**The Marxian conception**

Within the Marxian corpus we have not a unitary and systematic conception of ideology, but the concept has different meanings.

Marx/Engels: *The German Ideology*

The specific features of this early work: it is basically a polemical work mainly against the neo-Hegelian philosophers, incomplete and unpublished for long. A preliminary critical note: it basically deals with certain versions of ideology whereas it pretends to deal with ideology as a whole.

Basic observation: here ideology is a negative, from an evaluative point of view, term. Their own theory cannot be characterized as “ideology”.

What do they criticize through the negative term “ideology”?

First, the idea of the “tyranny” or “rule” of ideas or the idea that the “chains of men” are principally ideas. Furthermore, this idea is for them indissolubly connected to that of the independence, the so to speak self-existence of ideas. Thus, “ideology” for them means falsity with respect to the power of ideas and also of their source and way of formation.

“Ideology”, hence, is interconnected with idealism and an inversion that this entails. Here, however, as Eagleton notes, one could pose the question whether all forms ideology are really idealist in the same sense e.g. the French Ideologues were not idealist in the sense of Hegel.

The relevance of the Marxian critique of Feuerbach’s understanding of religion. Feuerbach asserts an inversion, but he is to blame too for an inversion

The position of Marx-Engels themselves about the source and the way of formation of ideas: the “real life process”, the social life as the source of ideas.

Consequently, what they furthermore consider as a feature of the ideas of “ideology” is that these ideas are detached from real life process and also neglect or conceal their real origin.

A further note is that all the above are related to a certain practical-political function of ideology, which is profoundly conservative. “Ideology”, for them, means those ideas, and that kind of detachment from reality, which lead to the disorientation of men, their distraction from real problems and social contradictions, or the concealing of these last ones.

Emphasis on the passage which shows this conception of ideology as “false consciousness”, invoking the metaphor of the “camera obscura” and the theme of inversion. The misunderstanding (also on the part of Althusser and some of his followers) that here Marx and Engels speak about a falsity with no reality, or that the “ghosts” of ideology are something similar to delusions or chimeras. On the contrary, what it seems that they have in mind is ideology as a “necessary social illusion” (Adorno) or as a falsity which is “a part of the truth of a whole social condition” (Eagleton)

(In this relevance, it is important to note the significance of Marx’s conception of religion in the *Critique to Hegel's Philosophy of Right.)*

The social reality which underlies and supports the detachment of ideas from the real life process, the free floating of ideas, hence also the idealist inversion: the division between mental and manual labour.