position are not somehow "tricked" into this condition; they are literally *led to believe so*, which is the best expression to signify Gramsci's depiction of hegemony as "intellectual and moral leadership". "One of the central aspects that makes all these social groups subaltern is that they lack a coherent philosophy or world-view from which to understand and interpret the world. One could say, they lack their own language. Rather, they work with a 'common sense' that is a fragmentary result of the sedimentation of ideas and beliefs elaborated by various traditional intellectuals".[97] This is the reason why Marcus Green and Peter Ives rightfully point out that "the contradictory nature of common sense is not the product of some sort of intellectual or psychological deficiency on the part of the masses"; however, it is also the reason why

[95] More on "good sense" below.

[96] Gramsci 2012b, p. 323.

[97] Ives 2004b, p. 78.

claiming that "the contradictory nature of common sense is largely defined by the contradictory nature of the ensemble of social relations, economic exploitation and the various exclusions they produce and reproduce"[98] is only partially true, to say the least. The point is precisely that the social structure does not generate such a social condition "by itself", or through the logic of its internal contradictions – which might well easily lead to a radical Althusserian understanding of "common sense" as merely a consequence of the social structure – but that this requires both an enormous hegemonic apparatus *and* a vast army of traditional intellectuals to achieve. As Gramsci wrote, "[i]deas and opinions are not spontaneously 'born' in each individual brain: they have had a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion – a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality".[99]

"Common sense" is thus full of conservative and reactionary notions and beliefs: ancient religious superstitions, patriarchy and sexism, inter-regional and intra-class antagonisms, defeatism and passivity etc. Its elements stem from various historical eras, but they can all be equally effective and alive regardless of that fact. The traditional intellectuals stimulate such elements, and thus a general incoherence of "common sense", while they, at the same time, repress potentially progressive elements. Jan Rehmann uses a perfect metaphor by saying that "Gramsci's common sense could be compared to a quarry consisting of several layers of different geographical periods deposited upon each other. These 'layers' are the raw materials to be processed and transformed by ideological apparatuses and ideologues".[100] This best describes the fragmentation of "common sense", as well as its non-contemporaneous structure. But what is also important to note is that "common sense" is not entirely regressive, but also, as we already hinted, contains progressive elements, which can be positively utilised. What then results out of such a composition of various elements is a conceptual and ideological collage. "When one's conception of the world is not critical and coherent but disjointed and episodic, one belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups. The personality is strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over".[101]

[98] Green and Ives 2010, p. 304.

[99] Gramsci 2012b, pp. 192-193.

[100] Rehmann 2013, p. 128.

[101] Gramsci 2012b, p. 324.

This means that it would be a wrong approach to simply abandon common sense or criticise it in the hope of showing to the masses how wrong they were, in the somewhat cynical manner of the Frankfurt School. "Common sense" is not a "false consciousness". If left aside to the biding of the traditional intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, it will be dominated by the "Stone Age elements" and "prejudices from past phases of history". That is where organic intellectuals come into play: it is their goal to locate the progressive elements of common sense and stimulate their development and upsurge.

Thus, from the standpoint of politics, the first methodical point in relation to "common sense" is that the "transformation of the condition of subalternity requires not the elimination of common sense but the critique and transformation of it".[102] The second one is that "transforming 'common sense' cannot take the form of the imposition of a superior worldview or understanding of the world originating outside of the previously accepted 'common sense'".[103] The organic intellectual is not a figure which comes from above the subaltern classes and teaches them "the right way" of thinking, as in the Lukácsian concept of the party. He comes from within the subaltern classes and constantly works among them as an equal. The relationship between organic intellectuals and the subaltern classes is an "educational relationship", where "the relationship between teacher and pupil is active and reciprocal so that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher".[104] Only by such an approach can the subaltern classes develop and prosper intellectually, and, eventually, overthrow bourgeois hegemony and start building a proletarian one. Thus, the difference between traditional and organic intellectuals is – from a methodical standpoint – one of approach, or what we described previously as hegemonic principle:[105] the traditional intellectuals are guided by the authoritarian hegemonic principle, while the organic intellectuals are guided by the internally persuasive hegemonic principle. The traditional intellectuals' argumentative strength is based on their authority of "expertise" – for example,

[102] Green and Ives 2010, p. 292.

[103] Ibid., p. 298.

[104] Gramsci 2012b, p. 350. "This form of relationship exists throughout society as a whole and for every individual relative to other individuals. It exists between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between the rulers and the ruled, *elites* and their followers, leader and led, the vanguard and the body of the army. Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations" (ibid.).

[105] See Chapter 4.2.4.

the quite widely accepted opinion that "common" people should not express any opinion or bother themselves with economics, since that is a "too complex" field which should be left to the "experts"; the organic intellectuals, on the contrary, are equals of their "pupils", since their class background is the same (but not only because of that), and they strive, firstly, to achieve with them a better comprehension of their position in the existing social relations, and secondly, to organise their class politically – an example is precisely Gramsci himself, who was a major figure in the post-WWI revolutionary movement of Turin.[106]

The struggle between traditional and organic intellectuals is the struggle for "common sense". If the traditional intellectuals assert their dominance, the consequence is, as we have seen, a fragmented consciousness, incoherent and uncritical. But this has practical consequences as well. The worker has no theoretical understanding of her position in the existing social relations, and, due to the fragmentation of her consciousness, she is bound to look for explanations of her predicaments in ideas and concepts which only cause her to remain passive and defeatist. Gramsci describes this as an existence of two contradictory consciousnesses.

> The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacity but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity.[107]

Instead of realising that, through the labour which she conducts each day, she is united with her fellow-workers both in their common social role and position, as well as in their common interest of liberating themselves from such a predicament, for which they have the power to do so only if they unite – in short, that she is united with them as *members of the same class* – the worker will more often find reasons for differing and separating herself from others like

[106] For Gramsci's biography, see Santucci 2010.

[107] Gramsci 2012b, p. 333.

her and is more prone to find the causes of her poor life conditions in matters which she perceives as out of her control (or, sometimes, anyone's). Gramsci emphasises elsewhere again that

> [t]his contrast between thought and action, i.e. the co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other displayed in effective action, *is not simply a product of self-deception*. [...] In [the case of the life of the great masses] the contrast between thought and action cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes – when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in 'normal times' – that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate.[108]

The task of the organic intellectual is, thus, not at all simple. If she is to win the struggle for "common sense", she has to locate and stimulate its positive elements, and develop them into a coherent totality. The key for this is to be found in philosophy, Gramsci claims. "Philosophy is criticism and the superseding of religion and 'common sense'. In this sense it coincides with 'good' as opposed to 'common' sense".[109] This claim is extremely interesting: philosophy is not only a sort of critical "tool" for the superseding of "common sense", but it also *coincides* with "good sense" (*buon senso* in Italian). First of all, we have to bear in mind here that with "philosophy", Gramsci does not understand some special science or a set of academic practices conducted by an educated elite; for Gramsci, philosophy "is intellectual order, which neither religion nor common sense can be"[110] – philosophy is, in short, exactly the opposite of "common sense", as the formulation "intellectual order" implies, because it is critical, coherent, organized. It is the opposite of "spontaneous philosophy". Philosophy is "the invitation to people to reflect and to realise fully that whatever happens is basically rational and must be confronted as such, and that one should apply one's power of rational concentration and not let oneself be carried away by instinctive and violent

[108] Ibid., pp. 326-327. My emphasis.

[109] Ibid., p. 326.

[110] Ibid., p. 325.

impulses".[111] Secondly, the reason why it coincides with "good sense" is that such a conception of philosophy implies "overcoming bestial and elemental passions through a conception of necessity which gives a conscious direction to one's activity. This is the healthy nucleus that exists in 'common sense', the part of it which can be called 'good sense' and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent".[112]

How are we to differ such a philosophy from other philosophies existing in society? Clearly, it is not only that numerous "spontaneous philosophies" exist, but also that there are philosophies of the ruling class which reproduce the ideological effects of bourgeois hegemony and thus the subordination of the subaltern classes. This new philosophy was born with Marx and is termed the "philosophy of praxis",[113] and its *differentia specifica* is to be located in the historical novelty which it brings.

> There is [...] a fundamental difference between the philosophy of praxis and other philosophies: other ideologies are non-organic creations because they are contradictory, because they aim at reconciling opposing and contradictory interests [...]. The philosophy of praxis, on the other hand, does not aim at the peaceful resolution of existing contradictions in history and society but is rather the very theory of these contradictions. It is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even the unpleasant ones, and in avoiding the (impossible) deceptions of the upper class and – even more – their own.[114]

The philosophy of praxis must start as "a criticism of 'common sense', basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that 'everyone' is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity".[115] Then, it has to proceed as a criticism of the various philosophies of the traditional intellectuals, showing their contradictory character. Finally, it must never become an individualistic

[111] Ibid., p. 328.

[112] Ibid.

[113] This was coined by Antonio Labriola, from whom Gramsci borrows the concept and further develops it. Although definitely related to Marxism, this term was not a way for Gramsci to circumvent prison censorship, as is sometimes thought, which would imply it is equivalent with Marxism.

[114] Gramsci 1995, pp. 395-396.

[115] Gramsci 2012b, pp. 330-331.

philosophy, limited to a few individuals or a group, but has to always be linked with the subaltern classes, therefore becoming "life" and history, leading them to "a higher conception of life".[116] That way, "good sense", the healthy nucleus of "common sense", can start developing, which consists in the fact that "in a whole range of judgements [it] identifies the exact cause, simple and to hand, and does not let itself be distracted by fancy quibbles and pseudo-profound, pseudo-scientific metaphysical mumbo-jumbo".[117] With a critical and coherent world-view, the subaltern classes would no longer be as susceptible to the workings of the traditional intellectuals and the bourgeois hegemonic apparatus.

Finally, what is, then, the role of language in this entire struggle and the two possible outcomes: "common sense" and "good sense"? When writing of the two contradicting conceptions in thought and action, he says the former is "affirmed in *words*", that it is not of the masses, but "is borrowed from another group" and is affirmed by the masses "*verbally*". A bit later, when writing of the two contradictory consciousnesses of the "man-in-the-mass", Gramsci claims that, while the "practical" one is implicit, the "theoretical" one is "superficially explicit or *verbal*, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed", and in the following sentence, he terms this consciousness a "*verbal* conception".[118] It is clear: the consciousness which is in contradiction with the practical activity and life of the masses, because of which the subaltern classes find themselves in a state of intellectual and moral submission and consent to the class rule of the capitalist system, is a world-view verbally "suggested" to them by the traditional intellectuals. Unlike the philosophy of praxis, this world-view effaces the contradictions of the existing social relations and the mode of production. The reason why the subaltern classes "borrow" and "uncritically inherit and absorb" this conception of the world is the prestige that the traditional intellectuals and the ruling class are the bearers of. Thus, as we discussed previously, "this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production".[119] What is prestigious is not only their world-view, but also their language, the "normative grammar" of a nation, the national language. Language, therefore, plays a key role in the struggle for "common sense".

[116] Ibid., p. 332.

[117] Ibid., p. 348.

[118] Ibid., p. 326; p. 333. My emphasis.

[119] Ibid., p. 12.

> Language (in the specific sense of the Italian *linguaggio*, or active socio-linguistic relations) functions in a certain sense as the concrete materiality of *senso comune* and thus also of the ideologies/philosophies, the active social relations of knowledge that unify and divide different social groups. Conceived in this 'instrumental' sense, as an 'apparatus' for the transmission and diffusion of knowledge, language becomes one of the primary fronts in the struggle between hegemonies, or the attempts of different social groups to concretise their class project in terms capable of providing direction to an entire society.[120]

This is why linguistic unity is immensely important and should be one of the central elements of a counter-hegemonic project. To reiterate, if "philosophy 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 if language "also means culture and philosophy", then to transform "common sense" into "good sense" is to create a new coherent and (self-)critical world-view, a new, unified culture, i.e. a new normative grammar or linguistic unity. "An historical act can only be performed by 'collective man', and this presupposes the attainment of a 'cultural-social' unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world".[121]

5.4.3. "Centres of Irradiation"

The effects of bourgeois hegemony are, to summarize, ideological, in the sense that, through a complex process which is a result of the political project of the bourgeoisie, it produces consent and passivity in the subordinate masses and asserts the "intellectual and moral leadership" of the ruling classes. "As an object of knowledge for the agents who inhabit it, the economic and social world exerts a force upon them not in the form of a mechanical determination, but in the form of a knowledge effect. It is clear that, at least in the case of dominated individuals, this effect does not tend to favour political action".[122] If we conceive of ideology not simply as a world-view, which would in fact imply ideology is neutral, as we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, but as various social practices and institutions, it is precisely them that produce this specific "knowledge effect", which is, in fact, Gramsci's

[120] Thomas 2010, pp. 431-432.

[121] Gramsci 2012b, p. 349.

[122] Bourdieu 2012, p. 127.

"common sense". As Peter Ives notes, "one of Gramsci's great insights is that people's desires, values and actions are connected to the institutional arrangement of society. Thus, Gramsci ties his conception of hegemony to definitions of the state and civil society. The question is *where* this organization of consent or this intellectual and moral leadership, broadly defined, is located within society?"[123] And, indeed, this is an important question, for its answer determines how a counter-hegemonic project should look like, what it should focus upon, which "weak spots" of the enemy should it target, etc. We have already broadly defined this place as *the hegemonic apparatus* of a dominant class, but what are its concrete elements? Such a research would be too broad for our purposes (it is, in a sense, what the Marxist theories of the state are comprised of), but we can discuss the elements of this apparatus pertaining to language in particular.

We referred earlier to a place in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* where he writes that "[i]deas and opinions are not spontaneously 'born' in each individual brain: they have had a *centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion*".[124] He continues with the claim that groups of men or even certain individuals were the "source" of these ideas, obviously referring to politicians, ideologues and traditional intellectuals in general. But it would be a reductionist reading of Gramsci if we were to interpret this as if *only* the traditional intellectuals comprise these centres of irradiation (which would also, to some extent, justify the critique of Gramsci as sometimes asserting a simple and naive voluntarism). Instead, if one takes into account everything we discussed in this chapter, I believe it is necessary to conceive of this concept as both an activity and an institution, which brings us back, once again, to the proper Gramscian understanding of ideology: the centres of irradiation are composed of *the specific activities* of traditional intellectuals *within specific social institutions* of the hegemonic apparatus. These are the true *foci* of ideological dissemination understood in the Gramscian sense.[125]

We can find confirmation for such an interpretation of this notion in another place in the *Prison Notebooks*. In a note entitled "Sources of Diffusion of Linguistic Innovations in the Tradition and of a National Linguistic Conformism in the Broad National Masses", Gramsci begins the note by immediately listing these sources. These are as follows: "1) [t]he education system; 2) the newspaper; 3) artistic writers and popular writers; 4) the theatre and sound

[123] Ives 2004b, p. 83.

[124] Gramsci 2012b, p. 192. My emphasis.

[125] As well as in the Marxian sense, as Jan Rehmann showed. Cf. Chapter 5.1.

films; 5) radio; 6) public meetings of all kinds, including religious ones; 7) the relations of 'conversation' between the more educated and the less educated strata of the population [...]; 8) the local dialects, understood in various senses".[126] The list might be slightly outdated, which merely signifies the fact that Gramsci wrote these lines almost 100 years ago, at a previous historical stage of technological development. However, since that was not *that* long ago, we can easily "update" the list by just a few modifications (which I shall highlight in italics): 1) the education system; 2) *television*; 3) the newspaper; 4) *the internet*; 5) artistic writers and popular writers; 6) the theatre and *the cinema* (instead of "sound films"); 7) radio; 8) public meetings of all kinds; 9) the relations of 'conversation' between the more educated and the less educated strata of the population; 10) the local dialects. Although a full analysis of all the elements would be useful, we shall briefly discuss here the most important ones.

The education system is, without a doubt, one of the most important elements of a hegemonic apparatus, where the existing class divisions and social relations are reproduced. There are several reasons for this, all of which are to be found in the structure of the modern educational system. The first is the general division into classical and vocational schools, which exists as the first class "filter" within society: "the vocational school for the instrumental classes, the classical school for the dominant classes and the intellectuals".[127] The vast amount of existing vocational schools serves to produce the illusion of "democratic choice" through producing really existing horizontal diversification, since there are truly multiple vocational schools which a child can finish. That all these schools are functionally the same is completely effaced. Access to classical schools is effectively extremely low for the lower classes, for two fundamental reasons: firstly, most of the children coming from the these classes tend to do worse in primary school than their upper class classmates (because of lower social and cultural capital, lower material conditions of life, etc.); secondly, even if a child from the lower classes manages to achieve significant success in primary school and meets the high standards of a classical school to be able to continue education there, it is very often the case that the costs of attending such a school are too high for the child's family (not only because of tuition fees, which are more and more common, but also simply because of costs of living, travel and the premium materials necessary for class, etc.), and it is thus forced to attend vocational schools after all. Even if the child and its family somehow overcome this problem, the child will probably be forced to work alongside its studies, or the family will

[126] Gramsci 2012a, p. 183.

[127] Gramsci 2012b, p. 26.

have to become indebted, or both. The proclaimed "social mobility" of modern democracies is thus more a myth than a reality.

Naturally, what is being taught in vocational schools is qualitatively inferior to what is being taught in classical schools. In a sense, the production of "common sense" starts already at this point, at the level of the vocational secondary schools: only the most specific vocational knowledge is what a child learns, while the intellectual capabilities to critically comprehend the world, to be active, both intellectually and politically, are neglected, or even indirectly suppressed, in short, the child does not develop a critical and rational world-view, but an ideological and subordinate one. But even at the level of higher education, not all knowledge is equally valued, or "welcome": an economics professor very often has to meet specific criteria in order to be "taken seriously" at all by a prominent university, which all come down to being an economic (neo)liberal. Through corporate funding – which is ever more common as an aspect of a wider process of the privatization of higher education – only specific educational programmes are being financed, while those that are perhaps critical of the existing social order, or simply stimulate critical thought, are being widely shut down (as is most evident in the US and the UK in the last couple of years). In that way, based on criteria of "cost-efficiency", a process of selection of knowledge or theoretical paradigms is maintained, so that even at the level of higher education, one does not necessarily have to adopt a critical world-view; on the contrary, "common sense" seems to prevail there as well, perhaps even more successfully since it appears under the guise of "expertise" and highly valued specialized knowledge.

All of this is, of course, directly linked to language: in the vocational schools, the children of the lower classes hardly master the official language, and their vocabulary hardly develops at all, at least in the sense of attaining and understanding advanced notions and concepts. At the level of higher education, one can hardly find an economics faculty where one could hear something about Marxist political economy, or, if one does, then one mostly just hears the common liberal misconceptions and denouncing claims.

> Each social group has its own type of school, intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate. If one wishes to break this pattern one needs, instead of multiplying and grading different types of vocational school, to create a single type of formative school (primary-secondary) which would take the child up to the threshold of his

> choice of job, forming him during this time as a person capable of thinking, studying and ruling – or controlling those who rule.[128]

One might add to this also a radical transformation of the higher education system, with an effective reversal of the current process of its commercialization. What would be necessary is a free, publicly funded, truly diverse and critical higher education system.

I take the television and the newspaper as, effectively, two aspects of the same phenomena, which comprise modern mass media. What is extremely characteristic of modern media, even in the "most developed" democracies of the West, is a strong link between the owners of the media corporations, representatives of the government, and the corporate sector in general (as the most recent case of Rupert Murdoch in the UK demonstrates). The result is a predominance of "monoglossic" media and news – in the Bakhtinian linguistic-ideological sense – whereby progressive and radical newspapers or TV channels are simply ignored by being excluded from corporate advertising (which is more or less the only means of financing in the media world today). A news reporter, columnist or a potential interviewee has to belong to the political spectrum of the centre in order to be granted any noticeable "space" in the media. The language one encounters in all the mainstream media is, indeed, the language of monoglossia, where certain meanings of certain words (such as a potentially positive meaning of the word "socialism") cannot be encountered. It is hard to overestimate the role and impact of the media in the modern world, as it has become, one might say, an enormous machine for the production of consent. Indeed, tackling the mainstream media (and their owners) is one of the primary obstacles for progressive social groups and political projects today.

We might also consider simultaneously what Gramsci calls "popular writers" and the theatre and the cinema. The "kiosk-novels", the popular romantic and crime novels, the Hollywood blockbuster, the popular musicals – they all share some common features. Their function is purely to entertain or to "soothe one's mind". They hardly ever possess any artistic value or stimulate the consumer of this specific form of "art" to think. Furthermore, they mostly – which pertains particularly to the Hollywood blockbuster – affirm the existing social relations, where any characters that would dare to question it or want to transform it (if they are present in the storyline at all) are depicted as villains, a threat to society. Obviously, this is also related to the popular television series and films. Again, what is being disseminated is a specific "normative grammar", a subordinate way of thinking and feeling, a "common sense".

[128] Ibid., p. 40.

That is how the centres of irradiation, the hegemonic apparatus combined with an army of traditional intellectuals, function: by producing the submissiveness of "common sense", they reinforce the existing social relations and class divisions. "If the objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in visions of the social world which contribute to the permanence of those relations, this is therefore because the structuring principles of the world view are rooted in the objective structures of the social world and because the relations of power are also present in people's minds in the form of the categories of perception of those relations".[129] The bourgeois hegemony thus seems as a curse, a closed circle in the form of a reproducing social structure. But, as Gramsci showed, every social phenomenon is ridden with contradictions, and even if "common sense" is regressive and often reactionary in character, it possesses a progressive core, a "healthy nucleus" which can be released and developed with proper political action.

[129] Bourdieu 2012, pp. 235-236.

Chapter VI

The Linguistic Constitution of the Person

The various processes, mechanisms and phenomena we have described thus far in relation to language lead us always again to the relationship between language and consciousness. Language is related not only to what people say and how they express themselves, but also to what they think, and the way they feel and act. If language takes part in the formation of all of these elements that constitute a person (which we hope is shown in all the previous chapters), then we might say that language, in effect, is an essential part in the formation of a personality. Of course, this formation does not occur solely on the individual level, but primarily on a social level; it is, indeed, inseparable from society, which means that it possesses some common characteristics pertaining to the type of society we live in. "We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man. The question is this: of what historical type is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs?"[1] In bourgeois hegemony, the predominant type of personality would then be the one characterised by "common sense": a passive person, subordinate in all its aspects in such a scope that it effectively participates in the reproduction of its own subalternity by its own actions. A personality created by a counter-hegemonic project, by a proletarian hegemony, would have to be quite the opposite: an active person, characterized by its critical world-view, a decisiveness to take action planned out according to the insights it came upon in theory, embodying thus a unity of theory and practice. The constitution of the person unites in itself all the phenomena language is related to and which we have thus far discussed, and is thus the crucial conclusion of a historical-materialist theory of language.

6.1. Why "Person" and not "Subject"?

In conceptualising the individual, Gramsci builds upon the *Theses on Feuerbach* where Marx writes, in the sixth thesis, that "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations".[2] The thesis is very succinct and its implications are wide-ranging, but Gramsci develops it into an outline of a theory of the person. In the note entitled "What is Man?", Gramsci writes at first polemically about

[1] Gramsci 2012b, p. 324.

[2] Marx 1845, p. 4.

"human nature" (which he always puts in quotation marks) and what it could be, but then concludes, alluding to the formulation in the *Theses*, that the claim

> that 'human nature' is the 'complex of social relations' is the most satisfactory answer, because it includes the idea of becoming (man 'becomes', he changes continuously with the changing of social relations) and because it denies 'man in general'. Indeed social relations are expressed by various groups of men which each presuppose the others [i.e. other groups] and whose unity is dialectical, not formal. Man is aristocratic in so far as man is a serf, etc.[3]

We find here, in fresh form, the theoretical content of the sixth thesis: there is no "man in general", be it man as the creation of god, be it man as a "rational animal", or man as a set of psycho-physiological processes (as he is often depicted today by the positivism of modern science). The individual is *a process of becoming*, determined by the social relations in which she lives and is a part of.

Such an understanding of the individual is reflected in Gramsci's terminology: he does not use the notion of "subject" at all, since it implies a unitary consciousness, a single and given "actor". This philological insight is indeed interesting: "the concept of the 'subject', declined in the classical terms of introspection/self-consciousness/intentionality/authorship, is noticeable in the *Prison Notebooks* by its almost complete absence. The term appears only fifteen times in over 2,000 pages; in the majority of cases, Gramsci transcribes it as a part of a quotation from another writer or is stimulated to use it by the vocabulary of the writer under discussion".[4] Instead, Gramsci uses the term "person", stemming from the Latin *persona*, firstly signifying simply the "'mask' or 'character' in a dramatic play", but later developed by Stoicism "in order to describe the various roles 'played' by any one individual in the course of social life",[5] and revitalised again later by Hobbes. "For this tradition, the person is a category of analysis less focused upon the interiority of a consciousness as constitutive of identity, than with the imposition (and passive or active acceptance) of an 'exterior' network of social relations that create the terrain of social action and therefore social identity".[6] It is from this tradition that Gramsci takes the concept of the person. The individual, then, is not at all as in-divisive as the etymology of the term implies; on the contrary, it is ridden with various social roles – "masks" and "characters" – which it tries to balance, but never fully succeeds in doing

[3] Gramsci 2012b, p. 355.

[4] Thomas 2010, p. 396.

[5] Ibid., p. 397.

[6] Ibid., p. 398.

so. Thus, "Gramsci posits the non-identity of the individual in a series of temporal dislocations that they (or rather, more often, the juridico-political apparatus) only sometimes manage to unify in an uneasy *modus vivendi*. He emphasises the various social roles played by any particular individual, in an ensemble of social roles, as related but distinct 'persons'".[7] The Gramscian concept of the person, a divided entity struggling between various social roles (and thus not a subject), is thus also a very welcome corrective for the Bakhtinian "unity of will" manifested in discursive practice.[8]

Therefore, in posing the question "what is man?", Gramsci writes, "what we mean is: what can man become? That is, can man dominate his own destiny, can he 'make himself', can he create his own life? We maintain therefore that man is a process, and, more exactly, the process of his actions".[9] In capitalism, under bourgeois hegemony, man does not create his own life; the "collective man", the "man-in-the-mass", the "mass humanity", the specific "historical type of conformism" is, within existing social relations and the existing mode of production, an intellectually and practically inferior man, a man whose actions are more or less determined by external social factors, instead of his own will or intellect – even when he thinks that is the case. That is what comprises the *ideological effect* of bourgeois hegemony: by producing "common sense", it produces a set of philosophical positions – the "spontaneous philosophy" of the masses, or, more generally, a fragmented world-view – which determine the practice of the members of the subaltern classes. These practices then determine again, in turn, their knowledge. Buci-Glucksmann termed this process *the gnoseology of politics*: "philosophical positions have their effects in all practices, and [...] all practices contain knowledge effects – a dual dialectic, in other words".[10] The end result of this dialectic in capitalism, in which language plays an important role as an "apparatus for the transmission of knowledge" (Thomas), is a passive person.

Man can become something else, but for that to happen, he has to realise, first, that he is the ensemble of the social relations he is a part of, and then he has to take conscious action in changing these relations so that he might change himself. By that, he breaks with the

[7] Ibid.

[8] Cf. part 4.2.

[9] Gramsci 2012b, p. 351. As Wolfgang Fritz Haug notes, Gramsci's concept of the person is extremely similar to Bertolt Brecht's understanding of the individual as "a complex full of contradictions in constant development, similar to a mass" (Haug 2006, p. 19.).

[10] Buci-Glucksmann 1980, p. 349.

previous type of person he was: instead of a passive, he becomes an active person. For Gramsci, the embodiment of such a remaking of oneself is the "democratic philosopher", i.e. the organic intellectual whose "philosophic" activity is conceived in the sense of a critique of "common sense".

> So one could say that each one of us changes himself, modifies himself to the extent that he changes and modifies the complex relations of which he is the hub. In this sense the real philosopher is, and cannot be other than, the politician, the active man who modifies the environment, understanding by environment the *ensemble* of relations which each of us enters to take part in. If one's own individuality is the *ensemble* of these relations, to create one's personality means to acquire consciousness of them and to modify one's own personality means to modify the *ensemble* of these relations.[11]

Since it is the goal of a counter-hegemonic project to modify the ensemble of existing social relations, this then also means that an integral part of this project is the creation of a new type of personality, a new type of "conformism" or "mass humanity".

6.2. The Struggle for Objectivity

But there is a significant obstacle for achieving such a personality: the popular, "common sense" belief in the objective givenness of the external world. Gramsci introduces the problem precisely from the perspective of "common sense" itself.

> The popular public does not think that the problem such as whether the external world exists objectively can even be asked. One just has to enunciate the problem in these terms to provoke an irresistible and gargantuan outburst of laughter. The public 'believes' that the external world is objectively real, but it is precisely here that the question arises: what is the origin of this 'belief' and what critical value does it 'objectively' have? In fact the belief is of religious origin, even if the man who shares it is indifferent to religion. Since all religions have taught and do teach that the world, nature, the universe were created by God before the creation of man, and therefore man found the world all ready made, catalogued and defined once and for all, this belief has become an iron fact of 'common sense' and survives with the same solidity even if religious feeling is dead or asleep.[12]

If this belief contains the notion of the world as "catalogued and defined", then this obviously presents an obstacle for conscious activity, for revolutionary practice which should change the

[11] Gramsci 2012b, p. 352.

[12] Ibid., p. 441.

ensemble of social relations. What it does is that it perpetuates the subalternity of the ruled classes.

> For a social group devoid of historical initiative, confined to the corporative level of civil society in the integral state of another class, the world can indeed appear as 'given', or rather, 'imposed'. The religious 'residue' then takes on a precise political function: it encourages acceptance of 'objectification' by the 'subject' of the ruling class, the 'inner' that looks (down) upon the subaltern classes' 'outer', which in its turn stares back in misrecognition and incomprehension.[13]

Indeed, what underlies this belief is actually a quite long-living philosophical antinomy of subjective/objective, characteristic not only of all metaphysical thought, but also of the metaphysical varieties of materialism, like that of Ludwig Feuerbach. Again, Gramsci resolves this apparent "antinomy" by treading in the footsteps of Marx, who confronted the "old" type of materialism in his *Theses*.[14] In the first thesis, Marx writes: "[t]he chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object, or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively".[15] Gramsci continues this line of thought by analysing what underlies the claim that there undoubtedly exists an objectivity independent of man and of history. "The idea of 'objective' in metaphysical materialism would appear to mean an objectivity that exists even apart from man; but when one affirms that reality would exist even if man did not, one is either speaking metaphorically or one is falling into a form of mysticism. We know reality only in relation to man, and since man is historical becoming, knowledge and reality are also a becoming and so is objectivity, etc".[16] Such a notion of "objective", then, implies an Archimedean point outside of the world as we know it. "But who is the judge of such objectivity? Who is able to put himself in this kind of 'standpoint of the cosmos in itself' and what could such a standpoint mean? It can indeed be maintained that here we are dealing with a hangover of the concept of God, precisely in its mystical conception of an unknown God".[17]

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[13] Thomas 2010, p. 304.

[14] At about the same time, Marx and Engels confronted it in *The German Ideology*, in a somewhat more polemical manner, but still theoretically very potent. See part 5.1.

[15] Marx 1845, p. 3.

[16] Gramsci 2012b, p. 446.

[17] Ibid., p. 445.

Of course, Gramsci does not wish to imply that *there is no objectivity at all* and that everything is always subjective, which would mean asserting a position of subjective idealism. He does not claim, therefore, that everything is simply subjectively relative. Instead, he asserts that "we are not merely 'thrown' into a world that is simply given to us, but that the reality we really do know and live is constituted by our social relations and our equally social relations with nature".[18] This is, truly, continuing and developing the crucial points of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. The dichotomy of subjective/objective is simply pointless and is negated both theoretically and practically by the concept of social practice: any practice is surely "subjective", since it is an individual that is its "source"; but at the same time, it is also objective since it is really existing not only for other men, but also for nature itself – for example, labour transforms both the social world and the natural world at the same time. "Since social practice is both real and subjective, the dichotomy of the 'objective' and 'subjective' cannot be maintained".[19] In Gramsci's words, "[o]bjective always means 'humanly objective' which can be held to correspond exactly to 'historically objective': in other words, objective would mean 'universal subjective'. Man knows subjectively in so far as knowledge is real for the whole human race *historically* unified in a single unitary cultural system".[20]

For Gramsci, objectivity is therefore a political notion – it is linked to the political project of cultural unification we are already acquainted with. Objectivity is a result of the historical process of change which social relations are always subject to. The question "what is objectivity?" is then actually a question of "what is the specific 'universal subjective' of our historical epoch?" The objectivity of capitalism is, still, the "religious" objectivity: imposed from above, predetermined and final – in short, it is the objectivity of fetishism. If each member of capitalist society "considers the collective organism to be a body extraneous to themselves, it is obvious that this organism no longer exists in reality but becomes a phantom of the intellect, a fetish".[21] This happens precisely because a "common sense" conception of objectivity prevails, which is the precondition for perceiving phenomena of the external world as "above" man and "beyond" man's reach:

[18] Thomas 2010, p. 304.

[19] Rehmann 2013, p. 64.

[20] Gramsci 2012b, p. 445.

[21] Gramsci 1995, p. 14.

> since a deterministic and mechanical conception of history has wide currency [...], single individuals (seeing that, despite their non-intervention, something nonetheless happens) are led to think that in actual fact there exists above them a phantom entity, the abstraction of the collective organism, a species of autonomous divinity that thinks, not with the head of a specific being, yet nevertheless thinks, that moves, not with the real legs of a person, yet still moves, and so on.[22]

This has to be another task of a counter-hegemonic project: to break out of their passivity, the subaltern classes have to change their understanding of "objectivity" and necessity into historical (historicized) concepts. "There exists therefore a struggle for objectivity (to free oneself from partial and fallacious ideologies) and this struggle is the same as the struggle for the cultural unification of the human race".[23]

6.3. Breaking the Spell of the Structure: From Passive to Active *Persona*

From language, through class and social structure, to the person – that is the path of a historical materialist theory of language. By its links with all these moments, language is linked to what kind of people we are. "Personality is itself generated through language, not so much, to be sure, in the abstract forms of language, but rather in the ideological themes of language. Personality, from the standpoint of its inner, subjective content, is a theme of language, and this theme undergoes development and variation within the channel of the more stable constructions of language",[24] that is, speech genres or various normative and spontaneous grammars. In capitalism, the forms of language that the subaltern classes use and are influenced by transmits specific knowledge which perpetuates their subalternity, as we saw in this and the previous chapters. The content of the language of bourgeois hegemony is ideological, in the Gramscian sense that, as en effect of the hegemonic apparatus and the labour of traditional intellectuals it "employs", it (re)produces "common sense": a fragmented, contradictory, incoherent and uncritical consciousness, in other words, a passive persona, which practically consents to its subaltern social position.

As we mentioned earlier, there exists an interpretation of this process which rather hastily concludes that it is entirely dictated by the social structure – determined, in the last instance, by the economic base – whereby this process is in fact an "unbreakable" circle, a

[22] Ibid., p. 15.

[23] Gramsci 2012b, p. 445.

[24] Voloshinov 1986, p. 153.

sort of "spell of the structure". Indeed, one might even find some "proof" of such an interpretation in Marx. As Michael Heinrich puts it,[25] class rule is not an intentional relationship, for the Marxian "capitalist in general" does not act as a capitalist simply because he wishes to rule the proletariat. He acts as such because his primary motive is profit, as Marx emphasizes numerous times in *Capital*. For example, in the preface to volume one, Marx writes:

> here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.[26]

Likewise, the worker acts as a worker, because his primary motive is acquiring a wage by selling his labour-power with which he will survive day to day and hopefully manage to raise a family. Thus, there is no general consciousness of the specific structural positions which these actors occupy; in fact, they appear not as actors at all, but as mere "bearers of a function" within the capitalist social structure. "If the capitalist merely executes the logic of capital, then it is not he, but rather capital, self-valorizing value, that is the 'subject' of the process. Marx refers to capital in this regard as the 'automatic subject', a phrase that makes the paradox clear: on the one hand, capital is an automaton, something lifeless, but on the other, as the 'subject', it is the determining agent of the whole process".[27]

But the point of Marx's *Capital* is, among other things, to show that this is how the capitalist mode of production *appears*, not that capital would *truly be* a "subject". We only need to remind ourselves of Gramsci's depiction of fetishism referred to above to understand what is truly at hand here. Besides, the working masses are not always just "embodiments" of a function in the capitalist mode of production: every true revolution is historical proof of people "suddenly" becoming aware of their structural position, of the class relations within their society, and of the particular conflicted interests between those classes. We can thus differ between a *passive persona* described by Marx in *Capital*, which dominates the masses when the reproduction and circulation of capital go unquestioned, and when capital appears as "subject", and an *active persona*, present in the subaltern classes in periods of revolution.

[25] Heinrich 2012.

[26] Marx 1867, p. 10.

[27] Heinrich 2012, p. 89.

Gramsci showed us which two types of consciousness underlie these two types of person: on the one hand, "common sense", on the other, "good sense", the healthy nucleus of "common sense". So what causes the sudden shift in the consciousness of an enormous number of individuals, which, in effect, makes them true social agents, and no more passive "bearers" of a structural function? How is the spell of the structure broken?

Essentially, the answer is a creation of a new type of personality, one not created by the social structure, but one creating both society and itself. Since the person is an ensemble of social relations, we can, together with Gramsci, draw out the theoretical premises of such a personality. "Men create their own personality, 1. by giving a specific and concrete ('rational') direction to their own vital impulse or will; 2. by identifying the means which will make this will concrete and specific and not arbitrary; 3. by contributing to modify the *ensemble* of the concrete conditions for realising this will to the extent of one's own limits and capacities and in the most fruitful form".[28] This has to be the ultimate goal of a counter-hegemonic, revolutionary political project. But revolution cannot be conceived simply as a "smashing of the state"; the modern form of the capitalist state – the integral state – formed in the historical process of the consolidation of the bourgeoisie as a class and its rule, is impenetrable to such upheavals.

What is necessary is a building and concentration of social forces led by organic intellectuals. Their goal is to identify the elements of "good sense" and, by an approach determined by an internally persuasive hegemonic principle, to stimulate the development of a new world-view, which can be done by creating new forms of social experience through which people can practically come to know what other forms of thinking, talking, feeling and acting exist. (This order of things is, indeed, dictated by the integral state, by bourgeois hegemony: "political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world".[29]) A crucial element of this process of wider cultural unification is language, for it has to be conceived as the "apparatus for the transmission of knowledge". The creation of a new conception of a world means a creation of a new language – but this can only be a very long process, where meanings are transformed, old revolutionary meanings reborn, new words formed, etc. Upon reaching a certain level of linguistic unification, a new normative grammar would be born, but one created not from above, but from below, as a result of the subaltern classes' creation of their own hegemonic project. The hegemonic language of the

[28] Gramsci 2012b, p. 360.

[29] Bourdieu 2012, pp. 127-128.

old hegemony, the old type of personality, would be transformed and unrecognizable. This cannot, of course, be achieved by an official edict, however the forces issuing such an edict would be revolutionary. It would have to be a democratic process of transformation of an existing language. Finally, to emphasize again, this does not imply a sort of "linguistic emancipation", a sort of "liberation" barely through "linguistic" means, as that would be an extremely idealistic and naive position. The process of revolutionary linguistic unification has to be a moment of a wider political project of creating a new hegemony – the hegemony of the proletariat – whose goal is the abolition of the existing mode of production and its corresponding social relations.

The creation of a new world-view, contained in "a critical understanding of oneself" and "a higher form of understanding reality",[30] would thus eventually lead to the clash of conflicted hegemonies. By being aware of the historicity of its social position and its newly developed world-view, the subaltern classes would realise the historical necessity of its revolutionary political action, and would thus begin unifying theory and practice. "'The identification of theory and practice is a critical act, through which practice is demonstrated rational and necessary, and theory realistic and rational".[31] The subaltern classes would undergo what Gramsci terms "catharsis": an overcoming of the various particular and egoistic interests present within its various representatives (workers, peasantry, women, immigrants etc.) and the final affirmation of it as a unified political force.

> The term 'catharsis' can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into superstructure in the minds of men. This also means the passage from 'objective to subjective' and from 'necessity to freedom'. Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives.[32]

Instead of being subject to "objectivity", to history, man would thus become the creator of history. The active type of person would become prevalent, with a new way of speaking, a new way of thinking and feeling and a new way of acting.

[30] Gramsci 2012b, p. 323.

[31] Ibid., p. 365.

[32] Ibid., p. 366-367.

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