Chapter Nine

Ideology-Critique with the Hinterland of a Theory of the Ideological: The ‘Projekt Ideologietheorie’ (PIT)

The ‘Projekt Ideologietheorie’ (PIT), founded by Wolfgang Fritz Haug in 1977, carried on essential aspects of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and Althusser’s ideological state-apparatus theory. The main difference with Althusser is that it did so on the basis of a theoretical elaboration of the ideology-critical approaches of Marx and Engels. What distinguishes it from more traditional versions of ideology-critique is that the ideological is not conceptualised on the level of ‘false consciousness’, so that the analysis, in turn similar to Gramsci and Althusser, focuses on the functioning of ideological powers, apparatuses, praxis and thought-forms.

9.1. The resumption of Marx and Engels’s critical concept of ideology

The approach is ideology-critical in the sense that the PIT deals with the functioning of ideological powers, practices, and discourses from the perspective of their ‘withering away’ in a society without class-, state- and patriarchal domination. To avoid a widespread misunderstanding, it must be clarified from the outset that this is not about a utopian vision of a society without ‘power-relations’. The concept of ‘domination’ is not to be confused with the concept of ‘power’, which is, as Max Weber put it, ‘sociologically amorphous’.1

The term furthermore contains in both Germanic and Romance languages the etymological root of ability/capacity – the German term *Macht*, for example, goes back to the Gothic *mahts* and *magan*, to be capable (still present in *vermögen*), which in turn corresponds to the French verb *pouvoir* that underlies the Romance nouns (*le*) *pouvoir*, *puissance*, and *power*. When Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the ‘power of the multitude’ in terms of its ‘becoming-subject’, they refer to the Latin verb *posse* – ‘power as a verb, as activity’, part of the Renaissance triad ‘esse-nosse-posse’, being-knowing-having power, and expressing ‘what a body and what a mind can do’. Tied to the complex of capacities, *power* might express both reciprocal relationships and unequal ones (such as in a paedagogical constellation), both competences monopolised by elites or a cooperative capacity to act from below in the sense of Spinoza’s *potentia agendi*.3

Whereas *power* is in principle open to democratisation, the concept of *domination* (German: *Herrschaft*) is formed around the ancient figure of the *dominus* (master), in German *der Herr*, which embodies the intersection of patriarchal and class-rule. It cannot therefore be conceived without its constitutive meanings of hierarchy and verticality. Whereas *power* is to be found on opposites sides of the class- and gender-divides, *domination* is ‘an institutionalised, structurally anchored asymmetric power relation of superiority and subordination’.4 Max Weber defines it by the successful issuing of ‘commands’ to others, bolstered by an ‘administrative staff’ ready to exercise the ‘necessary compulsion’.5 The ‘withering away of the state’ envisaged by Marx and Engels is not to be understood as an abolition of superstructural institutions and administrative functions altogether, but rather as a phasing-out of their hierarchical character, the end of their functioning as a form and medium of domination.6 For Marx, ‘human emancipation’ is a perspective in which individuals no longer ‘separate social power from [themselves] in the shape of political power’, but rather organise

3. On the etymology of *power/Macht*, cf. Röttgers 1980; regarding the revolutionary potentials of Spinoza’s *potentia agendi* and its relationship to Marx’s productive forces, see Negri 1998, p. 272; for a comparison of Spinoza’s *potentia agendi* as a cooperative power from below and Nietzsche’s verticalistic and ultimately exterministic *will to power*, cf. Rehmann 2004a, pp. 52–60.
6. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not “abolished”. *It dies out* [*Er stirbt ab*]. (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, Vol. 25, p. 268; cf. Marx and Engels 1957, Vol. 20, p. 262). For Gramsci as well, it is the coercive element of the state that ‘withers away’ as the former state-functions are ‘dissolved into regulated society’ (cf. Q6, §65, §88; Q7, §33; Gramsci 1971, p. 263).