

Susen, S. (2014). Reflections on Ideology: Lessons from Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski.  
Thesis Eleven, 124(1), pp. 90-113. doi: 10.1177/0725513614552444



**CITY UNIVERSITY  
LONDON**

[City Research Online](#)

**Original citation:** Susen, S. (2014). Reflections on Ideology: Lessons from Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski. Thesis Eleven, 124(1), pp. 90-113. doi: 10.1177/0725513614552444

**Permanent City Research Online URL:** <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/14387/>

### **Copyright & reuse**

City University London has developed City Research Online so that its users may access the research outputs of City University London's staff. Copyright © and Moral Rights for this paper are retained by the individual author(s) and/ or other copyright holders. All material in City Research Online is checked for eligibility for copyright before being made available in the live archive. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to from other web pages.

### **Versions of research**

The version in City Research Online may differ from the final published version. Users are advised to check the Permanent City Research Online URL above for the status of the paper.

### **Enquiries**

If you have any enquiries about any aspect of City Research Online, or if you wish to make contact with the author(s) of this paper, please email the team at [publications@city.ac.uk](mailto:publications@city.ac.uk).

---

# Reflections on ideology: Lessons from Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski

Simon Susen

City University London, UK

## Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate the enduring relevance of the concept of ideology to contemporary sociological analysis. To this end, the article draws upon central arguments put forward by Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski in 'La production de l'idéologie dominante' ['The Production of the Dominant Ideology']. Yet, the important theoretical contributions made in this enquiry have been largely ignored by contemporary sociologists, even by those who specialize in the critical study of ideology. This article intends to fill this gap in the literature by illustrating that useful lessons can be learned from Bourdieu and Boltanski's critical investigation, as it provides crucial insights into the principal characteristics and functions of ideologies, including the ways in which they develop and operate in advanced capitalist societies. The article is divided into two main parts: the first part examines various *universal features of ideology*; the second part aims to shed light on several *particular features of dominant ideology*. The paper concludes by arguing that the '*end of ideology*' thesis, despite the fact that it raises valuable sociological questions, is ultimately untenable.

## Keywords

Boltanski, Bourdieu, critique, dominant ideology, ideology, ideology critique, social theory

## Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate the enduring relevance of the concept of ideology to contemporary sociological analysis by drawing upon central arguments

---

Corresponding author:

Simon Susen, City University London, UK.

Email: [Simon.Susen@city.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.Susen@city.ac.uk)

---

put forward by Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski in ‘La production de l’idéologie dominante’ [‘The Production of the Dominant Ideology’], which was originally published in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* in 1976. Symptomatic of its continuing significance and far-reaching explanatory scope, this seminal text reappeared, more than three decades later, in book format as *La production de l’idéologie dominante* (2008 [1976]) [henceforth PID].<sup>1</sup> The important theoretical contributions made in PID, however, have been largely ignored by contemporary sociologists, even by those who specialize in the critical study of ideology. The following enquiry intends to fill this gap in the literature by illustrating that PID provides crucial insights into the principal characteristics and functions of ideologies, including the ways in which they develop and operate in advanced capitalist societies. The article is divided into two main parts. The first part examines various universal features of ideology. The second part aims to shed light on several particular features of dominant ideology. The paper draws to a close by arguing that the ‘*end of ideology*’ thesis, although it raises valuable sociological questions, is ultimately untenable.

## Ideology

### *1. Ideology and practice*

The production of ideology cannot be dissociated from the production of social practices. In fact, the production of ideology is not only embedded in social practices but constitutes a social practice itself. Without its tangible relevance to the multiple ways in which human actors establish a symbolically mediated relation to the world, ideology would lack the socio-ontological centrality it has acquired in the normative regulation of civilizational life forms. Given its praxeological significance with regard to the development of social existence, an ideological discourse ‘is only secondarily supposed to express [the] conviction’ (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 2008 [1976]: 11) of those who support it, since ‘[i]ts primary function is to orient an action’ (p. 11; emphasis added) or a set of actions. The preponderance of the practical, rather than the theoretical, dimensions of ideology in real-life situations goes hand in hand with the socio-ontological predominance of intuitive and taken-for-granted, rather than reflexive and discursive, knowledge in the construction of everyday life. Insofar as an ideology permeates people’s quotidian practices, it succeeds in converting itself into a material force capable of structuring embodied actions and interactions.

### *2. Ideology and cohesion*

Ideologies, insofar as they are produced and reproduced by specific social groups, serve a major bonding and integrative function, which depends on their capacity to create a sense of collectively sustained cohesion. Shared ideological frameworks make it possible ‘to *maintain the performers’ cohesion* reinforcing, through ritual reaffirmation, the group’s belief in the necessity and the legitimacy of its action’ (p. 11; emphasis added). Ideological discourses provide symbolic reference points that assume the role of cultural markers of identity, which are both conducive to and contingent upon social processes of group formation. In the case of hegemonic discourses, their ‘primary function is to

---

express and produce the logical and moral integration of the dominant class' (p. 9); in the case of counterhegemonic discourses, their principal role is to convey and guarantee the social and normative integration of dominated groups, which, in the long run, have an interest in overcoming their position, since it is supported by – exogenously imposed and endogenously reproduced – mechanisms of inferiorization. An effective ideological discourse comprises a set of values, principles, and assumptions whose adherents – whilst, in most cases, lacking a completely homogenous base, reducible to the will power of a monolithically defined collective actor – are capable of developing a sense of solidarity. The presence of ideologically mediated schemes of perception, appreciation, and action is a precondition for the emergence of viable processes of social integration founded on collectively shared experiences of real or imagined cohesion.

### 3. *Ideology and diversity*

The relative heterogeneity of field-differentiated societies manifests itself in the diversity of the ideologies shaping their history. Far from reflecting 'the perfect and entirely planned coherence of an "ideological state apparatus"' (p. 10), or of a pristine lifeworld characterized by social homogeneity and behavioural consistency, discursively mediated sets of values and principles are not only malleable and revisable but also tension-laden and, to some extent, contradictory. In fact, the long-term viability of a given ideology is inconceivable without a significant degree of elasticity and adaptability, since it 'owes its truly symbolic efficiency (of misrecognition) to the fact that it excludes neither divergences nor discordances' (p. 10; emphasis added) from its attempts to assert its epistemic validity and social legitimacy.

The combined effects of spontaneous orchestration and methodical composition imply that political opinions can vary infinitely from one fraction to another, and even from one individual to the next . . . (p. 10)

For the symbolically mediated development of society, the competition between different ideologies is just as important as the discursive struggles taking place within the intersubjective construction zones of these ideologies. Indeed, '[t]he liberal point of honour depends on this diversity within unity' (p. 10; emphasis added), without which there would be no variegated civilizational history. The fruitful interplay between spontaneity and improvisation, on the one hand, and rigidity and regulation, on the other, is essential to the possibility of cross-fertilizing rival ideologies, as well as competing intellectual currents within the discursive horizons out of which they emerge. The most homogeneous society cannot eliminate the influence, let alone the existence, of group-specific diversity.

### 4. *Ideology and positionality*

Every ideology is impregnated with the structuring power of social positionality. The persistent efforts made by dominant individual or collective actors to direct attention away from their relationally defined situatedness only reinforce the existential significance of the asymmetrically organized positions that they occupy in the social space. Ostensibly 'neutral places'<sup>2</sup> are 'ideological laboratories in which, on the basis of a

---

collective work, the dominant social philosophy is generated' (p. 17; emphasis added) by different fractions of the ruling class. Dominant ideologies are produced by and for those in dominant positions. Ideologies aimed at challenging hegemonic sets of values and principles, by contrast, tend to be produced by and for those in dominated positions, that is, by and for those whose practices are severely confined by relatively – or almost completely – disempowered and disempowering variables of interaction.

### *5. Ideology and intersubjectivity*

No matter how abstract or seemingly removed from the structural constraints of social reality, ideologies emerge out of their advocates' experience of intersubjectivity. Far from being reducible to a monological mechanism, the production of ideological frameworks emanates from a dialogical process, in which the communicative engagement with divergent perspectives is vital to the opinion and will formation of the different members and fractions of a particular social group or class. Indeed, '[o]ne of the functions of neutral places is to favour what is commonly called "exchanges of points of view"', that is, the reciprocal information on the vision that agents develop in relation to the future' (p. 98; emphasis added) by engaging in the construction of meaningful relations based on the quotidian experience of discursively mediated intersubjectivity.

### *6. Ideology and differentiality*

There is no ideology without the fabrication of conceptual differentiality (see p. 10). For every ideology comprises a relatively systematic set of interconnected values, principles, and assumptions founded on value-laden categorizations. To be exact, ideologically mediated differentiations manifest themselves in the relatively arbitrary construction of classifications, oppositions, and hierarchies (see p. 57). (a) Through the construction of classifications, it is possible to draw distinctions that are central to dividing the world into groups and types characterized by traits, particularities, and idiosyncrasies. (b) Through the construction of oppositions, it is possible to segregate the world in terms of conflicts, contradictions, and antagonisms. (c) Through the construction of hierarchies, it is possible to map the world in terms of vertical orders based on position-taking, grading, and ranking.

### *7. Ideology and partiality*

The emergence of ideology is unthinkable without the perspectival force of partiality, which – paradoxically – is often concealed by the illusion of impartiality:

The effect of objectivity produced by the neutral place results, fundamentally, from the eclectic structure of the group to which it corresponds: as a place of encounter – in which people come together, removed from different fractions, as they themselves constitute places of encounter, through the multiplicity of positions that they occupy within the dominant class – the neutral place imposes – through its own logic – the respect of formal rules that are commonly identified with 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' . . . . (p. 116; emphasis added)

The belief in neutrality – sustained not only by pretentious claims to objectivity and universalizability but also by reference to seemingly generalizable imperatives of

---

procedural rationality – cannot do away with the ineluctable partiality permeating the production of ideology.

### *8. Ideology and normativity*

By definition, every ideology is normative. Even if the advocates of a particular dominant ideology seek to defend a subject-specific – for instance, ‘economic’, ‘legal’, or ‘technocratic’ – discourse based on the forceless force of epistemically grounded objectivity, their claims to validity are impregnated with presuppositions and bias, which are indispensable to the social construction of reality. Ideology ‘is politics to the extent that, under the veil of objectivity, it prescribes what should be the case’ (p. 120; emphasis added) in society. An ideology, then, is not only a set of more or less logically interconnected principles, but also an ensemble of value-laden assumptions about the normative worth of relationally assembled realities.

### *9. Ideology and authenticity*

Ideologies, owing to the fact that they can be produced in seemingly neutral spaces, tend to give the misleading impression that discourses emerge ‘naturally’<sup>3</sup> as truthful and reliable representations of reality and, hence, as vehicles for symbolically mediated experiences of authenticity. The critical analysis of their genealogy demonstrates, however, that ideologies – far from developing without ‘the confrontation of individuals belonging to different fractions and removed from the fraction of every fraction’ (p. 117; emphasis added) – develop within and through struggles between interest-driven actors, who occupy different positions in society. The naturalization of normativity on the basis of ideology is what reinforces not only the apparent givenness of reality but also the taken-for-grantedness of symbolic legitimacy and the belief in representational accuracy. Ideology makes us naturalize the social to the extent that it induces us to assimilate and generalize historically contingent schemes of appreciation, perception, and reflection. At the same time, ideology makes us socialize the natural to the extent that it obliges us to convert our experientially constituted immersion in reality into a discursively codified encounter with normativity. The naturalization of the social and the socialization of the natural are inconceivable without the habitualization of intersubjectively sustained conventions, which are, by definition, spatiotemporally variable because they are performatively reconstructable. Concealing the social conditions underpinning their own claims to validity, ideologies can be converted into indispensable reference points in the pursuit of authenticity.

### *10. Ideology and self-referentiality*

All ideologies are, to a greater or lesser extent, self-referential. To put it bluntly, ideologies are self-fulfilling prophecies. For they are founded on values and principles whose validity they aim to confirm in terms of their own normative standards and codes of legitimacy. In this sense, every ideology can be regarded as ‘a prophecy that contributes to its own realization . . . , to its [own] truth’ (p. 105; emphasis added). Ideologies, insofar as they are driven by ‘a will to power’, aspire to set the agenda by converting their own parameters into hegemonic criteria, that is, into benchmarks that can be applied to

---

assessing the value of practices performed by all individual and collective actors in society.

The dominant representations continuously objectivize themselves within things, and the social world contains all parts – under the form of institutions, objects, and mechanisms (without mentioning agents' habitus) – of the realized ideology. (p. 105; emphasis added)

Amongst ideologically unified actors, almost everything revolves around themselves. Within the comfort zones of discursively sustained self-referentiality, the defensibility of core assumptions is corroborated on the basis of autopoietic yardsticks of acceptability. Allowing for the construction of ideological frameworks, mechanisms of 'circular circulation' (p. 120; emphasis in original) operate through processes of 'self-confirmation and self-reinforcement' (p. 120; emphasis added) aimed at strengthening 'the illusion of immediate evidence' (p. 120) and straightforward application. The 'prophetic chain' (p. 120) permeating the functioning of ideology represents a subtle source of self-referential agency oriented towards the endorsement of its own legitimacy.

### *11. Ideology and hegemony*

The production of ideologies cannot be divorced from social struggles for and against the power of hegemony. To be sure, hegemony is as much about unity and conformity as about division and intersectionality. Just as different fractions of a particular class (see p. 9) share key characteristics and interests, they are divided by idiosyncratic features and concerns: '[t]o consider the common places produced within neutral places does not mean to ignore the secondary differences that separate the producers and the products' (p. 9; emphasis in original), let alone the different fractions of ideological producers and the different clusters of ideological products. Given their powerful position not only within society but also within their own socioeconomic reference group, however, it appears that the dominant fractions within the dominant class determine the dominant discourses within the established order in which they occupy a hegemonic position. Central to the development of stratified societies, in other words, are not only the struggles between classes but also the struggles within classes. Critical sociologists need to study the 'neutral place and point of equilibrium of the field of the dominant class, in which its interest is defined within and by the mediation of the conflicts between the fractions of the dominant class, rather than between the classes, as suggested by the official representation' (pp. 117/120; emphasis in original). There are no stratified societies without ideologically mediated struggles for and against the power of hegemony.

### *12. Ideology and domination*

Ideologies can be mobilized either to stabilize, legitimize, and conceal or to undermine, subvert, and expose systems of domination. To the extent that ideologies – notably dominant ones – tend to reinforce, justify, or obscure 'the social hierarchy' (p. 3) in place, they contribute to confirming the normative validity of asymmetrical power relations. The 'goes-without-saying' (p. 3), which presents a 'major obstacle to socio-logical analysis' (p. 3), constitutes an essential ingredient of 'the most subtle and the least obvious forms of domination' (p. 3), including the hegemonic discourses by which

---

they are sustained. One of the most significant missions of critical social scientists consists in challenging the legitimacy of social relations based on idiosyncratic logics of domination, which is possible only by questioning the epistemic authority of their corresponding ideological constructions of justification. In stratified interactional formations, ‘the social philosophy of the dominant class’ (p. 49) reflects the worldview of those groups who have an interest in defending their leading position on the basis of more or less logically interconnected ideas validating the status quo.

After having considered 12 universal features of ideology, the question that arises when examining the power-laden constitution of discursively mediated sets of values, principles, and assumptions is the following: What is ‘dominant ideology’? As shall be demonstrated in subsequent sections, it is possible to identify 12 particular features of dominant ideology.

## Dominant ideology

### *1. Dominant ideology and distortion*

Dominant ideologies distort reality. In so doing, they conceal not only any kind of counterevidence undermining the cogency of their most fundamental claims to objective or normative validity but also, more significantly, the constitutive interests underlying their advocates’ quest for social legitimacy. To the extent that the interests of those who produce ideological frameworks – which are designed to maintain their supporters’ position in society – are not immediately obvious, it is the task of the critical sociologist to undertake ‘the theoretical and empirical construction of the concept of the field of power’ (p. 3) and thereby contribute to ‘a double effect of uncovering and of inspection’ (p. 3; emphasis added). Critical sociology, therefore, is unavoidably functionalist, in the sense that it aims to elucidate the degree to which dominant ideologies serve – above all – the purpose of protecting, legitimizing, and concealing the interests of the most powerful groups in society:

It sheds light on the resources of the discourse of the dominant class ... by means of which the dominant legitimize their domination, without ever having to justify themselves, whilst bringing about a social order that corresponds to their worldview. (p. 3)

In short, ‘in all ideology’ – to use Marx and Engels’s famous expression – ‘men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura’ (Marx and Engels, 2000 [1846]: 180), designed by and for those whose real interests it is supposed to disguise. Thus, when examining the key functions inherent in the production of ideological agendas, critical sociologists are faced not only with the task of demonstrating that different language games emanate from different life forms, but also with the challenge of exposing the extent to which the former generate misrepresentations that direct attention away from the underlying interests and motives of those who have the upper hand in the hierarchical construction process of the latter. The dominant ideology of the dominant class constitutes a discursive framework of symbolically mediated reference points based on partial or complete distortions of reality.



---

Hence, their essentially disjointed discourse masks the essential: not only everything that goes without saying, everything that is self-evident as long as those who believe in it remain amongst themselves, but also everything that cannot be declared without betraying oneself by contradicting the official intention of the discourse. (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 2008 [1976]: 11; emphasis added)

This distortive function of dominant ideologies is particularly important with regard to their capacity ‘to conceal selection principles . . . and thereby to respect the liberal sense of honour’ (p. 18). The dissimulation of the competitive mechanisms underlying liberal meritocracies permits socially influential actors to obtain recognition by virtue of misrecognition: ‘The most efficient form of the dominant discourse . . . is . . . the most unrecognizable’ (p. 72; emphasis added).

Dominant ideologies hinge on hegemonic sets of interrelated values and assumptions, whose power-laden constitution is supposed to remain largely unnoticed by those whose interests they do not represent. If necessary, the rhetoric of ‘scientific evidence’ can be employed in order to bestow a dominant discourse with legitimacy that gives the impression of being founded on conceptually and methodologically sound claims to epistemic validity. ‘The manipulation of the future of class through the manipulation of the collective representation of the objective future of class undertaken by the prophetic – scientifically authorized – discourse of the planners’ (p. 96) offers ‘an appearance or parade of objectivity’ (see pp. 79, 139), which leaves little – if any – room for an accurate account of reality motivated by a genuine search for facticity.

The distortive function of dominant ideologies is reflected in their extensive use of euphemisms. The rhetorical capacity to substitute trivial, indirect, or vague terms (in the form of circumlocutions) for serious, direct, and unambiguous ones (in the form of straight-to-the-point descriptions) is essential to the possibility of producing ideological misrepresentations of reality (p. 90). In every dominant ideology, things are portrayed as ‘too nice to be true’ (p. 17). The ‘capacity of euphemization’ (p. 109) permits the members of the dominant class to present unpopular truths as civilizational – notably, social, cultural, political, economic, demographic, or technological – achievements.

## 2. *Dominant ideology and binaries*

Dominant ideologies are inconceivable without the construction of binary categories. Indeed, ‘[t]he dominant discourse about the social world owes its practical coherence to the fact that it is produced on the basis of a small number of generative schemes’ (p. 57; emphasis added), which are organized around the conceptual adherence to binaries. Amongst the most commonly used binaries are the following:<sup>4</sup>

past	versus	future
premodern	versus	modern
small	versus	big
rural	versus	urban
local	versus	global
tribal	versus	cosmopolitan
national	versus	international / transnational

---

immobile	versus	mobile
ascribed	versus	achieved
closed	versus	open
blocked	versus	unblocked
determined	versus	free
static	versus	dynamic
outdated	versus	cutting-edge
backward-looking	versus	forward-looking
nostalgic	versus	realistic
conservative	versus	progressive

Within ideological frameworks, binary categories are always value-laden, expressing the interests of those actors who have an interest in defending their position in society by dividing the world into opposites bestowed with an abundance of quasi-natural validity.

### 3. *Dominant ideology and science*

In the positivist tradition of social thought, ideology and science tend to be conceived of as opposites: the former is distortive, based on misperceptions, misconceptions, and misrepresentations; the latter is – at least potentially – informative, founded on logical descriptions, rational explanations, and methodical evaluations. The whole point of scientific analysis is to demystify the deceptive – that is, ideologically filtered – appearances of ‘reality’ and to uncover the underlying structural mechanisms that govern both the characteristics and the developments of the ‘world’, including those of society.

In the Enlightenment-inspired tradition of modern politics, by contrast, ideology and science tend to be regarded as mutually inclusive: every scientific endeavour is – implicitly or explicitly – influenced by ideological presuppositions, just as every ideological project is – unwittingly or deliberately – affected by scientific knowledge. The legitimizing function of science in processes of justification, taking place in the political arena, has gained a considerable amount of importance in ‘knowledge societies’: given the increasingly influential epistemic currency of evidence-based validity, opinion and will formation processes rely heavily on findings from studies conducted in the natural and social sciences. ‘The trust in the science of underlying laws of economic and social development’ (p. 92) is essential to the modern belief in the possibility of developing steering media capable of controlling and regulating ideological, behavioural, and institutional patterns in accordance with human – that is, universalizable – interests.

To the extent that ‘the science of inherent structural tendencies is the condition for the success of political actions’ (p. 100), the positivist belief in the possibility of objectively established, empirically substantiated, and universally valid knowledge is converted into a yardstick for the defensibility of decision-making processes in large-scale social settings. The tension-laden dialectic that appears to be inherent in human existence – expressed in paradigmatic oppositions such as ‘structure versus agency’, ‘necessity versus freedom’, and ‘constraint versus choice’ – lies at the heart of all politics claiming to rely on scientifically corroborated insights when making, or justifying, decisions of collective weight:

---

A politics aimed at transforming the structures and neutralizing the efficiency of underlying laws should make use of the knowledge of the probable in order to reinforce the chances of the possible: the knowledge of underlying laws of the social world is the condition for all realistic – that is, non-utopian – action seeking to impede the realization of these laws; if the science of the probable exists, the chances of the possible are increased ... . (pp. 100–1)

The lawfulness of the social world can be studied by drawing on the insightfulness of the social sciences, acted upon by mobilizing the resourcefulness of political institutions, and naturalized by colonizing people's collective consciousness with dogmas propagated by dominant ideologies.

All politics ignorant of the probable that it seeks to impede runs the risk of contributing to its future; by contrast, the science that uncovers the probable at least has the virtue of uncovering the function of the *laissez-faire*. (p. 101; emphasis added)

Put differently, both politics and science can be complicit ways of confirming the legitimacy of established social orders. They differ, however, in the following sense: the former tends to be driven by instrumental concerns of power and authority; the latter tends to be motivated by epistemic concerns of analysis and enquiry. Owing to its commitment to the search for truth, science has the empowering potential of questioning the taken-for-grantedness of consolidated social arrangements, thereby – if necessary – contributing to their theoretical and practical deconstruction.

All dominant ideologies need to reconcile the potential tension between the intellectualism of academics and researchers, on the one hand, and the pragmatism of political and economic leaders, on the other (see pp. 133–5). The need to cross-fertilize insights obtained from the scientific field with convictions governing the political and economic fields represents a major challenge for those in charge of designing and defending dominant ideologies. Certainly, in most hegemonic discursive frameworks constructed by dominant classes, there is little – if any – room for 'concepts that are too obscure and arguments that are too complex, in short, anything that feels intellectual' (p. 11). For the whole point of dominant ideologies is to change, rather than simply to interpret, the world in accordance with the interests of the ruling classes. Yet, the most pragmatically oriented dominant ideology has no short-term – let alone long-term – currency unless it succeeds in re-appropriating knowledge produced in the realms of scientific enquiry.

#### *4. Dominant ideology and the state*

Dominant ideologies cannot be dissociated from the power exercised by the modern state. To the extent that the state constitutes one of the most powerful institutions – if not, the most powerful institution – in large-scale stratified societies, it cannot be bypassed by hegemonic groups seeking to disseminate their values, principles, and convictions. In fact, powerful collective actors have to colonize the state, both ideologically and structurally, in order to make it work in accordance with their own interests. The 'scheme of an "ideal state"', founded on the authority of a new aristocracy of personal value and competence' (p. 49; emphasis added), is central to the dominant class's envisaging of

---

an 'ideal society', based on a neoliberal economy and regulated by a neomanagerial administration. The state, then, acquires 'the role of mediator' (p. 52) between different social groups. Aiming to defend their privileged position in society, 'the business leaders' (p. 52) find themselves 'in the situation of buyers in relation to the state' (p. 52).

At least since the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the key challenge for the state has been to reach a compromise between individualism and collectivism, capitalism and socialism, marketization and bureaucratization, liberalization and regulation:

This state, neither 'capitalist' nor 'collectivist', needs to reconcile the organization and planning of the economy by the managing elite and the participation of 'citizens' and 'workers', but by means other than electoral democracy. (p. 49)

Economic efficiency and political legitimacy are two interdependent preconditions for the short- and long-term stability of capitalist-democratic societies. 'This technocratic utopia of "the left", which gives primacy to the "economic" over the "political"' (p. 53), reflects the triumph of the dominant ideology oriented towards the symbolic and material consolidation of capitalist imperatives. The Keynesian project of gaining relative control over the economy reaffirms the belief in the possibility of 'democratic planning' (p. 53), inspired by the doctrine of 'economic humanism' (p. 54). The plea for a 'capitalism with a human face' (see pp. 44–6, 54), based on a 'planned economy' (p. 53), expresses a political vision that is shared by both 'progressive reformism' (p. 54) and 'enlightened conservatism' (p. 54), demonstrating a considerable degree of ideological elasticity, which spreads across a wide spectrum of pluralist diversity.

### *5. Dominant ideology and biased realism*

Every dominant ideology comprises a societal project subject to a sense of biased realism. Even ideological doctrines that, when they are mobilized by a particular state or government, claim to follow 'evidence-based standards of scientificity' cannot escape the chains of their own normativity: 'their science is political, and their politics is scientific' (p. 88). Rather than conceiving of science and politics as two entirely separate social fields, the challenge consists in grasping the extent to which, especially in advanced historical formations, they are intertwined. Under neomanagerial modes of governance, 'the Plan is a proper form of politics, but – if we can say so – it is a politics that is depoliticized, neutralized, promoted to the state of technique' (p. 88). Its supporters employ a 'performative language' (p. 88) to impose their own benchmarks on as many social spheres as possible. Every dominant ideology, then, contains a projective attitude oriented towards the regulative construction of reality:

The dominant discourse on the social world serves not only to legitimize domination but also to orient the action perpetuating it and, thus, give a lesson [un moral] and a moral[une morale], a direction and directives, to those who direct and act upon it. (p. 94; emphasis added)

In order to realize their regulative potential, dominant ideologies need to provide both biased and realist approaches to the world: due to their biasedness, each of them reflects

---

a project of action shaped by particular sets of social interests; due to their realism, each of them constitutes ‘a project of action bestowed with reasonable chances of success’ (p. 94; emphasis added). In other words, a dominant ideology ‘proposes a vision that is, at once, biased, because it is partial and interested, and realist, that is, capable of imposing its own necessity’ (p. 95; emphasis in original) as a – seemingly uni- versalizable – normative order upon all sectors of society.

## 6. *Dominant ideology and lessons from history*

In the long run, a dominant ideology can assert its authority only to the extent that its leading advocates are willing to learn ‘lessons from history’ (see pp. 32, 76, 82; emphasis added).

A dominant class that gives itself as a norm the objective law of its change gains access to a mode of domination that includes the conscious reference to the history of modes of domination. The new leading fraction is educated, above all with regard to its history. . . . It invokes historical precedents and lessons from the past, not as instruments of legitimization, but in order to avoid old mistakes. (p. 76; emphasis added)

Dominant classes need to go through individual and collective learning processes, especially when revising their ideological reference points in the face of self-initiated or circumstantially induced ‘reality checks’. Political and economic elites may seek to present themselves as ‘the new prophets’ (p. 76) obliged to ‘impose a new direction’ (p. 76) – not only for their own class, but also for the society that they wish to lead and represent. As in most socioeconomically defined and ideologically driven groups, the ‘struggle between the “*conservatives*” and the “*progressives*”, between the “*rear-garde*” and the “*avant-garde*” of class’ (p. 76; emphasis added), may turn out to be decisive in defining the direction that a collective movement, or indeed an entire country, may take.

It seems that ‘[t]he backward-looking forces – irrespective of whether they are nostalgic of fascism or of parliamentary government, “old” right or “old” left – have not learned anything’ (p. 77) from the past, let alone from their own history. By contrast, ‘[t]he “intelligent” bourgeoisie has drawn lessons from the past, that is, lessons from the historical failures of the bourgeoisie’ (p. 77). In light of such a strategically motivated attitude, which is open to change and adjustment, the progressive fractions of the ruling class are willing to ‘abandon the past and the backward-looking dispositions that are normally linked to the occupation of a dominant position’ (p. 77).

To be sure, dominant actors tend to endorse orthodox and traditional standpoints, aiming to defend their position in society; dominated actors, on the other hand, tend to advocate heterodox and subversive views, seeking to challenge the status quo.<sup>5</sup> Irrespective of whether a particular social group subscribes to conservative or progressive positions, its viable planning of the future depends on its truthful interpretation of the past:

Its ‘intelligence’ consists in this combination of the capacity to adapt to new situations and the capacity to assimilate new situations to old situations, which equips it with reflexive knowledge of its past experiences. (p. 77; emphasis added)

---

Cutting-edge ideologies – even if they are designed to defend the interests of the dominant groups – need to be prepared to adjust their normative agendas to the socio-historically specific circumstances in which they are applied. To acknowledge that ‘one can no longer have it all and pay nothing’ (p. 77) requires accepting that it is essential to make concessions in order to defend one’s interests in relationally constituted spaces of possibilities.

### 7. *Dominant ideology and reproduction*

Dominant ideologies cannot be divorced from processes of social reproduction. ‘The abstractors of the textual quintessence often forget that the construction of a corpus is inseparable from the construction of the social conditions of production’ (p. 17) underlying the generation and circulation of symbolic forms.

Within critical sociology, ‘[t]he dialectic of research permits – practically – to get out of the hermeneutic circle’ (p. 17) of self-referential idealism and face up to the ineluctable structural constraints to which all meaning-generating actors are exposed and whose significance is emphasized in explanatory approaches associated with social holism.<sup>6</sup> Because of its social constitution, ‘a discursive body’ is never simply ‘a body of producers’ but always also ‘a set of places of discursive production and of the production of discursive producers’ (p. 17). In brief, a discursive body is a spatiotemporally contingent constellation of symbolic practices performed by social actors.

Dominant ideologies are shaped by ‘the only laws of reproduction and of institutional functioning responsible for reproducing’ (p. 13; emphasis added) vertically structured systems of classification. Even if they are intended to contribute to substantial behavioural or institutional change, ideologies – notably, dominant ones – cannot step outside the horizon of social reproduction. In particular, dominant social classes seek to ensure the state protects their interests: ‘the development of institutions in charge of economic (and, secondarily, sociological) research [are] directly subordinated to bureaucratic demand, the creation of elitist schools (such as ENA [*E cole nationale d’administration*]), in which the dominant discourse is subject to rationalization’ (p. 117; emphasis in original) and in which the leaders of the future acquire ‘an expert political competence’ (p. 117). In such a system, geared towards large-scale social reproduction, the ultimate function of the dominant ideology is to perpetuate the status quo and thereby stabilize the established social order.

One of the most important realms normalized by processes of social reproduction are educational institutions, such as schools and universities. Despite ‘the appearance of autonomy producing educational rationalization and neutralization, elitist schools legitimize the categories of thought and the methods of action produced by the class *avant-garde*’ (p. 122; emphasis added), thereby confirming the regulative authority of the established order. Notwithstanding a significant degree of internal heterogeneity, members of the dominant class reproduce an idiosyncratic mode of perception, appreciation, and action, by means of which they distinguish themselves from other socio-economically defined groups.

The products of this school of thought and action – political men, high-ranked state-employed, journalists of newspapers and semi-official reviews – have interiorized the

---

schemes of thought that reflect the methodically consolidated history of the dominant class. (pp. 122–3; emphasis added)

Fully-fledged members of the dominant class are equipped with the – socially naturalized and collectively shared – capacity to produce and reproduce their own *modus operandi*, permitting them to protect their privileged access to the material and symbolic resources guaranteeing their group existence. The mastery of mutually established cultural codes, including common reference points, forms the basis of self-referential markers of collective identity, such as ‘interconnaissance’ and ‘intercitation’ (p. 19), allowing for the construction of a sense of distinctive homogeneity. Thus, ‘a strict limitation of belonging and exclusion’ (p. 69) – based on ‘a system of categories of perception, reflection, and action’ (p. 122) – generates powerful mechanisms of social stratification.<sup>7</sup>

The production of ‘homologous habitus’ (p. 124) is a precondition for the construction of internally and externally differentiated social fields, divided by individual and collective actors struggling over access to material and symbolic resources in their daily competition for legitimate – and, hence, empowering – positions and dispositions. Whatever the specificity of a struggle in a given field, ‘act[s] of neutralization and homogenization’ (p. 9) generate naturalized and naturalizing realms of socialization, which are sustained by stratified processes of value-, interest-, and power-laden orchestration and which are oriented towards the production and reproduction of ‘ideological unity’ (p. 9) amongst members sharing a sense of belonging and identity.<sup>8</sup>

## 8. *Dominant ideology and ‘endology’*

Apocalyptic announcements concerning the alleged ‘end’ of various constitutive features of modernity have been à la mode at least since the late 1960s. The global developments that have been taking place in the second part of the 20th century, especially since the end of the Cold War, have been characterized in terms of numerous provocative declarations, such as ‘the end of the social’, ‘the end of politics’, or ‘the end of history’ – to mention only a few. Given its emphasis on the putative implosion of modernity’s cornerstones, the ‘*end of ideology*’ thesis<sup>9</sup> is inextricably linked to all of these paradigmatic pronouncements.<sup>10</sup>

To oppose ‘the discourse on the end of ideologies and of social classes’<sup>11</sup> means to challenge the fatalistic assumption that ‘there is no alternative’ (p. 4) to neoliberal capitalism, which is now widely perceived as the – triumphant – politico-economic system that has succeeded in consolidating its hegemonic position in the early 21st century on a global scale.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, the ‘end of ideology’ thesis is itself an ideology: ‘the ideology of the end of ideologies’ (p. 53) represents a grand narrative announcing ‘the end of grand narratives’. The ‘post-ideological age’ constitutes a ‘post-historical era’, in the sense that the alleged ‘end of ideology’ emanates from the supposed ‘end of history’, epitomized in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989:

the most important lesson learned from history is the discovery that one cannot expect anything from history, that the universe of possible political regimes (modes of domination) has come to an end. (p. 82; emphasis added)

---

Such a 'post-ideological age' is conceived of not only as 'post-historical', in the sense that civilizational development will not be able to make possible what it promised to deliver under the influence of Enlightenment thought, but also as 'post-utopian', in the sense that, in the current era, there seems to be little in the way of a viable alternative to the neoliberal consensus that has spread across large parts of the globe.

The fatalism that confines the ideology of the end of ideologies and the corresponding exclusion of possible alternatives are the hidden condition for a scientific usage of statistical prevision and economic analysis. (p. 88; emphasis added)

In the 'post-ideological age', it is possible to assert the end of realistic long-term alternatives to capitalism without relegating the scientific promise of regulative and predictive accuracy to the past. Hence, 'if all utopia is – by definition – excluded, what remains is only the choice of the necessary' (p. 88; emphasis added), whose ineluctable omnipresence can be confirmed by means of contemporary sociohistorical studies. Tendencies towards 'the depoliticization of the dominated' (p. 92) – expressed in prevalent 'political apathy' (p. 90) and the lack of systematic engagement with the political ideologies that shaped the 19th and 20th centuries – appear to corroborate the validity of the contention that we have entered an era characterized by the absence of meta-narratives and utopian recipes.

## *9. Dominant ideology and hegemonic performativity*

Dominant ideologies cannot be divorced from the exercise of power, that is, from the secrets of hegemonic performativity. 'Neither science nor phantasm, the dominant discourse is a form of politics, that is, a powerful discourse, not true, but capable of becoming true' (p. 94; emphasis added) – not accurate, but capable of presenting itself as accurate; not entirely credible, but capable of gaining credibility; seemingly removed from reality, but capable of shaping social development. A genuinely effective dominant ideology, in other words, constitutes a hegemonic discourse bestowed with the power to recognize – and, if necessary, react to – key historical developments and shape them in accordance with the interests of the most influential social groups.

Political power, in the proper sense, resides neither in the simple adaptation to structural tendencies nor in the arbitrary imposition of directly interested measures, but in a rational exploitation of structural tendencies ... (p. 98; emphasis added)

Efficient political power requires the development of a resourceful strategic rationality. A 'realized ideology' (p. 104), then, is an ideology that has succeeded in fulfilling its potential by shaping and, if necessary, transforming central components of society, even – and, perhaps, especially – if it has achieved this on the basis of objectives that appear to lie outside the scope of what is possible. Yet, the relationship between ideology and reality is not only about pushing the boundaries of what is, and what is not, possible. In a more fundamental sense, it concerns the dialectic of conceptual representations and empirical actualizations: 'mythico-ritual systems ... structure the conception of the social world in accordance with the very structures of this world' (p. 104).



---

Thus, in order to ‘escape idealism’ (p. 104) and avoid the illusory belief in the free-floating status of interpretive processes, it is not enough to insist upon the social determinacy of all discursively mediated representations of reality. Indeed, the point of the comprehensive study of hegemonic symbolic forms – as, for instance, undertaken in ‘critical discourse analysis’ (see, for example, Torfing, 1999) – is to recognize that ‘ideology is invented in order to invent things’ (pp. 104–5; emphasis added). Ideology is not simply a well-organized symbolic reflection or distortive representation of reality; rather, it creates reality. As such, it leaves its imprint on the social world: on its institutions, norms, and belief systems; in short, on its life forms.

The dominant representations continuously objectivize themselves within things, and the social world contains all parts – under the form of institutions, objects, and mechanisms (without mentioning agents’ habitus) – of the realized ideology. (p. 105; emphasis added)

Certainly, even an ideology that appears to be out of touch with reality cannot escape the ever-growing horizon of historicity. Every foreground performative act is situated within a background horizon, from which it draws the symbolic and material resources that allow for its coming-into-being in the first place. With regard to the everyday construction of normativity, therefore, it is imperative to concede that ‘all political action needs to confront the structure of the social world, insofar as it is, at least partly, the product of previous political actions: the historical heritage is also a capital’ (p. 105; emphasis added). There is no space of possibilities without a background horizon of already-realized occurrences and a foreground horizon of still-to-be-realized projects.<sup>13</sup> Dominant ideologies are successful to the extent that they convert their own projects into powerful sources of hegemonic performativity.

### *10. Dominant ideology and compromise*

From a long-term perspective, dominant ideologies are hardly sustainable unless their advocates are willing to make compromises by adjusting and, if necessary, de-radicalizing their key presuppositions and principles. One of the most obvious, and arguably most significant, historical examples of the fact that viable ideologies are malleable and adaptable is the rise of the various discourses defending the idea of a ‘Third Way’ between capitalism and communism.<sup>14</sup>

Nowadays, ‘the success of the “modernizers”’ (p. 3) advocating ‘the “Third Way”’ (p. 3) – that is, the ‘task of ideological modernization’ (p. 117; emphasis in original) – is hardly less relevant than it was in the second part of the 20th century. The exploration of the structural conditions of such an alternative socio-political project, however, has been far from straightforward: ‘the search for a “Third Way”’ (p. 43) is characterized by ‘the double rejection of liberal capitalism in its “anarchic” forms, of radical-socialist democracy with its “inefficient parliamentarianism” and its corruption, and, on the other hand, of “collectivism”, that is, of “communism” or “socialism”’ (pp. 43–4; emphasis added). Irrespective of whether one conceives of the relationship between these two historical projects as a ‘real dilemma’ or a ‘pseudo-dilemma’ (p. 45), the ‘synthetic solution’ (p. 45) that is inspired by the ideal of ‘economic humanism’ (p. 44) lies at the heart of the large-scale endeavour to consolidate an ‘economic and social order defined as

---

“harmonious” and “possible” (pp. 44–5) in terms of its capacity to overcome the systemic and ideological divide between capitalism and communism, which are commonly perceived as two diametrically opposed models of society. Such a ‘Third Way’, then, is founded on the ‘coexistence of a “planned industrial sector” and a “free sector”’ (p. 45; emphasis added).

Of course, the vision of ‘economic planning’, prescribing a specific degree of state interventionism, plays a pivotal role in most modern socio-political systems – notably, state socialism, social-democratic or conservative forms of liberalism, and fascism (see p. 45). In all of these regimes, with the exception of socialism, the ‘practical collaboration between classes, aimed at maintaining social peace’ (p. 45; emphasis added) and at creating a sense of class-transcending solidarity, is central to the promise of generating long-term prosperity, even if this venture is accompanied by intermediate periods of austerity.<sup>15</sup> Hence, it is “through the “effort” and the “freely agreed discipline” – that is, through the “cooperation” of all classes within a new “progressive contract”” (p. 74) – that it becomes possible to construct a society that can pride itself on being both free and planned, dynamic and stable, innovative and predictable, productive and redistributive, competitive and cooperative, affluent and fair. The result is, presumably, ‘the general elevation of life quality’ (p. 75) – not only for the middle- and upper-classes but also, more importantly, for the working classes.

The dream of ‘the affluent society’ has become a reality in large parts of the world in the early 21st century. Indeed, a vital function of dominant ideologies is to convince all members of society ‘that “poverty” and “the most salient disparities” have disappeared’ (p. 75) and that, consequently, there are ‘good reasons to believe that the “inequalities” between the classes are gradually being abolished’ (p. 76). It may be far-fetched to assert that ‘the enhancement of life quality’ (p. 121) is tantamount to ‘the emancipation of the working class’ (p. 121).<sup>16</sup> Yet, the creation of a Third Way – justified in terms of a pragmatically justified ‘class compromise’ and expressed in the ‘double condemnation of *the power of money (“plutocracy”)* and the power of the masses (*“democracy”*), of capitalism and of collectivism’ (p. 47; emphasis added) – constitutes the foundation of an ‘economic humanism’ (p. 46) based on both ‘anti-capitalism and anti-collectivism’ (p. 46), that is, on a social philosophy that, at first glance, is ‘neither right-wing nor left-wing’ (p. 48). The core content of this approach can be described as follows:

‘Socialist humanism’ seeks to ‘overcome’ ‘class struggle’ as well as antagonistic and ‘obsolete’ doctrines, such as ‘liberalism’ and ‘Marxism’, in order to undertake a ‘*synthesis of ‘freedom’ and ‘determinism’, ‘collectivization’ and ‘free enterprise’, ‘planning’ and ‘market economy’*’. (p. 50; emphasis added)

Hand in hand with this ‘Third Way’ philosophy goes the assumption that the globally triumphant ideology of the early 21st century is liberalism, whereas the obsolete – and, essentially, totalitarian – ideologies of the past are communism and fascism.

... the two ‘authoritarianisms’ – ‘fascist’ or ‘soviet’ – can function as two opposed poles of a political space, in which liberalism is the centre, the point of equilibrium, the ‘point of the biggest tension’ ... the ‘tamed (or domesticated) economy’ or the ‘indicative planning’ [is] opposed to ‘authoritarian (fascist or soviet) planning’, on the one hand, and ‘liberal

---

anarchy’, on the other. ... Once all alternatives are overcome, the only forced choice that remains is growth and liberal planning. (pp. 83–4; emphasis added)

Surely, the orthodox Marxist assertion that fascism can be regarded as a ‘continuation of liberal democracy with other means’ (p. 83; emphasis added)<sup>17</sup> fails to do justice not only to the historical specificity of the former but also to the genuinely progressive aspects of the latter. Yet, the view that, under extreme historical circumstances characterized by crisis and instability, fascism and capitalism are mutually inclusive – as demonstrated in Germany, Italy, and Spain before and during the Second World War – is corroborated by the fact that a large amount of ‘people representing capital betrayed France’ (p. 50) by endorsing anti-democratic politics in order to further their interests. The ‘compromise ideology’ par excellence is liberalism for having been able to adapt to the structural developments of capitalism without having to give up its core values and beliefs, notably its emphasis on the civilizational achievements obtained due to the rise of productivism and individualism.

### *11. Dominant ideology and meritocracy*

According to the most radical – notably, evolutionist – versions of dominant ideologies, long-term social development is tantamount to a ‘Darwinian selection process’ (p. 68), driven by ‘eternal competition’ and the ‘survival of the fittest’ (see p. 68). In the late 20th century, ‘authoritarian’ and ‘anti-democratic’ tendencies amongst members of the dominant classes were gradually replaced by the meritocratic ‘dream of a dictatorship of competence’ (p. 82). Sceptics may characterize this vision as ‘an elitism of competence, combined with a pastoral populism’ (p. 14), both of which appear to be diametrically opposed to the “‘humanisms’” associated with the “‘planning-ideology’” (p. 14).

In a meritocratic society, ‘the salary is freely negotiated with the company manager’ (p. 45); furthermore, there is a commitment, on behalf of every citizen, ‘to guarantee the leaders’ “‘competence’” and to limit the role of “‘heritage’” in the transmission of power’ (p. 45), thereby trying to minimize the possibility of discrimination embedded in nepotism and favouritism. In a broad sense, then, the ideal of meritocracy that forms part of dominant ideologies in advanced – that is, mainly neoliberal – capitalist societies can be characterized as follows:

... an order founded on the power of competence, suitable for bringing about the ‘rational organization of industrial work’ and, with it, the rational organization of society, that is, the ‘rational and human organization of inequality’, but of an ‘inequality’ based on nature, resting on ‘human value’, ‘competence’, ‘talent’, and not on the transmission of privileges. (pp. 45–6; emphasis added)

Ironically, when assessing the validity of the above definition from a sociological perspective, its ostensibly constructivist emphasis on values such as ‘fairness’, ‘achievement’, and ‘merit’ is contradicted by its underlying essentialist – if not, biologicistic – assumptions about the importance of ‘talent’, ‘genetically defined competence’, and ‘natural inequality’. Indeed, ‘the false discourse of essence ... fulfils a true function of eternalization’ (p. 108) – that is, of ontologization, absolutization, universalization,

---

decontextualization, and dehistoricization. In short, following the parameters of dominant ideologies, the meritocratic paradise is a society in which, in principle, everyone stands a chance of winning or losing, whilst – paradoxically – being determined to do either one or the other. Performative contradictions are amongst the most remarkable features of dominant ideologies.

## *12. Dominant ideology and conservatism*

Dominant ideologies cannot be dissociated from intellectual currents associated with conservatism. Granted, there are multiple conservatisms that have shaped the development of dominant ideologies over the past two centuries. The most important form of conservatism that has succeeded in continuing to play a pivotal role in setting political agendas in recent decades, however, is what is variably described as ‘progressive’, ‘enlightened’, ‘developed’, ‘modern’, or ‘liberal’ conservatism.<sup>18</sup>

Central to such a ‘reformed’ conservatism is the ideal of “‘democratic planning’”, which reinvents “‘the economic humanism’” of the thirties’ (pp. 53–4) and is aimed at the establishment of a ‘planned economy’ (p. 54). At the heart of this paradigmatic shift lies a firm belief in the possibility of civilizational progress: ‘the optimistic evolutionism of converted conservatism is the product of the same scheme as the pessimism of avowed conservatism’ (p. 70; emphasis in original).

Examining this ideological current in a systematic fashion, it is possible to differentiate between ‘traditional conservatism’ and ‘modern conservatism’ in terms of the following dimensions:<sup>19</sup>

- (a) The former is based on a pessimistic conception of society, arguing that human behaviour and desires need to be regulated and controlled by strict ‘law and order’ policies exercised by the state. The latter is founded on an optimistic conception of society, suggesting that human beings are not only capable of making decisions as morally responsible actors but also able to shape historical developments in accordance with rationally defensible considerations.
- (b) The former is characterized by a past-oriented attitude, expressed in a nostalgic idealization of social, cultural, political, and economic arrangements that no longer exist. The latter is motivated by a future-oriented attitude, epitomized in a strong emphasis on the civilizational role of creativity, imagination, and innovation, permitting human actors to project themselves into hitherto unexplored horizons.
- (c) The former is backward-looking and retrograde, in the sense that it is sceptical of radical historical transformations, notably in terms of their disruptive normative implications and their tendency to undermine the grounds of traditional modes of social organization. The latter is forward-looking and progressive, in the sense that it welcomes the alteration of social, cultural, political, and economic constellations, to the extent that such modernizing processes contribute to life-quality improvement and human evolution.
- (d) The former holds on to a firm belief in the intrinsic value of experiences of immediacy and authenticity, derived from a sustained engagement with ‘nature’ and relations based on trust, community, and quotidian intersubjectivity. The

---

latter defends the species-constitutive achievements of science and technology, driven by the ambition to gain increasing control over multiple theoretical and practical challenges arising from the human encounter with both natural and social aspects underlying the construction of reality.

- (e) The former is marked by a considerable degree of closure, aimed at preventing the status quo and at defending already established values, conventions, and principles against pleas for radical social change. The latter is characterized by a remarkable degree of openness, by means of which broad-minded actors are able to face up to, and cope with, the unprecedented challenges of both the present and the future.

The continuing presence of traditional conservatism makes its revised versions appear rather progressive. Key aspects of its classical variants – which stress ‘the feeling of decline, despair, and anxiety about the future’ (p. 71), whilst insisting upon the quasi-natural significance attached to ‘the nation, land, ancestral soil’ (p. 71) – seem out of date in the present context. In the current era, ‘progressive conservatism’ emanates from ‘a fraction of the dominant class that treats as subjective law what constitutes the objective law of its perpetuation, that is, change in order to preserve’ (p. 72).<sup>20</sup>

Because it has been both willing and able to revise some of its core assumptions, conservatism has managed to outlive the profound global transformations that have shaped major historical developments over the past few decades. Put differently, conservatism has been able to survive because it has become less conservative. Dominant ideologies will continue to set the agenda to the extent that they succeed in giving the misleading impression that they are much less forceful and intrusive than they need to be in order to exercise hegemonic power.

## Conclusion: The enduring relevance of ideology

As should be clear from the above reflections, the critical analysis of ideology is central to a comprehensive understanding of complex forms of social domination. The far-reaching – that is, both trans-disciplinary and trans-epochal – significance of the concept of ideology is confirmed by the fact that it has been, and continues to be, widely discussed in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>21</sup>

The ‘*society-as-a-project ideologies*’ of the 19th and 20th centuries, although they have not disappeared, compete with the ‘*projects-in-society ideologies*’ of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Intimately related to the development of industrial society since the mid-18th century, the historical impact of the former is reflected in the influence of ‘old social movements’. Inextricably linked to the rise of post-industrial society from the mid-1960s onwards, the historical impact of the latter is illustrated in the influence of ‘new social movements’.<sup>22</sup>

In light of this paradigmatic shift, the most influential (notably Hegelian, Marxist, and world-religious) versions of the idea of ‘the ultimate reconciliation, the final “convergence”’ (p. 73) – built upon ‘societal plans, projections, and projects’ (p. 73) – have largely been discredited, especially by those who endorse intellectual discourses that

---

insist upon the radical indeterminacy permeating the infinite paths of human history. And yet, alarmist announcements concerning the alleged arrival of a post-teleological constellation – epitomized in the rhetoric about ‘the end of ideology’ and ‘the end of history’ – are no less problematic than its intellectual counterparts. The continuing relevance of projective modes of thought in the current era, so skilfully examined in PID, is symptomatic of the fact that ideologies – although they may be more and more diversified, as well as less and less coherently organized – are far from obsolete.

As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, PID deserves to be considered an original contribution to contemporary studies of ideology, since it provides useful – and, in some respects, unparalleled – insights into the sociological role of discursive forms in highly differentiated and stratified societies. These insights are just as relevant today as they were in the 1970s. If there is one lesson to be learned from the critical study of ideology, it is that the construction of society is inconceivable without the distinctly human capacity to make discursively constituted claims concerning both the objective constitution and the normative potential of reality. When confronted with the historical specificities of socially constructed realities, however, the question that remains is who has the power to define ideological frameworks, convert them into hegemonic reference points, and thereby set the agenda.

## Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all page references (both in the body of the text and in the notes) are to Bourdieu and Boltanski (2008 [1976]); all translations (from the French) are mine.

1. Given its timely subject matter, this new edition was accompanied by a detailed commentary, written by Luc Boltanski and entitled *Rendre la réalité inacceptable. À propos de ‘La production de l’idéologie dominante’* [Making Reality Unacceptable. Comments on ‘The Production of the Dominant Ideology’]; see Boltanski (2008). I have elsewhere discussed significant points of convergence and divergence between Bourdieu and Boltanski; see, for example: Susen (2007: 223–4, 227 n.25, 228 n.50, 229 n.51, 229 n.52, 271 n.24; 2011a, esp. pp. 450–8; 2012b; 2014 [2012]; 2014 [2014]). On the far-reaching impact of Boltanski’s writings on the contemporary social sciences, see Susen and Turner (2014).
2. On the concept of ‘neutral place’, see esp. pp. 9, 17, 98, 113, 116–20, 122, 133, 135.
3. See p. 117: ‘*Le discours neutre est le discours qui engendre “naturellement” dans la confrontation d’individus appartenant à différentes fractions et prélevés dans la fraction de chaque fraction la plus disposée à entrer en communication avec les autres fractions.*’
4. See pp. 57–8, 60, 68, 74, 79, 94, 96, 107–8.
5. On this point, see, for instance, Susen (2007: 178; 2011b: 372–3, 406; 2013b: 208, 219, 225; 2013c: 332–3, 362, 371).
6. On this point, see p. 72: ‘*la société c’est Dieu*’. See also Bourdieu (1997: 288).
7. On this point, see also p. 99: ‘*schémas de pensée, de perception et d’appréciation*’.
8. On this point, see p. 9. See also pp. 98–9: ‘*l’orchestration des habitus et la concertation favorisée*’.
9. On the ‘end of ideology’ thesis, see, for instance: Bell (2000 [1960]); Donskis (2000); Rubinstein (2009); Scott (1990); Simons and Billig (1994); Waxman (1968).
10. On this point, see esp. pp. 4, 53, 82–84, 88–101.
11. On this point, see p. 4: ‘*Ce texte qui prend le contre-pied du discours sur la fin des idéologies et des classes sociales ouvre de nouvelles perspectives pour comprendre la société française d’aujourd’hui.*’

- 
12. On this point, see also, for example: Browne and Susen (2014); Holloway and Susen (2013); Susen (2012a).
  13. On this point, see p. 106: ‘... un processus de vieillissement et, indissociablement, de désenchantement qui tend à renforcer *l’antagonisme* entre les deux modalités politiques de *l’appréhension du réel, l’utopisme et le sociologisme (comme forme du réalisme)*, en *re’duisant contiùment la part d’utopisme qu’autorise le réalisme ou, mieux, l’utopisme réaliste*’ (emphasis in original).
  14. On this point, see pp. 3, 14, 43–51, 74–6, 79, 82–4, 107–9, 121.
  15. On this point, see Browne and Susen (2014).
  16. On this point, see also, for instance, Susen (2015: esp. pp. 1028–34).
  17. Translation modified: ‘le fascisme, continuation, de’ormais impossible, de la démocratie libérale par *d’autres* moyens’. On this point, cf. Kühnl (1990 [1979], 1998 [1983]). See also Susen (2013a: 99–100 n. 29).
  18. On this point, see pp. 53, 70–74, 79, 89, 97, 116, 123.
  19. Various normative oppositions are central to the typological distinction between ‘traditional conservatism’ and ‘modern conservatism’; see especially pp. 70–74 and p. 116.
  20. Emphasis added, except for ‘subjective law’, which is italicized in the original text.
  21. On the concept of ideology, see, for instance: Abercrombie et al. (1980, 1990); Apel (1971); Conde-Costas (1991); Eagleton (2007 [1991]); Haug (1999); Lee (1992); Marx and Engels (1953 [1845–7]); Marx and Engels (2000 [1846]); Thompson (1984); van Dijk (1998); Žižek (1989, 1994).
  22. On this point, see Susen (2010).

## References

- Abercrombie N, Hill S and Turner BS (1980) *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Abercrombie N, Hill S and Turner BS (eds) (1990) *Dominant Ideologies*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Apel K-O (ed.) (1971) *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Bell D (2000 [1960]) *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Boltanski L (2008) *Rendre la réalité inacceptable. À propos de ‘La production de l’idéologie dominante’*. Paris: Demopolis.
- Bourdieu P (1997) *Méditations pascalienues*. Paris: Seuil.
- Bourdieu P and Boltanski L (1976) *La production de l’idéologie dominante*. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 2–3: 4–73.
- Bourdieu P and Boltanski L (2008 [1976]) *La production de l’idéologie dominante*. Paris: Demopolis / Raisons d’agir.
- Browne C and Susen S (2014) *Austerity and its antitheses: Practical negations of capitalist legitimacy*. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113(2): 217–230.
- Conde-Costas LA (1991) *The Marxist Theory of Ideology: A Conceptual Analysis*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Donski L (2000) *The End of Ideology & Utopia? Moral Imagination and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century*. New York: P. Lang.
- Eagleton T (2007 [1991]) *Ideology: An Introduction*. London: Verso.
- Haug WF (1999) *Falsches Bewusstsein*. In: Haug WF (ed.) *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* (Vol. 4). Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, pp. 78–91.
- Holloway J and Susen S (2013) *Change the world by cracking capitalism? A critical encounter between John Holloway and Simon Susen*. *Sociological Analysis* 7(1): 23–42.

- 
- Kühl R (1990 [1979]) *Faschismustheorien: Ein Leitfaden*. Aktualisierte Neuauflage. Heilbronn: Distel.
- Kühl R (1998 [1983]) *Der Faschismus: Ursachen, Herrschaftsstruktur, Aktualität*. Eine Einführung. 4., überarbeitete Auflage. Heilbronn: Distel.
- Lee D (1992) *Competing Discourses: Perspective and Ideology in Language*. London: Longman.
- Marx K and Engels F (1953 [1845–7]) *Die deutsche Ideologie*. Berlin: Dietz.
- Marx K and Engels F (2000 [1846]) *The German ideology*. In: McLellan D (ed.) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 175–208.
- Rubinstein WD (2009) *The End of Ideology and the Rise of Religion: How Marxism and Other Secular Universalistic Ideologies Have Given Way to Religious Fundamentalism*. London: Social Affairs Unit.
- Scott A (1990) *Ideology and the New Social Movements*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Simons HW and Billig M (eds) (1994) *After Postmodernism: Reconstructing Ideology Critique*. London: SAGE.
- Susen S (2007) *The Foundations of the Social: Between Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology*. Oxford: Bardwell Press.
- Susen S (2010) *Los movimientos sociales en las sociedades complejas*. In: Basconzuelo C, Morel T and Susen S (eds) *Ciudadanía territorial y movimientos sociales. Historia y nuevos problemas en el escenario latinoamericano y mundial*. Río Cuarto: Ediciones del ICALE, pp. 149–226.
- Susen S (2011a) *Kritische Gesellschaftstheorie or kritische Gesellschaftspraxis? Robin Celikates, Kritik als soziale Praxis. Gesellschaftliche Selbstverständigung und kritische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2009). *Archives Européennes de Sociologie / European Journal of Sociology* 52(3): 447–463.
- Susen S (2011b) *Afterword: Concluding reflections on the legacy of Pierre Bourdieu*. In: Susen S and Turner BS (eds) *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays*. London: Anthem Press, pp. 367–409.
- Susen S (2012a) *‘Open Marxism’ against and beyond the ‘Great Enclosure’? Reflections on how (not) to crack capitalism*. *Journal of Classical Sociology* 12(2): 281–331.
- Susen S (2012b) *Une sociologie pragmatique de la critique est-elle possible? Quelques réflexions sur De la critique de Luc Boltanski*. *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 110(4): 685–728.
- Susen S (2013a) *Comments on Patrick Baert and Filipe Carreira da Silva’s Social Theory in the Twentieth Century and Beyond – Towards a ‘hermeneutics-inspired pragmatism’? Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 14(1): 80–101.
- Susen S (2013b) *Bourdieuian reflections on language: Unavoidable conditions of the real speech situation*. *Social Epistemology* 27(3–4): 199–246.
- Susen S (2013c) *A reply to my critics: The critical spirit of Bourdieuian language*. *Social Epistemology* 27(3–4): 323–393.
- Susen S (2014 [2012]) *Is there such a thing as a ‘pragmatic sociology of critique’? Reflections on Luc Boltanski’s On Critique*. In: Susen S and Turner BS (eds) *The Spirit of Luc Boltanski: Essays on the ‘Pragmatic Sociology of Critique’*, trans. Susen S. London: Anthem Press, pp. 173–210.
- Susen S (2014 [2014]) *Towards a dialogue between Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘critical sociology’ and Luc Boltanski’s ‘pragmatic sociology of critique’*. In: Susen S and Turner BS (eds) *The Spirit of Luc Boltanski: Essays on the ‘Pragmatic Sociology of Critique’*, trans. Susen S. London: Anthem Press, pp. 313–348.
- Susen S (2015) *Emancipation*. In: Gibbons MT, Coole D, Ellis E and Ferguson K (eds) *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. Vol. 3. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 1024–1038.
- Susen S and Turner BS (eds) (2014) *The Spirit of Luc Boltanski: Essays on the ‘Pragmatic Sociology of Critique’*. London: Anthem Press.
- Thompson JB (1984) *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.



- 
- Torring J (1999) *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- van Dijk TA (1998) *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London: SAGE.
- Waxman CI (ed.) (1968) *The End of Ideology Debate*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls.
- Žižek S (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek S (ed.) (1994) *Mapping Ideology*. London: Verso.

#### Author biography

Simon Susen is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at City University London. He is the author of *The Foundations of the Social* (2007). With Celia Basconzuelo and Teresita Morel, he edited *Ciudadanía territorial y movimientos sociales* (2010) and, with Bryan S. Turner, *The Legacy of Pierre Bourdieu* (2011) as well as *The Spirit of Luc Boltanski* (2014). In 2013, he edited a Special Issue on 'Bourdieu and Language' (*Social Epistemology* 27(3–4): 195–393). He is an Associate Member of the Bauman Institute and, together with Bryan S. Turner, Editor of the *Journal of Classical Sociology*.