

CHAPTER 9

Ideology

Dominant classes' and groups' rule is not guaranteed, but needs to be reproduced. All class societies are therefore based on violence and repression. Repression includes physical violence, structural repression, and ideological repression. Ideology is a strategy of reproducing domination and exploitation that operates in the realms of communication, culture, psychology, emotions, and beliefs. This chapter focuses on the concept of ideology from a critical theory perspective. It asks: What is ideology? How does ideology operate and work? In an attempt to answer these questions, the chapter first discusses the reification of consciousness (section 9.1). Second, it discusses the question of how ideology should be defined (9.2). Third, the relationship of communication and ideology is outlined (9.3). Fourth, some aspects of ideology critique are presented (9.4).

9.1. The Reification of Consciousness

Georg Lukács introduced the notion of reification. It is derived from Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. 'The essence of commodity-structure' is that 'a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a "phantom objectivity", an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people'.¹ 'The transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of "ghostly objectivity" cannot therefore content itself with the reduction of all objects for the gratification of human needs to commodities. It stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man'.²

Lukács bases this understanding of reification on a passage in *Capital's* section on the fetish character of the commodity, in which Marx speaks of

¹ Georg Lukács. 1923/1971. *History and Class Consciousness*. London: Merlin. p. 83.

² Ibid., p. 100.

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commodities as having a '*gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit*'.³ Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling translated this term as 'unsubstantial reality'.⁴ In contrast, Ben Fowkes translated it as 'phantom-like objectivity'.⁵ The second translation is superior because it is more literal. One could also employ the phrases 'spectral objectivity' or 'ghostly objectivity'. Spectres, phantoms, and ghosts are schizophrenic beings: They are present and absent at the same time. Marx uses the metaphor of the ghost for the commodity in order to express that the commodity's value is absent and present at the same time: It appears as the commodity's price, but at the same time value's substance, namely the labour time it takes workers on average to produce the commodity, is not visible, but hidden. Thereby also the class relations, in which commodities are produced, are hidden. The thing-like character of the commodity, money, and price veils class relations. 'History becomes fossilised in a *formalism* incapable of comprehending that the real nature of socio-historical institutions is that they consist of *relations between men*'.⁶ Marx's critique of the political economy constitutes a 'consciousness of consciousness' and a critical 'theory of theory'. It 'dissolves the rigid, unhistorical, natural appearance of social institutions; it reveals their historical origins'.⁷

The commodity and capital accumulation are based on the exploitation of labour power. In class societies, there are structures that degrade humans so that they are forced into exploitation that fosters capital accumulation. They produce commodities owned by and turned into capital by the dominant class. The commodity also has a commodity aesthetic, namely commodity fetishism that makes the labour that the commodity contains subjectively disappear. Ideology operates in a similar manner to commodity fetishism. In ideology, exploitation and domination are presented as natural, static, unchangeable, thing-like.

Class societies are based on a division of labour. In capitalism, the divisions between capital/labour, brain/hands, urban/rural, production/reproduction, local/global, etc. mediate capitalist production in such a manner that commodity producers and consumers do not experience how the entire commodity is produced. The way we experience capitalism in our everyday life is by the sale of our labour power, the purchase of commodities, and the use of money. We

³ Karl Marx. 1867/1890/1962. *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band: Der Produktionsprozeß des Kapitals*. MEW Band 23. Berlin: Dietz. p. 53.

⁴ Karl Marx. 1867. *Capital Volume I*. MECW Volume 35. London: Lawrence & Wishart. p. 48.

⁵ Karl Marx. 1867/1976. *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin. p. 128.

⁶ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

do not experience the class relations that are hidden behind the commodities that we buy in the supermarket or on Amazon. Ideology is built into capitalism's very structures. Not only is ideology fetishist, but also commodity fetishism is ideological: Social relations that can be changed by humans appear as natural and without alternative.

In capitalism, there are two particular features of ideology:

- (1) The ideological structure of commodity fetishism: Producers and consumers cannot experience class relations and commodity production in their totality. Commodities and money as things hide class relations. Commodity fetishism means that capitalism's economic structures are ideological.
- (2) The fetishist structure of ideology: Ideologies naturalise domination and exploitation. Ideology is a dimension of capitalism that is necessary for the latter's legitimatisation. The 'veil drawn over the nature of bourgeois society is indispensable to the bourgeoisie itself. [...] the need to deceive the other classes and to ensure that their class consciousness remain amorphous is inescapable for a bourgeois regime'.⁸

Max Horkheimer characterises the role of ideology in class society: 'One can distinguish two functions of ideology, justification [...] and concealment'.⁹ Lukács' notions of reification and reified consciousness build on Marx's notion of fetishism. For Lukács, reified consciousness is false consciousness. It 'obscures the historical, transitory character of capitalist society'. Ideology makes society's underlying relations appear as 'timeless, eternal' and 'valid for all social formations'.¹⁰ In capitalist ideology, there is no dialectic and totalities are dissolved and reduced into small parts. The whole is presented as the "sum" of the parts, and as a consequence 'isolated parts' appear as 'a timeless law valid for every human society'.¹¹ Lukács argues that ideology is not timeless, but rather a feature of any class society: Ideology presupposes 'societal structures, in which different groups and conflicting interests act and strive to impose their interest onto the totality of society as its general interest. To put it shortly: The emergence and diffusion of ideologies appears as the general characteristic of class societies'.¹²

⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

⁹ Translation from German: Max Horkheimer. 1957. Ideologie [I]. In *Max Horkheimer Gesammelte Schriften Band 14: Nachgelassene Schriften 1949–1972*, 272–273. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer. p. 273.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹² Translation from German [„Die Hauptfrage ist demnach, daß das Entstehen solcher Ideologien Gesellschaftsstrukturen voraussetzt, in denen verschiedene Gruppen und entgegengesetzte Interessen wirken und

Ideology has to do with the reification of consciousness, which poses the question of how to define ideology. The next section gives attention to this issue.

9.2. What Is Ideology?

Terry Eagleton notes six understandings of ideology: (a) ideology as ideas, (b) ideologies as class experience, (c) the legitimatisation of class interest, (d) the legitimatisation of the dominant class' interest, (e) the legitimisation of a ruling class or group's ideas by distortion and dissimulation, (f) false consciousness.¹³

If ideology just means ideas or experiences of a class, then there is no difference between knowledge and ideology. Ideology is then a general sociological category describing an anthropological feature of humans and society. Such a concept is not meaningful for a critical theory of society that needs a way of signifying attempts to manipulate consciousness. Therefore, a combination of understandings (d), (e) and (f) is appropriate for a critical theory of society. False consciousness on the side of the dominated class or group is not a necessary element of ideology. Ideology is not simply and not necessarily dominated groups' state of consciousness. Exploiting and dominant classes mostly have false consciousness. But growing up in the bourgeoisie does not imply you have false consciousness, as the examples of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx show. Ideology is a process. Dominative classes or groups communicate their dominant ideas and others react to it or do not react to it in particular ways. Dominant ideas certainly impact culture, both the culture of the dominant and the subordinate classes. But it is not pre-programmed what these changes will look like.

Definitions of ideology vary on a continuum where ideology is defined as worldview on the one end and as false consciousness on the other. Marxists do not agree on the question of whether or not we should speak of socialism as an ideology. For example, while Lenin agrees to a definition of socialism as ideology, Lukács disagrees. Lenin says: 'the only choice is – either bourgeois or socialist ideology'.¹⁴ For Lukács, ideology exists only in class societies: 'The emergence and diffusion of ideologies appears as the general characteristic of class societies'.¹⁵ General theories of ideology form one end of the continuum. Ideology critique can be found at the other end.

bestrebt sind, diese der Gesamtgesellschaft als deren allgemeines Interesse aufzudrängen. Kurz gefaßt: Entstehen und Verbreitung von Ideologien erscheint als das allgemeine Kennzeichen der Klassengesellschaften“]; Georg Lukács. 1984. *Georg Lukács Werke Band 13: Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins. 1. Halbband*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. p. 405.

¹³ Terry Eagleton. 1991. *Ideology: An Introduction*. London: Verso. pp. 28–31.

¹⁴ Lenin. 1902. What Is To Be Done? In *Lenin Collected Works* 5, 347–529. Moscow: Progress Publishers. p. 384.

¹⁵ Translation from German: „Entstehen und Verbreitung von Ideologien erscheint als das allgemeine Kennzeichen der Klassengesellschaften“, in:

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno are critical of approaches that advance a general definition of ideology. Horkheimer says about such definitions that they ‘thoroughly purge from the ideology concept the remains of its accusatory meaning’.¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno writes that the general theory of ideology uses ‘the terminology of social criticism while removing its sting’.¹⁷ Thinkers such as Horkheimer and Adorno want to use ideology critique as a method of critical theory and see ideology as a concept of critique, which is why they oppose the general definition of ideology. Mario Tronti argues that ‘any ideology is always bourgeois’¹⁸ and that ‘Marx’s thought’ is ‘not the ideology of the workers’ movement but its *revolutionary theory*’.¹⁹

The critical notion of ideology is normative. It distinguishes between true and false consciousness and practices. Based on such an understanding, ideology justifies the power of one group or individual, the way that groups or individuals exploit or dominate others. Ideology manifests itself in artefacts, belief systems, concepts, ideas, institutions, meanings, phrases, practices, representations, sentences, systems, texts, thoughts, and words that are employed to misrepresent or distort reality. Ideology is a reified and mystified semiotic representation of the world.

Ideology is not purely abstract. It is also concrete and lived. This means that in the world of labour, there are ideological workers who create and reproduce ideology. Marx writes that ideological workers are ‘the thinkers of the [ruling] class’, its ‘active, conceptive ideologists’. They ‘make the formation of the illusions of the class about itself their chief source of [their] livelihood’.²⁰

A critical concept of ideology rejects solipsism and is based on moral realism. Moral realism means that humans can analyse and understand the world’s reality and the real causes of complex problems. Ideology critique is the deconstruction of falsehood, of knowledge that is presented as truth but is deceptive. The term socialist moral realism implies that dominative and exploitative societies negate humans’ general interests. Seen from a political point of view, such societies should therefore be abolished and replaced by a societal formation that benefits all economically, socially, politically and culturally. Such a society of the commons is a socialist society.

Georg Lukács. Georg Lukács. 1986. *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins. Zweiter Halbband. Georg Lukács Werke Band 14*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. p. 405.

¹⁶ Translation from German: Max Horkheimer. 1972. *Sozialphilosophische Studien*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer. p. 28.

¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno. 1981. *Prisms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. p. 38.

¹⁸ Mario Tronti. 2019. *Workers and Capital*. London: Verso. p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 1845/46. *The German Ideology, MECW Volume 5*, p. 68.

Ideology defines an exploitative class' or dominative group's aims, actions, identity, membership, norms, resources, and values. There is always a relationship to a subordinated class or group. The power of the dominative group or exploitative group is justified and naturalised by the use of particular ideological strategies.

Ideology is an information process. There is the being-in-itself of ideology, the individual identity of a particular group that justifies its domination or exploitation of others. This identity includes aspects such as aims, practices, membership, norms, resources, etc. The subordinated group also has such an identity. So, the being-in-itself of the dominative group is dialectically related to the being-in-itself of the subordinated group (being-for-another as class relationship). The dominative group's being-in-itself is affirmed and the subordinated group's status as dominated or exploited is not talked about, is denied, or is in another way downplayed. Ideology suggests particular measures to change reality in particular ways that in the end just uphold the asymmetric power relation between the two classes or groups.

The power conflict is reproduced so that at some level of reality something new emerges that, however, fails to fundamentally change the old power relation. Ideology makes definitions of individual groups, defines a relationship and suggests how this relationship should be organised. In racist and xenophobic ideology, (a) a 'native' group is defined, (b) an outsider/immigrant group is defined, (c) a particular relationship between them is claimed (e.g. by falsely claiming that immigrants are lazy, are destroying the dominant culture, are criminals, etc.), and (d) specific measures are suggested (e.g. the deportation or killing of the outsiders). Ideological labour defines such identities, relations, and measures, and communicates these definitions and claims publicly in society.

Ideological labour's semiotic strategies often define in-groups and out-groups that are posited against each other. This can be done in a number of ways by employing the following strategies or combinations thereof:²¹

1. Positive information about the in-group is communicated;
2. Negative information about the out-group is communicated;
3. Positive information about the out-group is downplayed or suppressed;
4. Negative information about the in-group is downplayed or suppressed.

Ideology aims at treating humans like machines, which means that it wants to make them behave like automata. Ideology wants to manipulate human beings so that they take on the interest of the dominant group or class. The goal is that the dominant group or class benefits at the expense of the

²¹ Teun A. van Dijk. 1998. *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London: Sage. pp. 397–398.

subordinated groups. The Frankfurt School also characterises ideology as technological rationality and instrumental reason.²² Ideology aims at instrumentalising human behaviour and human consciousness in the interest of the dominant class or groups. Ideology does not always work. But in class society, dominant classes and groups constantly try to communicate ideology in an attempt to uphold their power.

Instrumental action is a peculiar type of purposeful action. It tries to instrumentalise human beings so that systems of exploitation and domination are reproduced. Socialism is also based on purposeful action. But socialism implies purposeful action that is non-instrumental and co-operative, and that fosters the common interest that benefits all/the many.

The concepts of instrumental reason and technological rationality are based on Lukács' notion of reified consciousness. And Lukács bases the concept of reified consciousness on Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Ideology tries to reify consciousness by presenting society as something that cannot be changed. Ideology also tries to treat human consciousness as a thing. It tries to turn humans into machines and Pavlov's dog. But society is a complex of social relations, which means that humans can change it.

For example, xenophobic ideology advances the idea that immigrants are by nature lazy 'parasites' and that their lifestyle is by nature incompatible with the hegemonic national one. The behaviour of 'foreigners' is presented as being determined by their nationality, not by the totality of social relations. No individual has by nature egoistic character features. Human beings in a society can therefore find ways to live together, learn from each other and become friends. Racist ideology reifies humans and reduces them to a specific nature with the aim of fostering division, hatred, exclusion, discrimination, conflict, war and in the last instance, annihilation.

By trying to treat humans as machines or as beings with automatic reflex reactions, ideology dehumanises human beings and society. It denies human beings their status as human. It fosters suffering, exclusion, domination, exploitation and extermination. By fostering one-dimensional cognition and communication, it wants to deny human beings the full capacity to think and act. Ideology's instrumental reason fosters undialectical practices, consciousness and communication. It tries to make consciousness, communication and practices simplistic and based on stereotypes and other forms of irrationality.

Ideology needs to be communicated in order to be effective. The next section focuses on the communication of ideology.

²² Max Horkheimer. 2004. *Eclipse of Reason*. London: Continuum. Herbert Marcuse. 1941. Some Social Implications of Modern Technology. In *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 1*, ed. Douglas Kellner, 39–65. London: Routledge.

9.3. Communication and Ideology

Ideology means a dialectical relation of communication and fetishism. Ideology communicates fetishistically and fetishism is a form of ideological communication. Commodity fetishism as a principle of capitalism means that 'the communicative character of commodities and the commodity character of communication act as the basis for an *illusory synthesis of society as a whole*. This synthesis is illusory because it does not result from a consciously and collectively organised interaction with nature, but is merely an expression of a mode of production, in which the *societalisation* of working subjects only ever happens retroactively, only after work has been done, so to speak. And in line with this, it is experienced as a *quasi-natural, fateful destiny*, and not as an *artificial* and thus *changeable* social reality'.²³

The Communicative Character of Commodity Fetishism

Price information communicates the monetary value of a commodity. In capitalism, there is a particular form of capitalist communication, in which things appear to speak to humans. Commodity sales dehumanise communication. In exchange, humans hardly communicate directly, but rather only through the mediation of money. The commodity form is one of capitalism's media of communication. It veils the social relations by which humans communicatively produce and produce communicatively. The commodity form speaks in terms of things and price. It thereby has a reifying and fetishist character. The commodity form is a communication of prices. But by communicating the price of a commodity it also communicates the ideology that the commodity and capital are natural forms for organising society. The commodity form of communication (advertising, mental labour power, access to communication networks, information and knowledge, communication technology, etc. as commodities) can also easily take on the appearance of a natural form of communication. Non-commodified communication is thereby marginalised.

Fetishism is a form of communication. It is a communication form particular to class societies. In it, the social is treated like a thing, and reification as a natural feature of society. Symbols in society appear to be communicating. But they are only symbols because social labour conducted in social relations turns them into symbols. The sellers of goods communicate to us through commodities and markets. But the thing-like character of commodities hides class and

²³ Horst Holzer. 2018. Communication & Society: A Critical Political Economy Perspective. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 16 (1): 357–401. p. 382.

exploitation. The fetishism of commodities empties out meanings from commodities. The result is a void. Advertising fills this void by creating artificial commodity meanings, commodity ideology that tries to make consumers buy certain commodities. They are promised by ads that their lives will be magically improved if they buy and consume certain commodities. Commodity fetishism disables the direct communication between the immediate producers of commodities. As a result, the producers organised in the form of a division of labour cannot speak to each other and it becomes more difficult for them to organise themselves politically. They can only unite through political organisation that supports them in formulating political demands vis-à-vis capital.

Treating culture and communications as commodities results in inequalities of communication power. Powerful organisations are able to reach many more people than weaker ones, whose messages may remain unheard. Alternative approaches such as public service media and community media try to overcome such limits, but face their own problems within capitalist society.

The dominant class tries to control the means of cultural production (the means of communication) and its contents in order to communicate ideology. Cultural workers thereby partly become ideological labour that produces, organises and communicates ideology in public.

The Fetishist Character of Ideological Communication

Ideology is a communication process, where a dominative class or group tries to impose its morality on others. How successful or unsuccessful such ideological attempts are, depends on many factors that have to do with how power is distributed in society. When the dominant class mobilises resources such as money, the means of communication, political influence, reputation, etc., then it increases the probability that there will be positive responses to its ideology. The outcomes of the ideological communication process are neither programmed nor arbitrary, but depend on power dynamics and social struggles.

Fetishism makes power appear natural. In the economy, fetishism means that money and commodities are naturalised. In political fetishism, political positions and structures like the state are naturalised. In cultural fetishism, social status and reputation are naturalised. As a result, society seems to be a collection of things and powerful elites. Money, commodities, political offices, and status communicate power and are symbols of power. But fetishism hides that these phenomena do not simply exist, but only exist because they are the result of the contradictions of power.

The economic, political, and cultural struggles of workers, citizens and subjects in general have the potential to abolish alienation and establish a different order.

Labour and ideology are inherently connected: Ideological labour is ideology-producing and ideology-communicating labour. Just as there is an ideology of labour, in capitalism we also find ideological labour. Ideology is a semiotic level of domination and exploitation. Through ideology, humans practise the production and spread of information and meanings in the form of ideas, belief systems, artefacts, systems, and institutions so that domination and exploitation are justified or naturalised.

Semiosis is the process by which humans ascribe meaning to objects and incorporate these meanings into their everyday practices. Ideology is a form of semiosis that takes place at the levels of the individual, social organisation, and society. It justifies, naturalises, and defends domination, and also tries to contain resistance. Ideology wants to make the public believe that society as it is – a system of domination and exploitation – is free, fair, just and good. Ideology spreads ideas that aim at making individuals question those who question the dominative status quo. An ideology is a particular form of socially produced knowledge. It is a knowledge product that aims at justifying asymmetric power, exploitation, and domination. To achieve this, reality is distorted, misrepresented, or depicted in a one-dimensional manner.

Ideology creates a difference between how the world is and how it appears. Ideology hides. It veils how society truly is behind appearances that are false. But these false appearances are communicated as the truth and as natural. Ideology often presents a simplistic and one-dimensional picture of the world that hides the latter's complexity. Ideology veils and tries to naturalise asymmetric power, exploitation, and domination.

Communication is work. The implication is that in a class society, a subset of communication work is ideological labour. And insofar as there is work that questions ideology, there is also the work of critique. Ideological labour produces and reproduces ideologies. Critical cultural workers produce critiques and critical knowledge. Ideology reifies language so that humans in a reified society also speak and communicate based on reified language.

Given that labour is organised in class relations, the dominant class needs ideologies to justify why alienation exists. They try to alienate the human mind in order to justify and uphold alienation in the interest of the dominant class. In capitalism, the foundation of ideology is that the object masks and veils the subject. For example, capital accumulation results in monetary profit that veils that this profit does not have its origin in money, but in a class relation of exploitation through which capital extracts surplus value from labour. Ideology is instrumental communication, an ideological communicative strategy of the ruling class and dominant groups that reproduces asymmetric power and class structures and tries to persuade others not to question these structures by means such as manipulation, displacement, ignorance, mystification, veiling, or the organisation of fantasies and desires.

Responses to Ideological Communication

The dominated classes, groups and individuals do not automatically see through ideology and develop critical consciousness. But neither will they necessarily succumb to false consciousness. Ideology's results are not certain. But given that there is a power asymmetry between the dominant and the subordinated class, the probability that critical consciousness will develop is on average lower than the probability that false consciousness will develop. An exception is when the subordinated groups, classes and individuals can empower themselves in ways so that they question ideologies. Subordinated classes, groups and individuals answer to ideology either in a positive manner (affirmation, hegemony), negatively (critique, counter-hegemony), or in a mixed manner.

The reactions to ideology are not determined by the ideological workers who on behalf of dominant groups create and communicate ideologies. There are different possibilities of how individuals and groups react to ideology. They can be conscious or not conscious of ideology, or something in between. They can follow, resist, partly follow, or question an ideology. In *Capital Volume 1*, Marx writes in the context of commodity fetishism that the latter works with the logic 'They do this without being aware of it'.²⁴ Slavoj Žižek says that ideology today operates in a cynical manner so that the individuals know that ideology exists, but nonetheless follow it. It would use the logic 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it'.²⁵ But the reasons why humans question or do not question ideology have to do with psychological hopes and fears.²⁶ For Žižek, humans follow ideology if it results in surplus enjoyment. Ideology is always false, but how humans react to it has a lot to do with their accumulated experiences and therefore their subjectivity, their processes of doing and knowing.

Table 9.1 displays sixteen reactions to ideology. Žižek's version of ideology is one of these sixteen possibilities and therefore is by no means the only way in which individuals can react to ideology. The first and second columns display constellations where humans reproduce ideology fully or partly, whereas in columns three and four we find cases where they do not follow or even resist ideology. But these sixteen reactions to ideology do not necessarily have the same likelihood. How likely each of them is depends on the reality of power structures and power struggles. It is rather unlikely that humans resist ideology by accident when they are conscious of it, but it is more likely that when resisting it they are also aware of and opposed to ideology.

The critique of ideology advances emancipatory knowledge. The next section deals with ideology critique.

²⁴ Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One*. London: Penguin. pp. 166–167.

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso. p. 25.

²⁶ Lukács, *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins. 1. Halbband*, p. 643.

Table 9.1: Possible responses to ideological communication.

Action → ↓ Knowledge	Following ideology	Following parts of ideology	Not following ideology	Resisting ideology
Not conscious of ideology	They do not know it, but they do it.	They do not know it, but they partly do it.	They do not know it and they do not do it.	They do not know it and they resist it.
Conscious of ideology	They know it, but still, they are doing it.	They know it and they partly do it	They know it and they do not do it.	They know it and they resist it.
Partly conscious of ideology	They partly know it, but still, they are doing it.	They partly know it and they partly do it.	They partly know it and they do not do it.	They partly know it and they resist it.
Critically conscious of ideology	They oppose it and they do it.	They oppose it and they partly do (not) do it.	They oppose it and they do not do it.	They oppose it and they resist it.

9.4. Ideology Critique

Dominative Knowledge and Emancipatory Knowledge

Modern society is a competitive society. It fetishises competition. Structures for the accumulation of money, political influence, and reputation are the result. And structures of accumulation produce winners and losers so that conflicts of interest and power are inherently built into them. Emancipatory knowledge can emerge from social struggles that question the asymmetric distribution of power. Knowledge is a form of power that can emanate from emancipatory struggles. Such struggles have potentials to foster emancipatory knowledge that questions dominative knowledge.

Georg Lukács analysed the structure and nature of class consciousness. He defines class consciousness as ‘the appropriate and rational reactions “imputed” [*zugerechnet*] to a particular typical position in the process of production.’²⁷ Imputed/ascribed/attributed class consciousness (*zugerechnetes Klassenbewußtsein*) has an objective character.²⁸ Class consciousness’ objective dimension is defined by an individual’s position in the relations of production. Class consciousness is not simply the actual consciousness of a class or an individual

²⁷ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

belonging to a class (the subjective class consciousness of a class as group or an individual belonging to that class). Objective class consciousness is the 'objective possibility' of consciousness, the 'thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were *able* to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation.'²⁹ Lukács also uses the notion of false consciousness. He defines it as that which 'by-passes the essence of the evolution of society and fails to pinpoint it and express it adequately.'³⁰

Revolutionary class consciousness 'does not happen of itself, either through the mechanical evolution of the economic forces of capitalism or through the simple organic growth of mass spontaneity.'³¹ Voluntarism and individualism assume that critical consciousness emerges spontaneously. Fatalist approaches assume that critical consciousness is the automatic effect of structural crises of capitalism. Lukács argues in contrast to both positions that a crisis of capitalism constitutes a space of potentials so that the future development of society is not determined. In such moments and phases of crisis, the future is shaped by social struggles that depend on the question of whether and to what degree the subordinate classes organise themselves, do not organise, or follow ideologies (capitalist ideology, fascist ideology, etc.).

Table 9.2 presents a typology of different forms of ideological knowledge and critical knowledge. Individuals in specific social relations produce and reproduce concrete knowledge structures. Knowledge workers produce knowledge as products that play a particular role in the economy and outside of it in other parts of society. The table also indicates what ideological and critical producers of knowledge there are and the types of social knowledge they create.

Specific workers create ideological and critical knowledge. The production of knowledge takes place in organisations and institutions, where we find not just knowledge workers but also other workers. Let us consider a school: There are teachers and pupils who directly engage with knowledge. But there are also associated workers such as cleaners, policy makers, cooks preparing meals, caretakers, etc. The production of ideologies and critiques takes place in broader institutional and organisational contexts. The analysis of knowledge production needs to avoid cultural idealism. It should be based on a materialist approach that analyses the relations of different types of labour and work in one organisation and part of the economy, the interconnection of different parts of the economy, and the interconnection of economy and society.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

³¹ Georg Lukács. 2009. *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*. London: Verso. p. 27.

Table 9.2: The production of ideological and emancipatory knowledge.³²

Realm of society		Ideological, dominative knowledge	Critical, emancipatory knowledge
Economy		<i>Capitalist companies:</i> knowledge commodities	<i>Non-capitalist organi-</i> <i>sations:</i> knowledge commons
Politics	Politics: govern- ment, parliament	<i>Dominant or oppositional parties and politicians:</i> political ideologies of inequality, domination and repression/violence	<i>Critical parties, politicians, intellectuals:</i> political worldviews of equality, participation and peace
	Politics: civil society	<i>Repressive social move-</i> <i>ments, NGOs and activists:</i> political ideologies of inequality, domination and repression/violence	<i>Emancipatory social movements, NGOs and activists:</i> worldviews of equality, participation and peace
	Politics: Interna- tional relations	<i>Nationalists:</i> nationalist ideology	<i>Anti-nationalists, internationalists:</i> global unity in diversity
Culture	News media	<i>Uncritical journalists:</i> one-dimensional, biased reports	<i>Critical journalists:</i> critical, engaging reports
	Arts and entertainment	<i>Actors, entertainers, directors, artists:</i> tabloidised, one-dimensional culture	<i>Actors, entertainers, directors, artists:</i> engag- ing, dialectical culture
	Personal and gender relations	<i>Hellbenders:</i> hate, sexism	<i>Altruists:</i> love, care, solidarity
	Belief systems, ethics, philosophy and religion	<i>Demagogues:</i> conservatism	<i>Public intellectuals:</i> progressivism
	Science and education	<i>Administrative scholars and teachers:</i> administrative knowledge	<i>Critical scholars and teachers:</i> critical knowledge
	Intercultural relations	<i>Racists, divisionists:</i> racism, fundamentalism	<i>Universalists:</i> intercul- tural understanding, transculturalism

Counter-hegemonic work – the work of critique – challenges the hegemony of ideologies and ideological workers. Antonio Gramsci argues that radical

³² Source: Christian Fuchs. 2016. *Critical Theory of Communication. New Readings of Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse, Honneth and Habermas*. London: University of Westminster Press. p. 100.

social change requires the ‘intense labour of criticism.’³³ Cultural workers’ opposition to ideological workers and the ideologies they create is a process of class struggle in culture. In cultural class struggles, critical workers create knowledge that aims at advancing care, critique, emancipation, equality, love, participation, socialism, and unity in diversity. Their critical knowledge challenges ideologies such as authoritarianism, conservatism, fascism, hatred, liberalism, nationalism, one-dimensionality, racism, sexism, etc. The outcomes of cultural struggles are, like the results of all social struggles, not pre-determined. Critical and ideological knowledge are fluid and dynamic. It might be the case that, for example, one article in a newspaper is critical and the one next to it is ideological. But in general, ideological and critical knowledge are clustered in certain media and institutions so that for example the overall amount of knowledge in a newspaper is either more or less critical. Institutions, in which knowledge is created, have their own internal and external contradictions. Internal contradictions include contradictions between dominant and subordinate groups in an organisation. External contradictions include contradictions between an institution and other institutions, contradictions between certain groups in society into which an organisation is embedded, etc.

Consent to exploitation and domination is created in the political and the cultural system. In these systems, counter-hegemony that questions ideology and the dominant classes and groups can also be established. Gramsci says in this context that the ‘crisis of the ruling class’s hegemony’ emerges when this class ‘has failed on some major political undertaking [...] for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses [...] have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution.’³⁴ Lenin, in a manner comparable to Gramsci, writes that radical transformation only takes place when ‘the “lower classes” do not want to live in the old way and the “upper classes” cannot carry on in the old way.’³⁵

The creation and reproduction of social knowledge is dialectical in multiple respects:

- In social systems, there is a dialectic of general social structures and knowledge structures.
- In social systems, there is also a dialectic of social knowledge and individual knowledge.

³³ Antonio Gramsci. 1988. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs. London: Lawrence and Wishart. p. 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³⁵ Vladimir I. Lenin. 1920. ‘Left-Wing’ Communism – An Infantile Disorder. In *Lenin Collected Works Volume 31*. Moscow: Progress. p. 85.

- The conflicts about power in dominative systems are also reflected on the level of knowledge as conflicts between dominative (ideological) and emancipatory (critical) knowledge. In antagonistic systems, knowledge is contested.
- In asymmetric societies, struggles over the definition and control of knowledge are not egalitarian, but unequal. More powerful actors who control money, influence, reputation, or structures of violence can mobilise these resources in struggles over the definition of knowledge.
- There is no absolute certainty that critical knowledge can be formed. Critical actors, movements, and groups are in capitalist society structurally disadvantaged. Critical knowledge is therefore less likely to occur than ideological knowledge. But there is always the possibility that social struggles will result in critical knowledge, critical consciousness, and progressive social change.

9.5. Summary and Conclusions

We can summarise the main findings and conclusions of this chapter as follows:

- Ideology and fetishism stand in a dialectical relationship: Ideology is built into capitalism's commodity structures. The capitalist relations of the production of commodities veil the class relations that the immediate producers enter. Via commodity fetishism, ideology is built into capitalism's economic structures. Ideology as the project of defending the ruling class' and dominant groups' interests operates in a fetishist manner. It tries to naturalise domination, exploitation, and the ruling class by methods such as scapegoating, distortion, dissimulation, misrepresentation, and manipulation. Ideology aims at the reification of dominated groups' consciousness. If ideology succeeds, then it creates false consciousness.
- Ideology tries to instrumentalise humans and their consciousness in the interest of domination and exploitation. It is based on instrumental reason and technological rationality. Ideology stands in a dialectic of communication and commodities. Commodity fetishism has a communicative character, and capitalist communication has a fetishist structure. Fetishism encompasses the communicative character of commodities, through which capitalism is naturalised. The commodity character of communication advances the spread of ideologies via the culture industry. Ideology hides the true essence and state of the world behind false appearances, and communicates these false appearances as truths and nature.
- Responses to ideology are not predetermined. Dominant classes and groups control more resources than subordinated classes and groups, which gives them advantages in ideological struggles over meaning. Ideological labour is labour that organises the production and diffusion of ideology. Ideological workers produce ideological knowledge. Ideology critique is

an activity that questions ideology and unveils how ideology works. The antagonism between emancipatory knowledge and ideology exists in the capitalist economy, capitalist politics, and capitalist culture. Ideologues are ideological workers who produce, disseminate, and reproduce ideologies. Critics are people who question ideology. Critique is always possible, but never guaranteed. There is a political economy of resource asymmetry inherent in capitalist society that poses structural disadvantages for alternative movements, alternative structures, and emancipatory knowledge.

The next chapter will discuss a particular kind of ideology, namely nationalism.