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All Meanings Necessary: A Hermeneutics of Ideology and Its Critique

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Abstract

My dissertation defends a hermeneutic conception of ideology and its critique that situates both in the world-disclosing function of language.

I argue that we must conceive of *ideologies* as world-disclosing *embodied interpretive schemas* insofar as they guide our cognitive, affective, and conative access to reality by providing the background knowledge, meanings, and pre-understandings through which we interpret it. On this view, ideologies appear more radical and comprehensive than traditional views, which conceptualize them as “systems of belief.” In addition, the hermeneutic approach not only explains why ideologies persist even after people change their beliefs but can account for the tenacity of ideologies as a function of their ability to make themselves (appear to be) true.

As a consequence of their world-disclosing nature, the successful *critique of ideologies* requires a type of critique that transcends the given interpretive context in order to challenge its dominant world-disclosure through *counter-hegemonic disclosures* which give rise to a comparative standpoint and emerge through “conceptual labor in company with others” (Mills). By means of new disclosures (such as the concept of sexual harassment), ideology critique can invalidate the ideological schema and its dominant interpretations (e.g., “flirting”). Embedded in the model of dialogue, the critic of ideology as a virtual participant in discourse neither paternalistically imposes her own views on others nor breaks dialogical symmetry, because it is “[t]he same structures that make it possible to reach an understanding [that] also provide for the possibility of a reflective self-control of this process.” (Habermas)

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Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to defend critical hermeneutics as our best choice for the critique of ideologies after the linguistic turn. This project may sound somewhat surprising, for one could say that, at least in the tradition of Critical Theory, neither ideology critique nor hermeneutics are in particularly good repute. For one, as is well-known, some of the leading figures of the Frankfurt School are outspoken skeptics of ideology because they take issue with its relevance as a meaningful analytic category for social theory and inquiry. Adorno and Habermas famously declared the notion of ideology obsolete because, in their view, modern societies have become “too transparent”¹ to afford “any niches for the structural violence of ideologies.”²

I want to argue that it is precisely at this junction that hermeneutics makes its first intervention. To grasp the continuing relevance of ideology, which implies the urgency of its critique, we have to first alter our understanding of the former in light of the hermeneutic theory of language and, in particular, the world-disclosing function of language. After the linguistic turn, philosophical hermeneutics views language as constitutive of our understanding and experience of the world. Language is not merely a vehicle for thought or facilitates communication. Essentially, our access to and experience of intra-worldly entities and phenomena is always already symbolically mediated. On this view, language makes the world and entities within it appear and is constitutive of our experience. In other words, language discloses the world to us, so that “only where there is language, is there world.”³

¹ Adorno 1973a: 191.

² TCA II, 354 and 196.

³ Heidegger 1949: 299.

This hermeneutic insight has far-reaching implications for the theory of ideology. In his debate with Gadamer over the universal status of hermeneutics, Habermas insisted that “[l]anguage is also a medium of domination and social power [and, as such] serves to legitimate relations of organized force.”⁴ But if language itself, which mediates our access to the world, is possibly shot through with relations of power and domination, how could we trust that our understanding of the world and ourselves could ever become “too transparent” to be influenced by something like ideology? Indeed, if the combined assumptions that language is not only constitutive of our experience but also a medium of power and violence are correct, then the truly radical nature of ideology is beginning to take shape.

In consequence, the first claim I make is that we have to understand ideology as an interpretive schema and situate it in the world-disclosing function of language, i.e., in the very meanings, concepts, and norms by means of which we access and interpret the world, and which thus regulate our experience of entities and phenomena. In this vein, the hermeneutic theory of language not only reveals the continuing relevance of ideology but also challenges two rival conceptualizations of this social phenomenon: On the one hand, the view that ideology constitutes a “system of belief” and, on the other hand, the view that, from a linguistic perspective, ideology should be conceived of as a problem of empty reference, where speakers’ linguistic expressions refer to non-existing referents.⁵

Recognizing the world-disclosing function of language implies that ideology is already operative when we access the world through the interpretive grid of concepts and categories that frame our social cognition and pre-package experience by shaping expectations so that

⁴ Habermas 1990a: 239-40.

⁵ See, for instance, Stanley 2015: 204-7.

someone's actions can be interpreted as "flirtatious" or "joking" rather than an act of sexual harassment. In arguing that ideology already operates prior to the doxastic level, within what Heidegger calls the fore-structure of understanding, my account consolidates the various attempts by contemporary theorists such as Tommie Shelby, Sally Haslanger, and Rahel Jaeggi to fully come to grips with the problem of ideology. As these scholars have noted, the alleged irrelevance of ideology as a meaningful category for social theory and the abandoning of the project of ideology critique is, in part, due to the cognitivist tendencies ubiquitous in traditional theories of ideology. The hermeneutical approach is thus presented as a way to conceptualize ideology as a structural phenomenon that goes beyond the agents' explicit (and even implicit) doxastic states to encompass their – equally linguistically mediated – affective and conative attitudes. Affirming the embodied nature of ideology can explain, for instance, how ideology can perpetuate racial injustice despite agents identifying as anti-racist, or how ideological understanding governs their affective responses and their motivations to act or not act. As a result, I characterize ideologies as embodied interpretive schemas whose world-disclosure makes possible ways of understanding reality which can be shown to be epistemically flawed and to produce or perpetuate forms of injustice.

Such a pejorative account of ideology implies a critical attitude toward the phenomenon and invites the question how exactly to critique forms of ideological understanding – in particular, given its deep-seated nature. While hermeneutics seems to offer a promising platform to restore the explanatory traction of ideology for social theory, it has earned a bad name as a guide to critiquing ideology. The wide-spread anti-hermeneutic sentiment is expressed succinctly in a statement by Michael Walzer, who himself is a devout hermeneut. The main objection against hermeneutics, Walzer summarizes, is "the charge that [interpretation, MS] binds us

irrevocably to the status quo – since we can only interpret what already exists – and so undercuts the very possibility of social criticism.”⁶

This blanket rejection of hermeneutics as a theoretical framework for critiquing ideology certainly has merit insofar as it takes Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s version of philosophical hermeneutics as the template for critique. It follows from the linguistic idealism inherent in their view that language is not only constitutive of our understanding and experience of the world but constitutive of the world as a “totality of significance.” Hence, language not only mediates our experience of the world but determines it by projecting the range of possible interpretations.

Heidegger’s idealism culminates in the claim that “No thing is where the word is lacking” and absolutizes the world-disclosing function of language, which manifests in his commitment to a strong version of meaning holism and the (implicit) thesis that meaning determines reference (Lafont⁷). This unfortunate combination implies that language (or linguistic a priori knowledge), by virtue of its world-disclosing function, acts as the final court of appeal to the effect that one’s historically contingent world-disclosure is taken as disclosing a primordial truth, which prevents the kind of criticism that could initiate learning processes. Another upshot of this view is that reaching mutual agreement about something in the world is predicated on speakers already sharing a language (or linguistically mediated cultural tradition). It is their common language (and the identity of meaning) which guarantees the identity of reference required for speakers to talk about the same thing and come to an agreement – which renders cross-cultural learning processes impossible. Moreover, the strong version of meaning holism does not allow speakers to adopt an objectifying attitude toward language. In assuming such an externalist perspective,

⁶ Walzer 1993: 3.

⁷ Lafont 2000: 189-99.

Gadamer contends, the social critic adopts a God's eye view, depriving language of its *a priori* character, and breaks dialogical symmetry with her addressees. No longer acting as a participant in discourse, the critic imposes her own ethical and political worldview on those she criticizes. If, however, the background knowledge of the fore-structure of understanding cannot be questioned because it is constitutive of their understanding and experience of the world, then ideology – which operates precisely at this level – would likewise be immune to criticism.

This is precisely the point at which the need for a *critical* hermeneutics emerges. In response, what Habermas proposes to avoid the conservative tendencies of traditional hermeneutics is to replace Gadamer's factual consensus as the basis for agreement with the idea of counterfactual consensus predicated on a formal notion of world. In order to be able to reach consensus, speakers must presuppose that a world exists that is identical for all of them regardless of their specific descriptions of it. As a result of the realist presupposition of a single world, the speakers' validity claims do not only depend on their epistemic conditions but also depend on whether or not the non-epistemic conditions obtain and thus necessarily transcend their interpretive context or tradition. In addition, Habermas argues that adopting an objectifying attitude is a function of one's communicative competence, which is, in principle, open to everyone. In accessing third-personal knowledge, the critic (as virtual participant) is making use of the same communicative competence as other speakers and therefore does not break dialogical symmetry.⁸ Habermas's theory of communicative rationality shows how the model of conversation can incorporate the objectifying attitude that is necessary for the critique of the very meanings and concepts through which participants disclose the world; the realist presupposition breaks with the linguistic idealism of philosophical hermeneutics, and the formal notion of a

⁸ TCA I, 130.

counterfactual agreement rejects the dependence on a shared tradition for reaching understanding.

However, as Cristina Lafont has shown, while the theory of communicative rationality makes a decisive step toward breaking with the viciousness of the hermeneutic circle, a truly critical hermeneutics requires a further de-absolutization of the world-disclosing function of language. The first step is to dissolve the remains of the transcendental element in Heidegger's past tense *a priori* and replace it with Putnam's fallibilist notion of the contextual *a priori*.⁹ Synthetic *a priori* (linguistic) knowledge cannot be invalidated from within the interpretive schema. But if the synthetic *a priori* knowledge is considered necessary only with regard to a specific conceptual schema and thus contextually valid, it becomes revisable in light of a rival interpretive schema or theory. The second step consists in elevating the referential function of language and introducing the theory of direct reference (Donnellan, Putnam) to move beyond Heidegger's thesis that meaning determines reference.¹⁰ The referential use of linguistic expressions allows speakers to refer to the same entities and thus talk about the same referent regardless of the descriptive content they use. The theory of direct reference complements Habermas's efforts insofar as it provides the semantic element to his communicative theory to support the claim that no prior agreement or shared tradition is necessary for speakers to reach consensus.

In light of these additions, we end up with an account of hermeneutics that accommodates the possibility of a context-transcending critique and initiates learning processes across interpretive schemas without breaking the dialogical symmetry of the model of understanding.

⁹ Lafont 2000: 275-88.

¹⁰ Lafont 1999: 227-81.

Critical hermeneutics thus counters the sentiment that hermeneutics “binds us irrevocably to the status quo.” In combining an “immanent procedure with a context-transcending concept of rationality”¹¹ (Honneth) it meets the desiderata for ideology critique.

It follows from the radical and pervasive nature of ideology that it does not suffice to criticize and change subjects’ beliefs to invalidate and overcome ideological understanding. Ideology critique must “dig deeper” so to speak. To successfully confront the world-disclosing function of ideology, ideology critique must invalidate the background knowledge, concepts, norms, and meanings through which social agents disclose the world. This requires a type of critique that is able to challenge the a priori knowledge of the ideological interpretive schema and transcend its interpretive context.

I argue that such a context-transcending critique, in turn, requires agents to assume a comparative interpretive standpoint on the basis of counter-hegemonic disclosures (e.g. the notion of sexual harassment) which emerge through processes of “conceptual labor in company with others” (Mills). Successful counter disclosures invalidate the ideological schema by allowing us to understand and experience the latter’s a priori truths as a posteriori falsehoods. In doing so, the critique of ideology confronts ideological understanding with the limits of its own truth.

Contrary to many left-Hegelian variants of Critical Theory and traditional hermeneutic accounts, the immanence of the present approach does not reside in the content of standards the critic applies to criticize social practices and institutions, which are (genealogically) reconstructed from an “original meaning” or a prior shared agreement. I argue that such attempts fail because they cannot criticize the very norms and concepts through which agents disclose the

¹¹ Honneth 2009: 51.

world. Instead, the immanence of critical hermeneutics lies in the formal structure of communicative rationality as it is embodied in everyday speech. Its procedural rules are anchored in the social practice of reaching mutual understanding with someone about something in the world. In the final analysis, the combination of an “immanent procedure with a context-transcending concept of rationality” is what qualifies critical hermeneutics as our best choice for the critique of ideologies after the linguistic turn in the attempt to dismantle the power structures operative in language as “a medium of domination.”

My argument proceeds in three steps. In chapter 1, I present the detailed account of critical hermeneutics and exemplify the shortcomings of philosophical hermeneutics as well as the merits of its critical counterpart through an extensive analysis of the experience of hermeneutic injustice in the case of sexual harassment. Against this background, chapter 2 introduces the conception of ideology as an embodied interpretive schema. In addition, it clarifies the pejorative understanding of ideology as propagating half-truths and hermeneutically explains the peculiar power of ideologies to make themselves (appear to be) true – either by delivering a false diagnosis or by commending a false therapy. Based on what hermeneutics revealed about its complex relation to truth and the deep-seated nature of ideology, chapter 3 defends critical hermeneutics against alternative conceptions as our best option for critiquing ideology. To this end, I argue that invalidating ideological schemas requires counter-hegemonic disclosures which help “us see what we ‘know’ about the world in a different light” (Jaeggi). I consolidate and exemplify this claim through an analysis and critique of colorblind racist ideology in the cases of “All lives matter” and the rejection of affirmative action as “preferential treatment.”

Chapter 1: On the way to critique

This chapter presents the critical hermeneutic framework by way of introducing the fundamental concepts of Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics and canvassing the latter's central assumptions about language – in particular, its absolutization of the world-disclosing function of language including two of its standard features, namely meaning holism and the claim that meaning determines reference (I.). The ramifications and shortcomings of the traditional account are exemplified by an extensive analysis and critical reconstruction of the experience of hermeneutical injustice in the case of sexual harassment through the lens of a hermeneutic-pragmatic approach to what it means to make a new experience (II.). The upshot of this analysis motivates a critical alternative that de-absolutizes the world-disclosing function. The last part of the chapter then gives a detailed account of critical hermeneutics as the framework that enables us to understand the full picture of ideology and how to critique it (III.).

I. Understanding and linguistic world-disclosure

I.1. The constitutive role of language and the primacy of understanding

At its core, Heidegger's hermeneutics are grounded in an understanding of language as constitutive of the world and our experience. Thinking about language as constituting the world and enabling inner-worldly experience, first and foremost, breaks with a more traditional view in philosophy that understands language as a vehicle for thought. In rejecting this instrumental view of language, Heidegger sides with a strand of German philosophy associated with Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt, whose linguistic acumen challenged the predominant understanding of

language as a mere means for communicating pre-linguistically formed thoughts and conveying information.¹² The instrumental view, which characterizes language as one among the many tools at the disposal of human reason is countered by the claim that, in virtue of language's constitutive character, our inner-worldly experience is always already linguistically mediated. Echoing the assertions of the "triple-H"¹³ tradition, Heidegger writes in his essay on *Hölderlin and the essence of poetry*:

"Language serves to give information. As a fit instrument for this, it is a 'possession'. But the essence of language does not consist entirely in being a means of giving information. This definition does not touch its essential essence, but merely indicates an effect of its essence. *Language is not a mere tool*, one of the many which man possesses; on the contrary, it is only language that *affords the very possibility of standing within the openness of entities*. Only where there is language, is there world, i.e. the perpetually altering circuit of decision and production, of action and responsibility, but also of commotion and arbitrariness, of decay and confusion. [...] Language is a possession in a more fundamental sense. It is good for the fact that (i.e. it affords a guarantee that) man can exist historically. Language is not a tool at his disposal, rather it is that event which disposes of the supreme possibility of human existence."¹⁴

It is noteworthy that Heidegger does not deny the communicative function of language "as a fit instrument [for] giving information." But he insists that the instrumental function of language is merely derivative of its essential feat, namely, the disclosure of a world which Dasein experiences through language. As Heidegger puts it, language affords Dasein to stand amidst "the openness of entities": "Only where there is language, is there world." Language is

¹² Throughout this work, I follow the hermeneutic interpretation of Heidegger's *Being and Time* put forward by authors such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Charles Taylor, and Cristina Lafont. This hermeneutic reading certainly does not stand uncontested. Other authors, such as Hubert L. Dreyfus (1990), Taylor Carman (2002), and Mark A. Wrathall (2002), propose a pragmatist alternative. In their view, language is not constitutive of the world and of our experience and meaning is pre-linguistic and pre-conceptual. For the differences between the hermeneutic and the pragmatist readings of Heidegger's philosophy and their exegetical arguments see, for instance, the debate in the special issue of *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 45, Issue 2 (2002). My aim here, however, is not to defend the hermeneutic interpretation against the pragmatist one, or any other alternative interpretation. Rather, I draw heavily on Lafont's hermeneutic interpretation as a plausible reading of Heidegger for systematic reasons. My interest lies solely with deploying the hermeneutic approach for the purpose of exploring the possibility to articulate a critical hermeneutics for understanding and critiquing ideology.

¹³ See Taylor 1985: 256 ff.; Taylor 2016.

¹⁴ Heidegger 1949: 299-300, emphasis added, internal footnotes omitted, translation modified.

constitutive of the world and enables our inner-worldly experience as well as our self-understanding insofar as it makes entities appear for us. But before we can explore the idea of linguistic world-disclosure to make sense of Heidegger's claim that "only where there is language, is there world," it is necessary to unpack the underlying hermeneutic notion of world. For such a fundamentally constitutive view of language requires a structurally homologous notion of world to accommodate its linguistic constitution.¹⁵

In line with his general criticism of the subject object-paradigm which tries to explain our experience of objects on the model of perception, Heidegger's notion of world takes issue with both the empiricist version and its counterpart in transcendental philosophy. For empiricism, "world" denotes the totality of entities to be perceived and known by the subject, a totality that encompasses other human beings inhabiting the world as objects with specific properties. Transcendental philosophy, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the transcendental ego as the extra-worldly subject that constitutes this totality of entities and warrants the objectivity of knowledge. On the basis of the ontological difference – the difference between entities (*Seiendes*) and their Being (*Sein*) – Heidegger attempts a radical break with the methodology of the subject object-paradigm and the concomitant model of perception that guides its thinking about how we acquire access to and knowledge of worldly entities.

The hermeneutic alternative proposes that our access to entities is "always already" mediated by a prior understanding of their Being which is constitutive for what entities are, i.e., the understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) determines in advance the ways in which entities can appear for us and how we can experience them (the *as what*). In other words, the

¹⁵ See Lafont 2005a: 270-4.

understanding of Being discloses and regulates the possibilities of understanding an entity.¹⁶ But parsing this Being of beings/entities is not a matter of perception, the Being of an entity cannot be grasped like an object,¹⁷ for it makes our comprehension of objects in the world possible in the first place: “An understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything which one apprehends as an entity.”¹⁸ Every inquiry, investigation, cognition or questioning is guided by an anticipation of the Being of the entities, however inadequate this anticipation may turn out to be: “we always conduct our activities in an understanding of Being.”¹⁹

It will be clear by now that Being, as “that which determines entities as entities”²⁰ cannot be accessed perceptually. As that which enables our cognition of objects, Being itself cannot be objectified and therefore exceeds the cognitive schema of the subject object-paradigm. Our access to Being is a matter of grasping its meaning (Sinn) through understanding.²¹ That entities show up in the world at all and can be designated as something requires an *understanding* of their Being. The structure of Being is one of meaning and the adequate way to access it is understanding. Hence, the hermeneutic conception of world does not denote the totality of entities but a web that consists of relations of meaning that structure our understanding of ourselves and the entities that appear in the world. In short, the hermeneutic conception of world denotes a totality of significance:

“The relational character which these relationships of assigning possess, we take as one of *signifying*. [...] These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality; they are what they are as this signifying [be-deuten] in which Dasein gives itself beforehand its Being-in-the-world as something to be understood. The relational totality of this signifying we

¹⁶ BT 41; Heidegger 1978: 193.

¹⁷ See BT 26: “The Being of entities ‘is’ not itself an entity.”

¹⁸ BT 22.

¹⁹ BT 25.

²⁰ BT 25.

²¹ BT 86: “To Dasein’s Being, an understanding of Being belongs. Any understanding [Verständnis] has its Being in an act of understanding [Verstehen].”

call ‘*significance*’ [Bedeutsamkeit]. This is what makes up the structure of the world – the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is.”²²

1.2. *World-disclosure and the dominance of das Man*

For Heidegger then, world is the world of constitutive relations of meaning/significance.²³ But if prior understanding of their Being is necessary for entities to show up in the world, we have to ask how we first acquire the meanings that enable us to make meaningful encounters with entities in the world.²⁴ To this question Heidegger replies that “the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way.”²⁵ And he explains that the way in which a preliminary, average understanding of Being becomes available to us is by virtue of the various meaningful everyday practices through which we are enculturated and socialized from childhood on. The everyday practices, which are continuously performed in the world into which we are thrown and into which we are initiated over time as participants, are structured by the signifying relations that make them appear meaningful to us. Growing up and growing into a cultural tradition we become familiar with its practices and the meanings that are made available to us by that tradition. Heidegger labels these signifying relations that constitute the ways in which these practices are interpreted and become intelligible to us “*das Man*” (“the they” or “the one”) which “is constituted by the way things have been publicly interpreted [and] which expresses itself in idle talk.”²⁶ Heidegger calls it the “subject” of everydayness²⁷:

²² BT 120. See also BT 114, 121 (“content of assignments or references”), 123 (“referential context of significance”), 153.

²³ As opposed to world in the ontic-existential sense of a specific cultural/social world.

²⁴ To clarify, world and the entities within it “do not exist side by side” in the sense that they could be conceived or accessed independently – like a container that contains objects within it; rather, world and inner-worldly entities are interrelated (“Sie durchgehen einander.”), i.e., they are only analytically distinct, see Heidegger 1985a: 22.

²⁵ BT 25.

²⁶ BT 292.

²⁷ BT 150. By calling *das Man* the “subject” of everydayness, Heidegger does not attribute subjectivity or agency to it. *Das Man* is not a meta-subject (of history). While it is not any concrete subject, *das Man* is everyone – although

“There are many things with which we first become acquainted in this way, and there is not a little which never gets beyond such an average understanding. This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed. *In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted*, set before the open country of a world-in-itself, so that it just beholds what it encounters. The dominance of the *public way in which things have been interpreted* has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world ‘matter’ to it. *The ‘they’ prescribes one’s state-of-mind [Befindlichkeit], and determines what and how one ‘sees’.*”²⁸

Das Man, the everyday way in which things have been interpreted, is how our understanding of Being is shaped, it “determines what and how one ‘sees’.” In this description, seeing does not just refer to perceptual cognition but stands in as a metaphor for understanding, i.e. “any access to entities or to Being, as access in general.”²⁹ The disclosedness that inheres in this everyday understanding of Being is what makes “sight” possible and gives Dasein access to the world.³⁰ So, while Heidegger’s characterization of world as a totality of significance that structures our interpretive access to all inner-worldly entities as a feat of the understanding does away with the empiricist myth of the given, his emphasis on the constituting signifying power of the everyday understanding (the socializing “one” or cultural tradition) rejects the constitutive power of the transcendental subject.³¹

Das Man is not a meta-subject but the anonymous standpoint of the “generalized other” (Mead) that represents socially generalized norms.³² It resides in and exerts its power through

not in the sense of the sum of all subjects (BT 164); rather, it is a social structure of understanding that prescribes the Being of everydayness by way of determining everyone’s doings as well as exonerating them in their doings because this is simply how *one* does it, see below.

²⁸ BT 213, emphasis added, internal footnotes omitted.

²⁹ BT 187.

³⁰ BT 214.

³¹ Lafont 2005a: 272.

³² See Egan 2012; Honneth 2003: 18-9.

language: “The one is the original [eigentliche] how of the being of humans in everydayness and *the primordial* [eigentliche] *bearer of the one is language*. The one dwells, has its primordial [eigentliche] dominance in language.”³³

The metaphor of the understanding of Being residing or dwelling in language culminates in Heidegger’s remark after the *Kehre* that “[l]anguage is the house of Being.”³⁴ Any historical language acts as the primordial bearer of a cultural tradition which provides the meanings and interpretations for world-disclosure aka our understanding of Being: “Significance is that on the basis of which the world is disclosed as such.”³⁵ However, the last sentence of the passage previously quoted at length reveals that the average everyday understanding proffered by *das Man* also harbors a potential for domination.³⁶ Signifying relations may operate as relations of power that entangle the subject from the very beginning. As a structure of understanding, *das Man* conceivably epitomizes a power structure into which Dasein is thrown and that operates in and through language: “this vague average understanding of Being may be so infiltrated with traditional theories and opinions about Being that these remain hidden as sources of the way in which it is prevalently understood.”³⁷ The “dictatorship” of *das Man* manifests itself when the ways in which we take pleasure, read, see, and judge coincide with and take their justification from the ways in which “one” takes pleasure, reads, sees, judges, or when we find shocking what “one” finds shocking *because* that is what “one” finds shocking.³⁸ It is through the medium of language – expressed in idle talk – that *das Man* prescribes the everyday understanding of Being.

³³ Heidegger 2002a: 64.

³⁴ Heidegger 1998: 239; OWL 135. For our purpose, Heidegger’s *Kehre* (turn) signifies a shift of focus regarding the idea of world-disclosure from Being to language.

³⁵ BT 182.

³⁶ *Supra* BT 213

³⁷ BT 25. This feature of *das Man*, i.e. how our understanding the world and our interpretations are shot-through with power, comes up short in Nikolas Kompridis’s account of world-disclosure (Kompridis 2006), cf. Allen 2011.

³⁸ BT 164.

Because of language's constitutive nature, it determines how we perceive, cognize, interpret, judge, and experience the world. Determining the average everyday understanding of Being and thus pre-structuring our experience, the "one" limits the possibilities of understanding by limiting the meanings that we can recruit to interpret the world.

At the same time, *das Man* exonerates the individual subject in her doings. The "one" presents "every judgment and decision as its own."³⁹ The way "one" interprets, does, or experiences something is that which goes without saying, that which the subject follows without questioning the cause or reason for action because that is simply how "one" does it. In referring to the way one does it, the doer is thus released from individual responsibility.⁴⁰ This second aspect of the dominance of the "one" is taken up by Heidegger when he notes that "by publicness everything gets obscured"⁴¹ or his remark that idle talk forecloses.⁴² What idle talk forecloses are alternative meanings or signifying relations. In doing so, idle talk re-asserts the dominance of the "one" as the public way in which things have always been interpreted and thus immunizes the traditional understanding of Being that belongs to a cultural community against challenges on the basis of new disclosures.

Although Heidegger insinuated the dominating nature of *das Man* and Gadamer frequently noted the potential for violence in language, philosophical hermeneutics did not seriously confront this issue. In part, as we will see in our discussion of the Habermas Gadamer-debate, this is largely a home-made problem which results from some general assumptions about language shared by Heidegger and Gadamer. It was not until Habermas's depth hermeneutics

³⁹ BT 167.

⁴⁰ BT 165: "Yet because the 'they' presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability."

⁴¹ BT 165.

⁴² BT 213-4.

emerged as a critical contender to traditional philosophical hermeneutics that the potential violence of language and linguistic world-disclosure was put on the agenda and given the attention that this matter so urgently demanded.⁴³

Two features of linguistic world-disclosure that cast additional light on this issue and, in fact, reveal its ideological character, are the facticity and contingency of disclosedness.⁴⁴ As Heidegger notes, “disclosedness is essentially factual,”⁴⁵ and it is in this “factual disclosedness of the world [that] entities are discovered.”⁴⁶ It follows from its facticity that world-disclosure is historically contingent. The world, as it is disclosed to us in our thrownness, is contingent on the historical language shared in a particular cultural community. Its disclosedness is therefore not definite for all rational/speaking beings but is, in a sense, a matter of fate, for it depends on which particular tradition we are born into and into which we are inducted. The historically alterable and contingent status of world-disclosure rounds off Heidegger’s renunciation of transcendental philosophy and the idea of a world-constituting ego that stands in as the guarantor of the objectivity of experience. What remains of objectivity is objectivity in a relativist sense, relative to the particular world-disclosure of a cultural tradition and its historical language. Against this backdrop, we can see yet another aspect of the dominating nature of *das Man* more clearly. Heidegger’s remarks to the effect that idle talk forecloses and that “everything gets obscured” through the workings of the “one” and its publicity can also be interpreted as calling attention to a second order of dominance, namely, the ways in which *das Man* hides its own disclosedness. If someone perceives, interprets, or experiences a situation the way “one”

⁴³ See Habermas 1990a: 239-40: “Language is also a medium of domination and social power.”

⁴⁴ Lafont 1999: 56-69.

⁴⁵ BT 264.

⁴⁶ BT 201.

perceives, interprets, or experiences it, they dogmatically and blindly defer to the traditional ways in which things have been interpreted without questioning this way of being in the world because it is, after all, simply the way “one” does it. Despite its historically contingent nature, a particular world-disclosure is taken as that which goes without saying, without any need to question it.⁴⁷ In doing so, the subject’s deferral to the standpoint of the generalized other and the way “one” does things not only lets agents conveniently off the hook but also preserves the status quo insofar as it masks the fact that things could be (done) or understood otherwise.

The general tendency of world-disclosure to exhibit linguistically mediated forms of structural violence, however, is by no means confined to the average everyday understanding of *das Man* and its articulation in idle talk. In his lecture on *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, Heidegger notes that the dominance of world-disclosure is

“not merely a matter of the everyday [...] but affects in an even more profound sense that interpretation of Dasein which is made the explicit task of Dasein, science [Forschung] and philosophy. Various [logoi] can assume such dominance so much that they render inaccessible the entities that they denote for a long time.”⁴⁸

Hence, neither the natural historical languages that determine the everydayness of Dasein nor the artificial, technical languages of the sciences and philosophy are immune to the dominating effects of world-disclosure, namely, that in determining entities as entities, disclosure may in fact disguise their authentic Being. The sciences Heidegger has in mind are, of course, the allegedly rigorous natural sciences whose ontology and methodology, in his view, infiltrate and corrupt the humanities, social sciences, and even philosophy and which he conceives of as the prototypical enemy of the model of hermeneutical understanding. But what exactly does the structural

⁴⁷ See Lafont 2005b: 510-1, 514-6 (“Dasein can lose oneself in the one and fall into groundlessness”).

⁴⁸ Heidegger 2002a: 276-7 (my translation).

violence or dominance of world-disclosure that potentially pervades any linguistically mediated understanding consist of?

I.3. The fore-structure of understanding

As we have seen, our dealings and interactions with-in the world are predetermined by a structure of intelligibility, a pre-ontology or implicit understanding of Being, that precedes us and into which we are born and enculturated. The world we learn to inhabit is always already interpreted for us by a (dominant) interpretation – a cultural tradition – that guides our attempts to access and make sense of the world by both enabling and limiting that which can appear in it. World-disclosure maps out the panoply of possibilities for grasping entities and guides our questioning in a certain direction: “disclosedness of the world sketches out the possibilities of understanding.”⁴⁹ Dasein, therefore, essentially means already being-in a dominating disclosedness.⁵⁰

Yet, even if we find this idea plausible, we may still ask where this “fact that the world I come into, in which I grow up, is there for me in a specific disclosedness,”⁵¹ where it originates or, put differently, where this prior structure of intelligibility is to be situated? The answer we are given in *Being and Time* is that our understanding of Being is pre-structured by three elements which together form the “unitary phenomenon”⁵² that Heidegger calls the fore-structure of understanding. We should thus locate the “specific disclosing function of interpretation,”⁵³ which releases and regulates our access to entities, in the triad of fore-having (*Vor-habe*), fore-sight

⁴⁹ BT 186.

⁵⁰ Heidegger 2002a: 358.

⁵¹ Heidegger 2002a: 274 (my translation).

⁵² BT 192. This implies, pace Dreyfus, that the three elements are equi-primordial, i.e., non-hierarchical and merely analytically distinct.

⁵³ BT 190 (translation modified, cf. SZ 150: “spezifischen Erschließungsfunktion der Auslegung”).

(*Vor-sicht*), and fore-conception (*Vor-griff*). Fore-having provides a first phenomenological approximation of the object of experience;⁵⁴ as such, what fore-having brings about is a contextual, non-theoretical and not even necessarily thematic, practical orientation for interpreting and experiencing the world. Understanding through fore-having operates within a totality of involvement which is (said to be) already and undisputedly understood. Every attempt to disclose what remains enclosed in this disclosure must depart from and make use of a particular point of view or perspective (*Hinsicht*) that guides our interpretation of entities with respect to something determinate.⁵⁵ This perspectival fore-sight or “upon which” (*worauf*) of interpretation allows the something we have before us in our fore-having to be interpreted and therefore made accessible as something; fore-sight allows us to broach the subject so to speak⁵⁶ by opening up the horizon of meaning, for meaning, as Heidegger puts it, “*is the ‘upon-which’ of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something.*”⁵⁷ Thus, fore-sight showcases the dimension of interpretive meaning and symbolic mediation of our access to entities: grasping something as something. The fore-conception, finally describes how the implicit disclosedness of fore-having and fore-sight are expressed through concrete concepts (“a definite way of conceiving [something]”) and provides Dasein’s vocabulary for making assertions.⁵⁸ Every interpretive effort is founded in a fore-conception and so in interpreting we

⁵⁴ BT 275.

⁵⁵ Heidegger illustrates this perspectival nature of understanding in terms of different qualitative modes of Being: in accessing an entity we can choose the perspective of its thingness, its presence-at-hand, or we can choose to look at it as equipment that is ready-to-hand, like a hammer that serves as a tool for hammering, see Heidegger 2002a: 275 (my translation): “Entities [...] are procured under the guidance of a specific meaning of Being: being ready-to-hand, being present-at-hand.” See also Althusser (1971:176), who claims that “*individuals are always-already subjects*” within an ideological structure before they perceive themselves as such.

⁵⁶ This is the meaning of the German verb “*anschneiden*” that Heidegger uses in this context (SZ 150) as in “*ein Thema anschneiden.*”

⁵⁷ BT 193.

⁵⁸ BT 191. See also Heidegger 1998: 104-5, where Heidegger clarifies that contrary to fore-having and fore-sight, “a conceptual comprehending of being presupposes that our understanding of being has developed itself, and that being as understood, projected in general, and somehow unveiled in such understanding, has expressly been made

have always already made a decision to conceive of something in one way or another – sometimes this “decision” is final, sometimes it comes with a caveat.⁵⁹

Between them, fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception make up the fore-structure of understanding that is the presupposition of all interpretation – what Heidegger calls the “hermeneutical situation”⁶⁰:

“Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something given. [...] In any interpretative approach lies necessarily that which is posited with interpretation as such, i.e. what is given in fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception.”⁶¹

The fore-structure of understanding and the “as-structure” of interpretation (interpreting something *as* something) show an “existential-ontological connection with the phenomenon of projection,” in which “entities are disclosed in their possibilities.”⁶² The fore-structure of understanding and the predicative structure of interpretation (its *as*-structure) complement each other and facilitate the specific disclosing function of interpretation.⁶³ To this end, Heidegger distinguishes two types of “as-structures” which respectively carry out the identifying/referential and predicating functions of interpretation.⁶⁴ The meaning of the apophantic ‘as’ is the standard operation in logical predication. It is the one we use when making assertions, i.e. when we

thematic and problematic.” Typically, such conceptual understanding of Being can be found in the sciences, but conceptual determination alone does not yet guarantee that one grasps the essence of Being: “The fundamental concepts of contemporary science neither contain the ‘proper’ ontological concepts of the being of those beings concerned, nor can such concepts be attained merely through a ‘suitable’ extension of these fundamental concepts.” (ibid).

⁵⁹ BT 191.

⁶⁰ See BT 275.

⁶¹ BT 191-2, translation modified, internal footnotes omitted. What the fore-structure of understanding amounts to, that which is posited in any interpretation as such, are the implicit preconceptions (Vormeinung) of the interpreter.

⁶² BT 192.

⁶³ BT 192-3 and BT 190: “interpretation functions as disclosure.”

⁶⁴ BT 201.

“*address and discuss* something as something.”⁶⁵ In the use of the predicative ‘as,’ interpretation amounts to the specification or determination of an object that has already been identified by the hermeneutic ‘as’ of articulation which is responsible for the disclosing function of interpretation⁶⁶ and precedes the predicative ‘as’ of assertion.⁶⁷ Articulation is that which, by virtue of its disclosing function, enables thematic assertions by indexing the context, directing the “upon which”, and providing the concepts and the vocabulary to “*address and discuss* something and something”:

“Any assertion requires a fore-having of whatever has been disclosed; and this is what it points out by way of giving something a definite character. Furthermore, in any approach when one gives something a definite character, one is already taking a look directionally at what is to be put forward in the assertion. [...] Thus any assertion requires a fore-sight; [...] To any assertion as a communication which gives something a definite character there belongs, moreover, an Articulation of what is pointed out, and this Articulation is in accordance with significations. [...] When an assertion is made, some fore-conception is always implied; but it remains for the most part inconspicuous, because the language already hides in itself a developed way of conceiving. Like any interpretation whatever, assertion necessarily has a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception as its existential foundations.”⁶⁸

It is thus the upstream hermeneutic ‘as-structure’ of articulation which belongs to the fore-structure of understanding and constitutes the disclosedness of Being.⁶⁹ When we “see”⁷⁰ a pen, for instance, we understand the pen in its mode of Being as a ready-to-hand, i.e., as something to

⁶⁵ BT 89 (translation modified, cf. SZ 62).

⁶⁶ BT 190.

⁶⁷ BT 266.

⁶⁸ BT 199 (internal footnote omitted).

⁶⁹ SZ 149, 161.

⁷⁰ For Heidegger, there is no mere “seeing” (or sensing more generally) that is not already interpretive. This is the hermeneutic core of *Being and Time*. It follows from the priority of Being and the model of understanding (see *supra*) that every perception or experience is subject to the predicative structure of interpretation that understands an entity *as* something within the totality of meaning (*Bewandtnisganzheit*). To conceive of something clear of this interpretive structure (the ‘as-structure’) – though possible – appears as a privation, a derivative form of cognition, see BT 188-92. In his 1925 Marburg lectures *Prolegomena on the History of the Concept of Time*, Heidegger gives a vivid rendition of this hermeneutic turn (1985b: 56): “It is not so much that we see the objects and things but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what *one says* about the matter.”

write with. Without the contextual, perspectival, and conceptual pre-structuring of the fore-understanding, which reveals the possibilities for projection, Dasein would be at a loss to assert anything about the entity. The pre-predicative but nonetheless linguistically mediated understanding that derives from articulation is a kind of understanding of an experience that is available to Dasein prior to any thematic assertion.⁷¹ When making an assertion we flesh out, test, and choose between the projected meaningful possibilities that emerge against the background of our fore-understanding which constitutes the world as a totality of significance.⁷²

As Heidegger remarks:

“In the projecting of the understanding, entities are disclosed in their possibility. The character of the possibility corresponds, on each occasion, with the kind of Being of the entity which is understood. Entities within-the-world generally are projected upon the world – that is, upon a whole of significance, to whose reference-relations concern, as Being-in-the-world, has been tied up in advance. When entities within-the-world are discovered along with the Being of Dasein – that is, when they have come to be understood – we say that they have *meaning* [*Sinn*]. But that which is understood, taken strictly is not the meaning but the entity, or alternatively, Being. Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility [*Verständlichkeit*] of something maintains itself. That which can be Articulated in a disclosure by which we understand, we call ‘meaning’. The *concept of meaning* embraces the formal existential framework of what necessarily belongs to that which an understanding interpretation Articulates. *Meaning is the ‘upon-which’ of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception.*”⁷³

I.4. No thing is where the word is lacking: Heidegger’s linguistic idealism

The above passage explicates the ontological-existential interpretation of meaning.⁷⁴ Meaning is not a property of entities but that “wherein” understanding “maintains itself.” The

⁷¹ See Heidegger 1985b: 48. Heidegger discusses thematization via the problematic example of scientific projection in which the entity is then objectified by abstracting from the contextual-perspectival understanding of its Being and determining its properties, see BT 414-5. See also BT 415: “For Dasein to understand even prior to any thematic understanding, *“a world must have been disclosed to it.”*”

⁷² BT 189: Interpretation is “the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.”

⁷³ BT 192-93, internal footnotes omitted.

⁷⁴ BT 193: “In so far as understanding and interpretation make up the existential state of Being of the ‘there’, ‘meaning’ must be conceived as the formal-existential framework of the disclosedness which belongs to understanding.”

“understanding interpretation” articulates meaning: it discloses by making something intelligible as something. It does so by virtue of the formal framework of the fore-structure of understanding which opens up the possibilities “upon which” we project meaning. The projection of meaning through which we disclose the world is therefore enabled and limited by the prior structure of intelligibility; its expression is at once facilitated and bound by the meanings of the concepts and the vocabulary supplied by the fore-conception of understanding.

Since there is no access to entities without any prior understanding of their Being, the meaning of the term we use to refer to an entity determines *as* what this entity is available to us, *as* what we can access it: “*it determines our experience with those entities*. By designating entities as tables, doors, carriages or bridges we are at the same time answering the ontological question of what can be in our world (namely tables, doors, carriages, bridges).”⁷⁵ This explains Heidegger’s statement in *The Origin of the Work of Art* that “[l]anguage, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance.”⁷⁶ What can appear within the world, i.e., what can be intelligible for us and what can be experienced *as* something, is conditioned by the prior understanding which provides the ontological framework and opens up the possibilities for projection.

Two important consequences follow from this ontological-existential account of meaning, the first of which is its linguistic idealism which then implies, second, the strong a priori character of linguistic world-disclosure.

With Rorty, we can describe linguistic idealism as the view that “what appears to us, or what we experience, or what we are aware of, is a function of the language that we use.”⁷⁷ For

⁷⁵ Lafont 2005a: 275, emphasis added.

⁷⁶ Heidegger 2002b: 46.

⁷⁷ Rorty 2014: 203.

Heidegger, as we have seen, there is no access to entities without a prior understanding of their Being. The fact that there is no possible experience of objects independent of their meaning indicates Heidegger's idealism which follows from the ontological difference as well as the priority of Being and lends itself to a linguistic variant to the effect that world-disclosure is contained in language.⁷⁸

The troubling consequence of Heidegger's version of linguistic idealism is the quasi-transcendental status of linguistic world-disclosure which follows not from his later linguistic turn after the *Kehre* but from the priority of Being, i.e., his claim that we "always conduct our activities in an understanding of Being."⁷⁹ World-disclosure as an ontological-existential concept shares the a priori character of worldhood.⁸⁰ To the extent that the understanding of the Being of entities organizes our experiences prior to any empirical knowledge, the concepts constitute the objects of experience; and to the extent that these concepts disclose the world, they share the strong status of synthetic a priori knowledge in traditional philosophy including one of its most problematic features, namely that they cannot be questioned from within.⁸¹ Since for all those who share a particular world-disclosure any meaningful experience and empirical knowledge depends on their linguistically mediated understanding of Being no inner-worldly experience of

⁷⁸ Whereas Heidegger's linguistic idealism becomes explicit only after the *Kehre*, arguably, there are numerous passages in *Being and Time* that intimate such an interpretation. The above-quoted passage can be taken as an example: "Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility [Verständlichkeit] of something maintains itself." BT 193 ("Sinn ist das, *worin sich* Verständlichkeit von etwas *hält*." SZ 151, emphasis added). Here, the adverb "wherein" suggests a spatial interpretation of "sich halten" (to maintain oneself) as "sich aufhalten" (to dwell) so that the sentence could be interpreted as saying that meaning is the place wherein understanding dwells – foreshadowing the post-turn dictum "Language is the house of Being." For an in-depth analysis of Heidegger's linguistic idealism, see Lafont 2000, who stresses the importance of BT sect. 17 for the part of her argument that Heidegger's linguistic idealism is present prior to the turn. For some challenges to that position, see Carman 2002.

⁷⁹ BT 25.

⁸⁰ See BT 93.

⁸¹ Lafont 2005a: 279.

an entity or phenomenon could be used to either contradict or confirm the shared prior structure of intelligibility.

Due to their contextual and perspectival nature, the projections of Being are historically contingent (and ordinarily fashioned by the everyday understanding of the “one”). In transcendental philosophy (as traditionally construed) the *a priori* acts as the guarantor for the possibility of objective experience tout court. Heidegger’s “*perfect tense a priori*,”⁸² on the other hand, which is familiar to us as the “always already” (“*immer schon*”) of Dasein’s own Being, indicating that Dasein has no access to the world in which it finds itself, apart from the meanings disclosed through its being in the world,⁸³ is relative to a particular historical world-disclosure. Heidegger characterizes the origin of any particular world-disclosure as a “happening.” Hence, the understanding of Being that makes experience possible is not a strictly universal structure of understanding but, due to its origin in a historically contingent event, must be conceived of as constitutive only with regard to those who share a particular world-disclosure.⁸⁴

As Heidegger’s discussion of the circle of understanding shows, in interpreting the world and projecting possibilities, we always already draw on the fore-structure of understanding, which has a status akin to synthetic *a priori*. Yet despite the essential facticity of disclosedness,⁸⁵ the particular world-disclosure Dasein is thrown into is imbued with normative authority.⁸⁶ So, while Heidegger’s notion of linguistic world-disclosure opens up the possibility of different worlds and conceptual pluralism, his linguistic idealism and the proposed validity of the perfect

⁸² BT 117.

⁸³ This “being in” is Dasein’s ability to understand and be involved with everything that shows up within the world and this involvement grounds the inescapability of being a participant.

⁸⁴ See, for instance, QCT 115: “The priority of the *a priori* concerns the essence of things; what enables the thing to be what it is comes *before* the thing, in accord with the matter [*Sache*] and ‘nature,’ although we first apprehend what comes before after taking cognizance of some of the more immediate qualities of the thing.”

⁸⁵ BT 264.

⁸⁶ Lafont 1999: 63-7.

tense a priori prohibits learning through experiences that contradict the prior structure of intelligibility.

1.5. Experience where the word is lacking?

One of the disastrous consequences of hermeneutic idealism is that its conceptualization of world-disclosure cannot accommodate learning processes based on new experiences that contradict the prior structure of intelligibility. On this view, language is constitutive of our understanding and experience of the world by projecting the range of possible interpretations. But if language is constitutive of experience, then our (linguistic) knowledge of the world cannot be contradicted by our experience. From the idealist standpoint, one's world-disclosure can neither be questioned from within nor accessed and contested from without.⁸⁷ A prominent place in which the problematic consequences of the idealist view play out and call for an alternative way to conceptualize the issue is the ongoing debate about the "central case" of hermeneutical injustice: the experience of sexual harassment. I will turn to the discussion over sexual harassment to pinpoint the pitfalls of linguistic idealism and present my own hermeneutic-pragmatic conception of experience.

On Miranda Fricker's view, the experience of sexual harassment indicates a learning process. Even prior to having the concept of sexual harassment at their disposal, victims of such mistreatment felt the cognitive dissonance between the "received understanding," for example, its interpretation as an act of "flirting," and their "own sense of a given experience,"⁸⁸ which points to their indeterminate understanding of a wrongdoing. Such a (cognitive) dissonance,

⁸⁷ Lafont 2000: xv ("unrevisable from within and inaccessible (meaningless) from without.").

⁸⁸ Fricker 2007: 163.

however, is inconceivable from the idealist standpoint, which does not allow for (potentially) contradicting experiences. Equally inconceivable is the nominalist alternative advanced by Rebecca Mason, who holds that, pace Fricker, victims of sexual harassment were able to understand their experiences of sexual harassment full well even before they acquired the new concept, which only enabled them to name their experiences after the fact. Mason's nominalism, as I will argue, disregards the world-disclosing function of language (in the proper – non-idealist sense), while Fricker's account does not provide an adequate explanation for the experience of dissonance; in other words, what her account is missing is the hermeneutics of hermeneutical injustice.

From a systematic perspective, however, the possibility of both views regarding the experience of sexual harassment as a possibility for initiating a learning process depends on an alternative to hermeneutic idealism that preserves the insights of the hermeneutic tradition but avoids the problems of the idealist version. This alternative framework will begin to take shape by introducing my hermeneutic-pragmatic notion of what it means to make a new experience in section II. In addition to rejecting Mason's nominalism and providing an explanatory theory for Fricker's interpretation, the discussion of hermeneutical injustice further contextualizes and exemplifies the pitfalls of hermeneutic idealism in ways that are significant for the discussion of ideology critique in two ways.

First, my discussion will highlight the neglected ideological character of the debate by presenting the notion of sexual harassment as an example of a counter-hegemonic disclosure that facilitates the counter-experience of sexual harassment. Against Fricker's contention that there was a "hermeneutical *lacuna* where the words sexual harassment should be,"⁸⁹ which brings her

⁸⁹ Fricker 2007: 159, emphasis added.

position relatively close to hermeneutical idealism, I argue that the women's attempts to make sense of their situation took place in an interpretive space that was ideologically charged with sexist stereotypes and misinterpretations that counteract(ed) their efforts to understand their situation. Hence, the analysis provides a first important insight into how ideologies operate as well as what their critique requires.

Second, examining the shortcomings of hermeneutic idealism anticipates an in-principle objection to a long-standing concern in the history of Western Marxism (and beyond), namely the spectre of a totalizing ideology. Theorists have argued that ideologies often “go deeper” than hermeneutical injustice,⁹⁰ meaning that agents cannot experience their condition as wrongful or harmful to them because their experiential-interpretive resources consistently fail to register the wrongness produced by ideology's own feat and prevent them from learning through new experiences. I reject the possibility of total ideology on the basis that sustaining this option would require one to endorse hermeneutic idealism (see III.3.).

II. Linguistic world-disclosure and experience

From the perspective of hermeneutic idealism, being able to “make sense” of one's experience means to be able to experience something the correct way, because, on this view, there is no possible experience that could contradict one's world-disclosure. In this sense, it would be impossible for victims of sexual harassment to “make sense” of their experience as the experience of sexual harassment. Since they did not have the concept of sexual harassment, they could not have the correct experience of it. As Heidegger would have it, there is no thing (sexual

⁹⁰ Celikates 2017.

harassment) where the word (“sexual harassment”) is lacking. This is not, however, the meaning of “making sense” we are after. The possibility of making sense of the experience of sexual harassment should denote that agents can incorporate their experiences in a conceptual framework that allows them to articulate their experiences in a propositionally correct way. This is the meaning of making sense of one’s experience that the debate about hermeneutic injustice in the case sexual harassment (including Fricker) presupposes. However, this is typically done without an explicit conceptualization of what it means to make an experience from the standpoint of hermeneutics (II.1.). In this sense, I will clarify the hermeneutics behind hermeneutic injustice and argue that to establish the full picture of the experience of sexual harassment (without compromising the insights of the linguistic turn) we need a notion of experiencing that captures the negativity of any new experience as a frustration of one’s expectations which puts agents in touch with reality in the negative sense of experiencing an, by and large, indeterminate wrong (II.2.). Learning from this new experience, however, requires “conceptual labor in company with others” through counter-disclosures such as “sexual harassment” (II.3.), which presupposes a notion of a confirming experience that can encompass its linguistically mediated, intersubjective, and embodied nature (II.4). In applying the above to the case of hermeneutical injustice, my claim is that what women initially experienced was a largely indeterminate wrongdoing against them. As such, they made a new experience in the negative sense of indexing reality by frustrating their expectations; however, this was not yet the experience of sexual harassment which only became intelligible to them by virtue of this new disclosure and the process of “conceptual labor” leading up to it. Moreover, the notion of sexual harassment (which facilitated the counter-experience of sexual harassment) must be understood as a counter-disclosure to the

extent that it had to be asserted against and overcome dominant stereotypes and misinterpretations oversaturating the prevalent interpretive space.

From a systematic perspective, the analysis of experience in this section is crucial for developing a theory of ideology critique grounded in a critical hermeneutics: Counter-disclosures yield a comparative standpoint from which dominant (ideological) descriptions can be challenged, which constitutes a necessary condition for the kind of critique that is able to transcend a given interpretive context or tradition (III.).

II.1. The experience of hermeneutical injustice

Carmita Wood had worked in an administrative capacity at the department of nuclear physics at Cornell when a distinguished professor of the department started approaching her with unwanted sexual advances (jiggling his crotch when standing near her desk, brushing against her breasts under the pretext of reaching for papers, and even kissing her on the mouth in the elevator after the annual Christmas party). As a result of the ongoing mistreatment, Wood requested a transfer to another department. As her request was denied, she eventually quit her job. But when Wood applied for unemployment benefits, she was at a loss for words to explain what had happened to her and chose to put down “personal reasons” on the form. Wood reached out to a feminist activist who organized a speak out for women who, as she recalled, had experienced similar encounters and it was through their deliberation that they collectively coined the term “sexual harassment” to name and make sense of the wrong they’ve experienced. Fricker characterizes Carmita Wood’s being at a loss to describe the mistreatment she had to endure as an instance of hermeneutical injustice, which she defines as “the injustice of having some significant area of

one's social experience obscured."⁹¹ Wood felt shame and embarrassment but did not have the mean(ing)s to fully understand and articulate what had happened to her. In that sense, she wasn't able to make sense of her social experience by being unable to call it what it was: sexual harassment. Worse than that, as Fricker notes,⁹² the interpretive space was already saturated by specific positive meanings (such as the concept of "flirting"⁹³) toward which Wood's attempts to make sense of her social experience gravitated.⁹⁴ Flirting presented the unwanted sexual advances of her supervisor as a kind of flattery. The harassment was to be understood as

⁹¹ Fricker 2007: 158.

⁹² Fricker 2007: 153.

⁹³ See, for instance, Rhoda Koenig's 1976 piece published in Harper's Bazar (Koenig 1976: 90): "Harassment – or, as some of us would call it, flirting – is a happier assertion of humanness than sabotage or shoplifting. It gives a woman a reason to be careful with her lipstick in the morning and a topic of conversation for the ladies' room at 4:30. It greases the wheels of social intercourse and makes the day a little less long." In her article, Koenig mocks the victims of sexual harassment, denounces the alleged hypocrisy of the many promiscuous female workers who are asking for it, bemoans the decline in men complimenting women on their appearance, and lashes out at the feminists and their motto to blame others for one's own failures: "For persons who do feel guilt at being dissatisfied, feminism offers absolution. However you have failed, they are told, don't hold yourself accountable. Society is to blame, and matters will be set right by feminist fiats and general moral pressure, ensuring that one's wages will be adequate, one's ideas respected, and one's orgasms of the proper quantity and ideological persuasion. In this atmosphere, independent action is unreasonable, and so is independent thought. When confronted with inequities, the believing feminist throws a tantrum, or rises above it all, or awaits the action of the collective avenging conscience." (ibid) See also Baker 2008: 101, for further references confirming the omnipresence of the cultural trope of flirting.

⁹⁴ This indicates that the hermeneutical injustice did not result from the existence of a collective "hermeneutical lacuna where the words 'sexual harassment' should be," (Fricker 2007: 159) as, in her attempts to make sense of her mistreatment, Wood was, in fact, working against other dominant interpretations and their distorting effects, some of which were institutionalized as when, in the absence of a suitable option, she had to declare that her reasons for quitting the job were "personal," which ended up in the denial of her unemployment benefits (for a more detailed analysis of dominant interpretations, see *infra* II.5.). Instead of a hermeneutical lacuna we find a situation of hermeneutical domination which guides the efforts of epistemic agents to make sense of their social experiences in a certain direction as Fricker seems to acknowledge, "for it was no accident that their experience had been falling down the hermeneutical cracks. As they struggled in isolation to make proper sense of their various experiences of harassment, the whole engine of collective social meaning was effectively geared to keeping these obscured experiences out of sight." (Fricker 2007: 153) Again, it is not just a matter of certain experiences falling through the hermeneutical cracks, but the cracks being in the right places. The design and position of the linguistic grid and the cognitive frame that supports it is fixed in order to generate some meanings (e.g. "flirting"), rather than others ("sexual harassment"). Charles Mills (2017: 105, emphasis added) perceptively connects the misconception of gaps to the working of ideology: "It will generally be the case, then, that such 'lacunae' are integral to the ideology of domination, functional for the reproduction of the existing order. It is not a matter of an innocent misunderstanding or gap, but of a misrepresentation generated organically, materially, from the male perspective on the world, motivated by their group interests and phenomenologically supported by their group experience. And depending on how pivotal this misrepresentation or non-representation is to the preservation of the status quo, its reformist naming or renaming will be vigorously resisted by the system's male beneficiaries."

commending her personality and complimenting her physical appearance. On the whole, this was meant to honor her as someone who lives up to the ideal of a hard-working, personable, attractive, grateful, and subservient black woman in the workplace. The positive notion of “flirting” saturates the semantic space. Against this background, her rejection to receive such “flirtations” as the well-intended and harmless expression of appreciation (let alone the contestation of its allegedly fun and honoring nature) would most likely be understood as ungrateful and insulting, as an overreaction of a black woman who doesn’t know her place in a (predominantly male and white) professional setting.⁹⁵ While, in the face of this dominant misinterpretation she lacked the mean(ing)s to make sense of her experience in a way that could bring out the injustice, she nonetheless sensed the wrongness of her superior’s actions all along.

On Fricker’s view, some victims of hermeneutical injustice possess an experiential account of being wronged, but they were “unable to make sense of [their] ongoing mistreatment.”⁹⁶ In the case of sexual harassment, agents like Carmita Wood “find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible.”⁹⁷ To be caught in a condition of hermeneutical injustice is to “feel the dissonance between received understanding and your own intimated sense

⁹⁵ Fricker (2007: 151-2) is aware that “flirting” is the “extant dominant understanding” wronging the harassee and benefitting the harasser and believes that we should therefore pay attention to the “social background conditions that were conducive to the hermeneutical lacuna.” However, Fricker ultimately conceives of the latter in purely pragmatic terms: what constitutes the hermeneutic injustice is women’s “unequal hermeneutic participation” in the meaning generating social practices by way of which biased and harmful meanings emerge and perpetuate male dominance, for instance, by permeating the everyday understanding of Being aka *das Man*. What this account neglects is the semantic issue of world-disclosure. However, while fixing the procedural issue of hermeneutic participation can enhance the legitimacy of the meanings generated, considerations of inclusiveness and fairness (by themselves) are no guarantee to get it right, i.e., to arrive at a correct understanding of the experience (cf. *infra* III.2.).

⁹⁶ Fricker 2007: 151.

⁹⁷ Fricker 2007: 148.

of a given experience.”⁹⁸ Agents experience an obscure, scant sense of being wronged but they cannot make proper sense of the wrong. The first step for remedying the harm of sexual harassment as an epistemic wrong is therefore to render their confused and inarticulate experiences socially comprehensible and consequential.

Fricker’s position on the experience of hermeneutical injustice, however, is disputed by some who hold “that women – prior to naming *sexual harassment* – were able to understand their experiences of it.”⁹⁹ Proponents of this nominalist view contend that the fact that Carmita Wood had a well-understood experience of sexual harassment is evidenced by her course of action following the denial of her unemployment claim and her subsequent acts of resistance. This counter-position takes issue with the homogenizing notion of “hermeneutical lacunae” and criticizes Fricker for neglecting the non-dominant interpretive resources available to marginalized subjects. As Rebecca Mason argues:

“Although the name sexual harassment galvanized political action, women’s newly found linguistic ammunition did not indicate that the women were, until then, prevented from understanding their experiences of it. To the contrary, *naming* does not occur ex nihilo: it was precisely women’s interpretations of their treatment as wrongful and unjust that fueled the resistance movement that was responsible for naming sexual harassment. [...] *naming* sexual

⁹⁸ Fricker 2007: 163. To be clear, I am not attributing to Fricker the view that all agents will, as a matter of necessity, make such an experience.

⁹⁹ Mason 2011: 298. I take it that in Rebecca Mason’s use of the “experiences of it” the “it” refers to sexual harassment which implies that the well-understood experience of women like Carmita Wood *is* the experience of sexual harassment. If that interpretation is correct, I disagree with her judgment for reasons I will state later. For the same reasons I am convinced that what is involved in the process that enables agents to make sense of their experience extends beyond the mere “naming” of an experience. At times, both Fricker’s and Mason’s analyses suggest a nominalist tendency to characterize the process of rendering an experience socially intelligible as an act of naming; see, for instance, Fricker’s description of “hermeneutical gaps” as “blanks where there should be a name for an experience” (Fricker 2007: 160), and Mason 2011: 298. On a different note, it is important to mention that both of them seem to be attentive to dimensions of experience other than the purely cognitive. Fricker alludes to the affective dimension of experience when she notes that being in a condition of hermeneutical injustice is to “*feel* the dissonance between received understanding and your own intimated sense of a given experience” (2007: 163, emphasis added). In addition, Mason points to the conative dimension of experience when she refers to Carmita Wood’s “*actions* following the denial of her unemployment claim” (2011: 297, emphasis added). Their remarks indicate the need to expand our notion of experience, see my proposal below.

harassment did not mean that women were only then able to understand that which had previously evaded comprehension.”¹⁰⁰

In what follows, I will argue that this nominalist characterization of the experience of sexual harassment as naming an already existing experience falls short on two counts. First, it does not correctly capture the experience of women like Carmita Wood prior to their conceptualization of sexual harassment. Second, it does not acknowledge the world-disclosing function of language and the need for counter-disclosures to overcome dominant interpretations. To support my objection against the nominalist view, we will start by asking “What does it mean to have or to make an experience?” In approaching this question, we see that even the verb we use to describe the occurrence of an experience seems to matter. To say that someone is having an experience seems to suggest that the agents takes a passive a stance toward something they undergo or suffer. Heidegger, for instance, endorses this view when he claims that

“[t]o undergo an experience with something – be it a thing, a person, or a god – means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of ‘undergoing’ an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it.”¹⁰¹

On the contrary, when we say that someone is making an experience, it evokes a more active role on the part of the person experiencing something. Some claim that the moments of receptivity and productivity actually converge in our experiences. In a description that is reminiscent of Newton’s third law of motion, Dewey stresses this simultaneity of “doings and sufferings”¹⁰² in experiencing something:

¹⁰⁰ Mason 2011: 298, emphasis added. See also *ibid* 305: “I have argued, contrary to Fricker, that Carmita Wood had an understanding of her experience of workplace harassment prior to the act of naming in which she participated.”

¹⁰¹ OWL 57, the passage continues “It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens. To undergo an experience with language, then, means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it.”

¹⁰² Dewey 1929: 358; see also Dewey 1980: 3.

“[Experience] includes *what* men do and suffer, *what* they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also *how* men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine in short, processes of *experiencing*. [...] It is ‘double-barrelled’ in that it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality.”¹⁰³

In the process of experiencing, the agent is interacting with the environment: one cannot touch without being touched. In good pragmatist fashion, Dewey situates experience in the context of action which is to highlight both its embodiment in habits, behavioral routines, and bodily skills and its experimental nature as a guide to problem-solving that eventually issues in processes of cognitive learning.¹⁰⁴

Foregrounding the passivity of the subject of experience, as does Heidegger, certainly does not square well with the realist intuitions of those who credit experience with a capacity to put us in touch with a mind-independent reality. The belief in the constitutive power of language could easily pull us back into the idealist paradigm where epistemic authority is grounded in the structure of subjectivity or, in our case, linguistic world-disclosure.¹⁰⁵ Incidentally, the view of the subject as a passive receiver of experiential data is certainly not exclusive to this version of linguistic idealism. Classical empiricist theories of sense-data likewise posit that the subject is merely passive in grasping external reality through experience. Typically, the test case is the perceived immediacy of perceptual experience in which the subject encounters the object of experience “simply as it is.” The claim is that in our sensual experience reality presents and asserts itself to us in an unencumbered way, i.e., reality is “given” to the mind in experience.

¹⁰³ Dewey 1929: 8.

¹⁰⁴ My argument is linked to the tradition of classical pragmatism but does not build on Dewey’s particular account of experience. For an excellent study of Dewey’s notion of experience and how it could secure objectivity, see Levine 2019, esp. chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁰⁵ On the dangers of sliding into linguistic idealism, see Bernstein 2010: 134-5.

Here, it is not language but reality that speaks – and the subject recoils, listens, and learns.¹⁰⁶

Though, as we've seen in our discussion of linguistic world-disclosure, we should be equally skeptical of any claim to the passive subject's immediate access to sensory data. Within the linguistic paradigm, the data we collect is never raw. The data we "receive" from our bodily sensations, mental images, or even our perceptual impressions is always already pre-cooked.¹⁰⁷

On that view, the idea that we interact with a symbolically pre-structured world and that our understanding of it is interpretive at every step prevents any kind of epistemic talk about immediate access to reality in our experience of innerworldly phenomena. As Habermas puts it:

"After the linguistic turn, we no longer have access to an internal or external reality that is not linguistically mediated. The presumed immediacy of sense impressions no longer serves as an infallible court of appeal. Absent the possibility of a recourse to uninterpreted sense data, sense experience loses its unquestioned authority. In its place, there is the authority of the 'second-order experience' that is possible only for an *acting* subject."¹⁰⁸

The two senses of experiencing – having and making an experience – indicate an epistemic difficulty in our efforts to come to terms with the notion of experience and, of course, the objectivity of experience. If we want to determine what it means to experience something, we must, on the one hand, not fall prey to the Myth of the Given of sense-data empiricism and its

¹⁰⁶ For Heidegger though, language is not so much given as it is giving (see OWL 55: "language gives"): "If our thinking does justice to the matter, then we may never say of the word that it is, but rather that it gives – not in the sense that words are given by an 'it,' but that the word itself gives. The word itself is the giver. What does it give? To go by the poetic experience and by the most ancient tradition of thinking, the word gives Being" (OWL 88).

¹⁰⁷ By characterizing our access to data as "pre-cooked," I want to claim that experiential data is neither "raw" as the sense-data empiricists would have it nor fully "cooked." To the extent that they endorse the linguistic determinism of structural linguistics, the latter view is featured in the writings of many structuralists (see, e.g., the juxtaposition of "raw" nature and "cooked" society in Lévi-Strauss 1969) and post-structuralist theorists alike. It finds its foremost expression in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the claim that different languages cause different realities via the conceptual apparatus they make available for experiencing reality: "No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (Sapir 1949: 69). The constitutive nature of language and the incommensurability of different linguistic backgrounds and the worlds they create show the kinship between linguistic determinism and Heideggerian linguistic idealism. On the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis from a hermeneutic standpoint, see Taylor 2016: 320-31.

¹⁰⁸ Habermas 2003: 12.

notion of immediate experience that warrants empirical knowledge. On the other hand, we do not want to get tied up with linguistic idealism for which experience merely unearths knowledge about linguistically pre-disclosed and radically incommensurable worlds rather than generating knowledge of a singular language-independent reality.

Any theory of experience that endorses the linguistic turn will therefore have to address these broader concerns. In what follows, my aim is to articulate an account of experience that accepts the basic insight of the “HHH” theory of language, namely, that language always already mediates our experience. The goal is to articulate a theory of experience after the linguistic turn that enables us to make sense of the experience of hermeneutic injustice. With a view to the experience of sexual harassment, such a theory, I argue, will put us in a position to address Mason’s challenge. To that end, I will draw on the traditions of philosophical hermeneutics and pragmatism – discussing the views of Gadamer and Peirce as two of the traditions’ foremost representatives for the purposes of my argument. I will begin with the hermeneutic side, in particular, Gadamer’s general account of experience (of which “hermeneutic experience” is a particular variant). Approaching the problem from this angle benefits my analysis because the theory’s wider scope offers a perspective that – unlike Peirce’s account which, by and large, focuses on experiences in the empirical world – encompasses the social dimension of experience which we need in order to explain the experience of sexual harassment. Gadamer argues that hermeneutic experience is the “experience of a Thou” which cannot be grasped in terms of subject-object relations common to many discussions of experience in the context of scientific inquiry. Against this reductive model, Gadamer proposes a communicative alternative that captures the process of understanding between two speaking subjects (“I” and “Thou”) (II.3.). The conversational model allows us to conceptualize the intersubjective model of the

comparative standpoint as a necessary condition for critique (III.1.). But let's start with why making a new experience is a frustrating business.

II.2. *Experience in the Making*

Gadamer endorses the view that language is constitutive of experience when he claims that language precedes experience and serves as “a positive condition of, and guide to, experience itself.”¹⁰⁹ The way in which language acts as a guide for our experience is by projecting the range of possibilities of those meaningful objects and events we are to expect in our interpretive encounters with the world. Our expectations originate from within a tradition and its conventional linguistic meanings which, at times, can also guide experience down the wrong path.¹¹⁰ Analogous to Dewey, Gadamer emphasizes the importance of an understanding of experience as a process that goes beyond the scientific-teleological account of experience centered on the acquisition of knowledge.¹¹¹ But in viewing experience as a process, he also adds that “this process is *essentially negative*.”¹¹²

For Gadamer, this negativity introduces a consequential distinction which he highlights using the verbal distinction between having a confirming versus making a new experience. We may generally speak of having an experience whenever the act of experiencing confirms that

¹⁰⁹ TM 344.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ For Gadamer (TM 350), experience is not primarily about knowledge, he even asserts that “[e]xperience stands in an ineluctable opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge.” The “truth” of experience, for Gadamer, lies in its potential for opening up new experiences: “The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience.” Hence, the experienced person is not someone who has accumulated knowledge but rather someone “radically undogmatic” who has learned from experiences to be open for new experiences. This is consistent with both Heidegger’s and Dewey’s claims that experiences are not merely knowledge affairs (see OWL 66 and Bernstein 2010: 146).

¹¹² TM 347, emphasis added; see also TM 349-50. We should note that since negativity is a structural element of experience, it doesn’t say anything about the content of the experience. I can indeed be very happy even after my expectations are frustrated, for example, when my friends throw a surprise birthday party for me or when I receive a better grade than I expected.

things are in fact how they are supposed to be according to our expectations or hypotheses.

Confirming experiences verify an expectation we possess. But this, for Gadamer, is not a new experience or an experience that we “make,” for “[s]trictly speaking, we cannot make the same experience twice.”¹¹³ New experiences confound our expectations.¹¹⁴ Whenever we “make” a new experience it startles our expectations and prompts us to rethink our understanding of the object of experience:

“‘experience’ in the genuine sense – is always negative. [...] Thus the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply that we see through a deception and hence make a correction, but we acquire a comprehensive knowledge. We cannot, therefore, make an experience with any object at random, but it must be of such a nature that we gain better knowledge through it, not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before—i.e., of a universal. The negation by means of which it achieves this is a determinate negation. We call this kind of experience *dialectical*.”¹¹⁵

Subjects can experience this negativity as a “performative failure” of their actions.¹¹⁶ When our actions fail in the face of a recalcitrant reality, our expectations are frustrated. Such a contextually confined breakdown of our expectations may trigger doubts about the explicit and implicit doxastic states underlying and shaping our expectations. In his well-known paper *The Fixation of Belief*, Charles Sanders Peirce gives us a psychologizing account of how the irritation of doubt that follows a performative failure motivates (scientific) inquiry to attain the “calm and satisfactory state” of belief.¹¹⁷ The unsettling force of doubt, he thinks, “is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief.” Inquiry relies on the powerful affect of real doubt as

¹¹³ TM 348 (translation modified; in German Gadamer stresses exactly this active moment of “making” an experience vis-a-vis having an experience: “Strenggenommen kann man dieselbe Erfahrung nicht zweimal ‘machen’.” Cf. WM 359).

¹¹⁴ Referring to the German “Ent-täuschung,” in this sense making an experience is disenchanting or disillusioning.

¹¹⁵ TM 347-8 (translation modified to reproduce Gadamer’s distinction between the “having” and “making” of an experience).

¹¹⁶ Habermas 2003: 12, 78.

¹¹⁷ CP 5:358-87.

opposed to paper doubt, for “the mere putting of a proposition into the interrogative form does not stimulate the mind to any struggle after belief.”¹¹⁸ Out of the many methods for fixing our beliefs in the experience of doubt, only the scientific method warrants true empirical beliefs. The reason why the scientific method merits success is that here our beliefs are determined by an “external permanency,” i.e., “Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them,” and which “affect our senses.”¹¹⁹

In the essay, Peirce’s reference to “Reals” could easily lend itself to misinterpretation when he adds that “by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really and truly are.” But attributing to Pierce a view that recognizes any kind of givenness of the “percept” in perceptual experience would miss his scathing critique of the efforts of those who seek to go “back to the first impressions of sense,” – indeed calling it “the most chimerical of undertakings.”¹²⁰ While the description still owes to the philosophy of consciousness and its representational model, his reflections on perceptual evidence acknowledge both the constructedness (in the sense that we “impose human categories on experience”¹²¹) and the fallibilism of the “perceptual facts” we derive from “the evidence of the senses”:

“The science of psychology assures me that the very percepts were mental constructions, not the first impressions of sense. But what the first impressions of sense may have been, I do not know except inferentially and most imperfectly. [...] the only thing I carry away with me is the perceptual facts, or the intellect’s description of the evidence of the senses, made by my endeavor. These perceptual facts are wholly unlike the percept, at best; and they may be downright untrue to the percept. [...] The perceptual facts are a very imperfect report of the percepts; but I cannot go behind that record.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ CP 5:376. It takes such living doubt prompted by the experience of surprise (see below) to start questioning the stock of our commonsensical background beliefs and expectations which we can examine but one by one, see Misak 2013: 33-4.

¹¹⁹ CP 5:384.

¹²⁰ CP 2:141. See also his dismissive remarks about “direct experience” in CP 1:145.

¹²¹ Misak 2014: 30.

¹²² Ibid.

II.3. Indexing reality and the referential use of “sexual harassment”

Since perceptual facts are judgments and therefore assertions “in propositional form” about the percept, they are interpretations and in need of an interpretive theory.¹²³ Peirce recognizes that in perception, every perceptual fact amounts to a fallible description, a “report of the percepts,” which has already passed through an interpretive filter. Though there is no option to “go behind that record” – which is equivalent to claiming that there is no such thing as unmediated access to the percepts – he contends that empirical reality (the “external permanence”) acts as a corrective which constrains us in the construction of perceptual facts. In our interactions with the empirical world, the insistent force of reality makes itself known to us as the encounter of a “sense of resistance” that Peirce calls “Secondness.”¹²⁴ The “hardness” of, say, a perceptual fact “lies in the insistency of the percept, its entirely irrational insistency, – the element of Secondness in it.”¹²⁵ Peirce describes the insistency of the percept as “brute” because its assertiveness does not exhibit any rational element or lawlike regularity;¹²⁶ reality strikes us with the brute force of its “irrational insistency.”¹²⁷ The lack of any rational involvement is what he takes to be the principal characteristic of Secondness. For as soon as we begin to make sense of the resistance, we throw our (linguistically mediated) categories and concepts into the mix and enter

¹²³ Perceptual facts, for Peirce, are “given in direct perceptual judgments,” i.e., in judgments “asserting in propositional form what a character of a percept directly present to the mind is.” (CP 5:54)

¹²⁴ Secondness is one of three categorical aspects of experience for Peirce (see, e.g., CP 8:328-32 and Misak 2013: 38-41) and “the most prominent of the three” (CP 8:266). It consists in dyadic relations between ego, i.e., the subject’s “inner world” which harbors the old expectation, and non-ego, i.e., the “exterior world” of the new phenomenon whereas Thirdness consists in triadic relations (as in A giving some B to C or two people signing a contract) that involve concepts, inferences, rules, human practices, intention, customs, as well as signs and meanings.

¹²⁵ CP 7:659.

¹²⁶ CP 8:330.

¹²⁷ CP 6:340 and 7:659.

interpretive territory or what Peirce refers to as “Thirdness.”¹²⁸ Through Secondness experience acts as an external and not merely a psychological or conversational constraint; it functions as a negative corrective for our attempts to come to terms with a mind-independent reality. Its essence, Peirce insists, lies in “the *hereness* and *nowness*” of the “shock of reaction between ego and non-ego” which goes missing once we attempt to conceive and hence interpret it.¹²⁹ Picking up on this point, Cheryl Misak explains that the Secondness of experience for Peirce “is that which impinges upon us and gives us indexical access to the world. [...] But this indexical pointing to reality is very thin. As soon as we form an experiential judgment, we have interpreted what impinged upon us.”¹³⁰

I want to argue that if we understand the negative indexicality involved in Secondness from a linguistic perspective, then we can begin to accommodate the “realistic intuitions” within a linguistic framework that preserve the objectivity of experience from within language without yielding to either idealist misconceptions or the Myth of the Given. When used by speakers, indexicals, and demonstratives as well, operate referentially; they designate objects, events, or phenomena and introduce them to the conversation. Indexicals such as “I,” “here,” “this,” “there,” or “now” do not carry with them any stable, context-transcending signification for the meaning they make possible by making something the object of conversation depend on the context in which it is uttered. Their linguistic function is primarily referential and not

¹²⁸ It is clear, that for Peirce drawing the distinction between Second- and Thirdness of experience and underscoring the irrational and brute way in which the former asserts itself is an attempt to secure the objectivity of empirical experience in keeping with our “realistic intuitions.” Richard Bernstein (2010: 136) even thinks that we don’t “need anything more than Secondness to do justice to what philosophers call their ‘realistic intuitions.’”

¹²⁹ CP 8:266.

¹³⁰ Misak 2014: 31. See also Habermas 2003: 32: “Against the background of expectations about how we act, sensory contact with objects in the world provides stimulating points of reference for interpolating facts. We must not confuse the information we acquire through this contact with the world, and which takes linguistic form, with its source, that is, with what we experience.”

attributive.¹³¹ When uttering the words “this thing right here,” the speaker is referring to a particular referent regardless of what “this thing right here” may turn out to be, i.e., without giving an interpretation or description of the referent as she does when she employs an expression attributively. This is not to deny that referential expressions employ meanings. When the speaker utters “this thing right here” referentially, she is still implicitly attributing certain qualities to the referent, for example, that it is a “thing” (i.e., a kind of unitary whole that isn’t a person). The point is that in using referential expressions the speaker does not (have to) think of those qualities as constituting the referent, i.e., making it appear. What is characteristic of referential expressions, thus, is not so much their descriptive component that states the necessary and sufficient conditions for unambiguously identifying the referent as it is the “*indexical* component” in their meaning, “the fact that our terms refer to things [...]”¹³²

Indexicality in fact goes far beyond the class of indexicals and demonstratives to include proper names (Mill), definite descriptions (Donnellan), as well as “natural kind terms” and scientific concepts (Putnam). And it is in response to this pervasive phenomenon of indexicality that some philosophers of language such as Donnellan and Putnam have developed theories of direct reference. Such theories hold that the semantic value of referential expressions lies not in their giving the best account of the set of necessary and sufficient conditions for unmistakably identifying the referent. Rather, what referential expressions contribute to the meaning of an utterance is that they pick out and present a particular referent. On that view, used referentially, linguistic expressions do not identify a referent by assigning propositional content to it but make

¹³¹ See, e.g., Wettstein 1991: 28. On the distinction, see below.

¹³² Putnam 1975: 265.

the referent available for signification in a linguistic context independent of the particular way in which it is being referred to.

What does this do for the purpose of conceptualizing experience? In what follows, I argue that establishing the independence of the referential use of language will enable us to make sense of Peirce's notion of Secondness in an attempt to give an account of experience after the linguistic turn that consolidates the refined insights of both the pragmatist and the hermeneutic tradition. To this end, my analysis is centered on Donnellan's distinction of the attributive and the referential use of linguistic expressions.¹³³ After presenting Donnellan's distinction, I follow Putnam's lead, who argues that the referential use of linguistic expressions is ubiquitous in contexts of scientific discovery, to make the argument that analogously the women who participated in the first speak-out on sexual harassment must be understood as having used "sexual harassment" referentially to designate a specific phenomenon they believed to exist in the social world. From a systematic perspective, the distinction between the world-disclosing and the referential function of language is the first step towards developing a critical hermeneutics as it identifies the first dead end of hermeneutic idealism, which – lacking such a distinction – could not account for the experience of sexual harassment on the basis of a new disclosure.

In his seminal paper *Reference and Definite Descriptions*, Keith Donnellan points out that definite description such as "the man drinking a martini" can be used by a speaker either to denote an entity or to refer to something. The former, Donnellan calls the attributive use of the definite description, the latter its referential use. When a speaker uses the definite description attributively, she "states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so." In the

¹³³ For a perceptive and much more detailed discussion of theories of direct reference and their significance for restoring the cognitive function of language and salvaging the hermeneutic project after the linguistic turn, see Lafont 1999: esp. 236-74.

attributive use, the speaker's intention is to refer to whoever or whatever fits the description.

Thus, the particular attribute "of being so-and-so" chosen by the speaker is "all-important," for it cannot be substituted by a non-synonymous attribute without changing the propositional content of the expression and therefore altering the success conditions of denotation. If it turns out that no entity fits the description, the speech act failed. In the case of its referential use, the point of using a definite description is different, because the speaker

"uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing. [Here,] the definite description is merely one tool for doing a certain job – calling attention to a person or thing – and in general any other device for doing the same job, another description or a name, would do as well."¹³⁴

The description used by the speaker can be substituted by a non-synonymous description because satisfying the descriptive content of the expression is not crucial in the case of referential use; what matters is that the audience in a specific linguistic context is able to pick out a particular referent and not whether the description used to help them do so actually fits the referent. To demonstrate the plausibility of his claim about the independence of the referential use, Donnellan asks us to consider the use of the expression "the man drinking a martini" in a different setting:

"Suppose one is at a party and, seeing an interesting-looking person holding a martini glass, one asks, 'Who is the man drinking a martini?' If it should turn out that there is only water in the glass, one has nevertheless asked a question about a particular person, a question that it is possible for someone to answer."¹³⁵

In his famous example,¹³⁶ successful reference to the person holding a martini glass does not require that the referred to person is in fact "the man drinking a martini." Whatever the

¹³⁴ Donnellan 1966: 285.

¹³⁵ Donnellan 1966: 287.

¹³⁶ Donnellan 1966: 287: "[The chairman of the local Teetotalers Union] has just been informed that a man is drinking a martini at their annual party. He responds by asking his informant, 'Who is the man drinking a martini?' In asking the question the chairman does not have some particular person in mind about whom he asks the question; if no one is drinking a martini, if the information is wrong, no person can be singled out as the person about whom

content of the glass or the gender of the person, as long as the descriptive content used enables the audience to pick out the particular person the speaker has in mind, the act of reference is successful and the question can be answered. It is also noteworthy that as a general feature, the referential use of a term or expression allows members of the audience or the speaker to correct the initial description or re-describe the referent using a non-synonymous description.¹³⁷ Hence, we could say that referential use is about communicative success between speakers that establishes the possibility for them to talk about the same thing rather than their epistemic success of correctly identifying a referent with the descriptive content of the expression.

What Donnellan wants to establish is that the attributive and the referential use of expressions – in his case definite descriptions – constitute two distinct modes of reference and that traditional theories of reference (of which his target, Russell’s theory of definite descriptions, is exemplary) have neglected the latter in favor of the former. They are distinct, as we have seen, because the conditions for successfully referring to something are non-identical. When used referentially, the meaning of the expression does not determine the referent, for in this case the descriptive content of the expression is accidental and substitutable. The referential use enables us to use linguistic expressions merely to pick out objects, events, or phenomena and make them the topic of conversation even if the descriptive content of the expression does not fit the referent and varies between the partners in conversation.

For Putnam “indexicality extends beyond the *obviously* indexical words and morphemes”¹³⁸ to include “natural kind terms” like “water,” “gold,” or “tiger” and even

the question was asked. Unlike the [referential] case, the attribute of being the man drinking a martini is all-important, because if it is the attribute of no one, the chairman’s question has no straight-forward answer.”

¹³⁷ Donnellan 1966: 287 and 301. Though, if the definite description is used attributively, redescription and correction do not make sense.

¹³⁸ Putnam 1975: 234.

theoretical concepts (e.g., “electron”). Indeed, Putnam argues that in most contexts of scientific discovery, theoretical terms and definitions function analogously to indexicals. He claims that when scientists use terms like “electron,” they use them referentially, that is, in using this term they refer to specific entities in the world under substitutable and thus revisable descriptions.

This means that the descriptive content of the expressions they use does not determine the object referred to but gives an account of an entity which is postulated to exist according to what they take to be the best available knowledge of it. Here is how Putnam puts it:

“It is beyond question that scientists use terms as if the associated criteria were not necessary and sufficient conditions, but rather *approximately correct characterizations of some world of theory-independent entities*, and that they talk as if later theories in a mature science were, in general, better descriptions of the same entities that earlier theories referred to.”¹³⁹

With the possible exceptions of mathematicians and logicians, who are, by and large, in the business of using theoretical terms attributively to refer to some possible entities, most empirical scientists are not primarily interested in the construction of possible worlds but want to make claims about entities they believe to exist in the actual world. Putnam concludes that in most contexts scientists presuppose the existence of an objective world of “theory-independent entities” and use theoretical terms and definitions referentially. What is distinctive about the referential use is that while the descriptive content of a term like “electron”¹⁴⁰ can thus be

¹³⁹ Putnam 1975: 237, emphasis added. For commonalities with Peirce, see my discussion of the presupposition of a single world and Misak 2000: 79, regarding Peirce’s fallibilism.

¹⁴⁰ That “electron” continues to refer to the same entity throughout the various changes in the underlying theory is one of the examples of “*trans-theoretical* terms” Putnam uses to make his point, see Putnam 1991: 12–13, and 1975: 197. Another example he discusses is the natural kind word “fish”. What is interesting about this last example is that he thinks that Friedrich Engels, without attributing to Engels any “sophisticated theory of meaning and reference,” seems to share Putnam’s view of the inherent indexicality of natural kind words when Engels observes that the concept “fish” certainly would include the property “breathing through gills” while not all fish breath through gills (much like a three-legged tiger is still a tiger). That is why Putnam thinks it is fair to say that Engels (like Putnam) “*rejects* the model according to which such a concept as *fish* provides anything like analytically necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in a natural kind. Two further points are of importance: (1) The fact that the concept ‘natural kind *all* of whose members live under water, breath through gills, etc.’ does not strictly fit the natural kind Fish does not mean that the concept does not *correspond* to the natural kind Fish. As Engels puts it, the

corrected, the identity of the referent is preserved, so that scientists with a better understanding of “electron” are still referring to the same entity under a revised description. By virtue of the fallibilist consequences that we can consistently draw from it, the referential function of language is essential to generating empirical knowledge about the world as opposed to knowledge about the meaning of linguistic expressions.

In the same vein, I want to argue that the women who participated in the first speak-out¹⁴¹ on sexual harassment have used the term “sexual harassment” referentially to designate a specific phenomenon they believed to exist in the social world. In that respect, their “conceptual labor” echoes the process of inquiry in the scientific community. Analogous to the situation of scientists, their “conceptual labour” proceeds on the basis of stipulating that a “theory-independent” social world exists and that to generate knowledge about this world and the phenomena therein requires the referential use of linguistic expressions to access referents in a way that the descriptions of them are intended as temporary approximations whose content can be revised in light of ongoing scrutiny.

I believe it is fair to say that it was clear to them that the term’s meaning – its conceptual articulation – was neither exhaustive nor set in stone but had to remain open to modifications as their understanding of the phenomenon would increase in light of further experiential accounts, its application to different contexts, or analytic conclusions downstream. In their initial discourses, they must thus be viewed as employing the term precisely “as if the associated criteria were not necessary and sufficient conditions, but rather approximately correct

concept is not exactly correct (as a description of the corresponding natural kind) but that does not make it a *fiction*. (2) The concept is continually changing as a result of the impact of scientific discoveries, but that does not mean that it ceases to correspond to the same natural kind (which is itself, of course, also changing),” *ibid* 196-7.

¹⁴¹ See II.5.

characterizations”¹⁴² of a social phenomenon. Utilizing the term “sexual harassment” was intended to make sense of a series of sexist episodes known to them at a given time, not to (attributively) state the necessary and sufficient criteria of a theoretical term regardless to what the term thus defined would apply; their aim was to refer to those instances under a hypothetical description that represented the best understanding of the phenomenon available to them at the time. They were not interested in exploring possibilities in referring to “whatever happens to satisfy some description,”¹⁴³ but to understand a crucial aspect of their actual world and to that end they had to use the term “sexual harassment” referentially, i.e., in a way that enabled them to produce revisable knowledge about a stipulated phenomenon in the social world.

From the standpoint of the idealist theory of world-disclosure, the referential use of “sexual harassment” (and the analogous use of terms and definitions in the empirical sciences) is a non-starter. Hermeneutic idealism absolutizes the world-disclosing function of language at the expense of its referential function, since meaning determines reference. This means that the different meanings of the linguistic expressions speakers use determine their access to the referents; however, they do so not only factually but epistemically. In that way, the meaning of the linguistic expression determines what there can be according to, in our case, a scientific theory, or, writ large, “what there *can be* for a linguistic community – or what such a community *can say* (i.e. *believe*) that there is. In this sense, the key function of language is held to lie in its *world-disclosing* capacity.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Putnam 1975: 237.

¹⁴³ Putnam 1975: 244. Like the term “sexual harassment,” the associated characterizations are used referentially; the latter do not stand in as synonyms for the former but function as referential expressions that designate the referent, cf. Lafont 2000: 235-6.

¹⁴⁴ Lafont 1999: xii, 59-76.

When, under the idealist paradigm, a scientist wants to refer to an object, she can only do so under one of the descriptions that is provided by the scientific theory and, as such, is correct; this is due to the fact that only objects under those descriptions are accessible to her. It is impossible for her to refer to an object by any description that is not already projected by virtue of the basic propositions and axioms of the theory which are true by stipulation. Since “sexual harassment” was not among the projected possibilities available to the agents in the situation of sexual harassment, the behavior could not be experienced, i.e., discovered *as such*. In its absence, women could only discover the phenomenon (correctly) according to the dominant disclosure (as a flirtation, a joke, or a personal matter).

Finally, Donnellan’s distinction of the attributive and the referential use provides a tool for understanding the notions of Second- and Thirdness in a way that is suited to conceptualize Secondness without falling prey to the Myth of the Given. The analysis shows that the distinction between the referential use and the attributive use maps onto the distinction between Secondness and Thirdness. Both Donnellan’s referential use of definite descriptions and Peirce’s notion of Secondness are conceptualized as non-epistemic (successfully referring to an object does not presuppose that the speaker knows anything about it) and put us in “linguistic contact” with referents while the attributive use and Thirdness fall on the other side of the divide for they put us in “epistemic contact” with them.¹⁴⁵ So, saying that Secondness “gives us indexical access to the world”¹⁴⁶ means that by virtue of the referential use of language we have access to the “hereness and nowness” of a particular something – whatever it may turn out to be. In keeping

¹⁴⁵ It is in fact a virtue of theories of direct reference that, as Howard Wettstein (1991: 158) puts it, “linguistic contact with things – reference, that is – does not presuppose epistemic contact with them.”

¹⁴⁶ Misak 2014: 31. See also Habermas 2003: 32: “Against the background of expectations about how we act, sensory contact with objects in the world provides stimulating points of reference for interpolating facts. We must not confuse the information we acquire through this contact with the world, and which takes linguistic form, with its source, that is, with what we experience.”

with our linguistic account of indexicality, this does not imply, of course, that referential expressions are somehow semantically neutral and grant access to the reality of uninterpreted facts “given” to us in small packages of raw data. When using an expression for the purpose of referring to an entity, it is necessary that the speaker employs some descriptive content; her reference is linguistically mediated by the meaning conveyed in the expression. But since one linguistic expression can be replaced by any number of non-synonymous ones to the extent that they perform the referential function, no specific meaning governs the speakers’ access to the referent, or, in other words, meaning does not determine reference.

The possibility of the referential use of linguistic expressions is a crucial building block for critical hermeneutics. For the task at hand, i.e., to explain the experience of hermeneutical injustice and to rebut the claim that sexual harassment could be experienced before the concept became available, two more components are necessary: the intersubjective and embodied nature of experience.

II.4. The intersubjectivity and embodiment of experience

Peirce is in agreement with Gadamer about the essential negativity of experience in the strict sense. The notion of experience is at the heart of Peirce’s pragmatism, it is revered as our “great teacher” but the pedagogy of experience is somewhat cruel. In Peirce’s words, experience plays “practical jokes” on us and teaches us by surprise, i.e., by toppling our expectations.¹⁴⁷ For “naturally nothing can possibly be learned from an experiment that turns out just as was anticipated. It is by surprises that experience teaches all she deigns to teach us.”¹⁴⁸ And Peirce is

¹⁴⁷ CP 5:51-3.

¹⁴⁸ CP 5:51 and CP 8:346.

quick to note that doubt, which, as we have seen, results from the frustration of previous expectation and motivates inquiry, “usually, perhaps always, takes its rise from surprise.”¹⁴⁹ Reality thus makes itself known to us in the negative experience of performative failure. In order to make the negative structure of experience and the objective nature of the shock of surprise more plausible, Peirce introduces the idea of a “double-consciousness”:

“Examine the Percept in the particularly marked case in which it comes as a surprise. Your mind was filled [with] an imaginary object that was expected. At the moment when it was expected the vividness of the representation is exalted, and suddenly, when it should come, something quite different comes instead. I ask you whether at that instant of surprise there is not a *double consciousness*, on the one hand of an Ego, which is simply the expected idea suddenly broken off, on the other hand of the Non-Ego, which is the strange intruder, in his abrupt entrance.”¹⁵⁰

While underscoring the point that experience basically comes as surprise – the shock of one’s expectations being shattered –, double-consciousness is presented as the kind of dissonance that occurs when instead of the expected “imaginary object” in the subject’s head “something quite different” comes along. At this moment of surprise, the Ego feels a rift between the expected idea of an “imaginary object” and the Non-Ego asserting itself and breaking off the Ego’s mental image. In this passage from his *Lectures on Pragmatism*, Peirce, in marking this tension, apparently conceives of the notion of double-consciousness along the lines of the subject-object model according to which human experience is represented following the standard of the perception of physical objects. But for reasons we have already examined, philosophical hermeneutics holds that the methodological individualism underlying the subject-object model ignores the *intersubjective* dimension of the meanings that make the subject’s access to the “imaginary object” possible and falls short when in the social world the Ego encounters not

¹⁴⁹ CP 5:512.

¹⁵⁰ CP 5:53.

objects but Alter Egos.¹⁵¹ Relating to one another exclusively on the basis of the subject-object model misconstrues the radical intersubjectivity of understanding and distorts human experience of other subjects. Hence, when it comes to understanding subjects as Alter Egos, we require an intersubjective model of double-consciousness.

Some years before Peirce,¹⁵² W.E.B. Du Bois had already established his now famous notion of double-consciousness in the essay “Of Our Spiritual Strivings.” Examining a social context, Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness preserves the element of tension but triangulates the relation of understanding to allow us to tap into the intersubjective dimension of our linguistically mediated experiences:

“[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with *second-sight* in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this *double consciousness*, this *sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity*. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ As we have seen *supra*, Heidegger’s conception of “world” is radically intersubjective: “[T]he world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world” (BT 155). Linguistically mediated world-disclosure – situated in the fore-structure of understanding and manifested in the average, everyday understanding of Being of *das Man* – precedes any individual subject and yet is itself neither an innerworldly object nor a (variant of the transcendental) subject: “But the Self of everydayness is the ‘they.’ *The ‘they’ is constituted by the way things have been publicly interpreted*, which expresses itself in idle talk” (BT 296, emphasis added). Hence, even when the subject encounters an object that frustrates her expectations, this experience is not merely a private event but has been shaped by “*the way things have been publicly interpreted*.”

¹⁵² While Du Bois’ collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (including “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”) was published in April 1903 and Peirce’s *Lectures on Pragmatism* (the passage cited above is from the second lecture) were held from March 26 to May 14, 1903, Du Bois’ essay first appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897.

¹⁵³ Du Bois 2007: 8-9, emphasis added; the passage continues: “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this *merging* he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. [...] This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius” (emphasis added). This “merging,” however, is quite different from Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons” (TM 337, 370), where, in this “thoughtful fusion of the whole of tradition with the present” for the purpose of understanding, the former always holds the upper hand (see *infra*). Du Bois opposes such a one-sided resolution in favor of the dominant perspective: “In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world” (Du Bois 2007: 9).

There is no mention of any element of shock or surprise in this account of double-consciousness, Du Bois is not concerned with the negativity of experience in the strict sense. Rather, double-consciousness, as Maria Lugones explains, is defined here as the capacity of being “able to hold two incompatible and parallel perceptions at once.”¹⁵⁴ Du Bois uses the metaphor of “second sight” to demonstrate that the “American Negro” has achieved two ways of understanding or relating to himself: through his own eyes and through the eyes of white America, i.e., through the veil of a racist construction of himself. In addition to how he understands himself, he has learned how white Americans perceive him and has internalized this dominant and dehumanizing perception. This is what Du Bois means when he explicates that one side of double-consciousness is the capacity “of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

And this capacity to capture social relations and intersubjective phenomena more broadly is precisely what, for our purposes, sets the Du Boisian notion of double-consciousness apart from Peirce’s account centered on the subject-object model.¹⁵⁵ Despite his repeated references to the sense of vision, Du Bois’s conception of double-consciousness is not grounded in the traditional model of perception. For to measure one’s soul by the tape of another world, that is, for someone to apply the standard of a different worldview to pass judgment on one’s own identity, one has to understand that perspective which requires taking a second-personal standpoint. This option, however, is ruled out on the basis of the subject-object relation which

¹⁵⁴ Lugones 2003: 156.

¹⁵⁵ I do not want to argue (as Gadamer does) that the S-O model has no use for scientific inquiry whatsoever in the social world, however, it must be modified in light of the consequences of meaning holism, see my discussion of this key issue of the debate between Gadamer and Habermas *infra* III.2.

admits only of the third-personal perspective of the Ego as an external observer. What is needed to access the full scope of human experience is a framework that allows the subject to access other subjects as Alter Egos – and not merely from the third-personal perspective of an external observer as another empirical object with observable behavioral regularities and causally determined drives.¹⁵⁶

This alternative framework within which subjects can encounter each other and interact in non-objectifying ways, letting them speak and recognizing them as making meaningful claims of their own, is the paradigm of communication. In conversation or dialogue subjects interact with each other adopting the alternating roles of speaker and hearer. As participants in conversation they can exchange their perspectives and come to an understanding about something in the world. The relation between them is a social relation between subjects who encounter each other as I and Thou which requires participants to adopt a *second-personal stance* toward each other:

“The I who is an interpreter is a *you* as a participant in communication. [...] I do not simply adopt your point of view or even mine in offering an adequate interpretation. Instead I do something that is much more complicated and dialogical: When I offer an interpretation of your action or practices, I adopt the point of view that you are an interpreter of me.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Some of interpretive social science tries to understand things through the points of view of others and thereby mitigate the problems of the third-personal perspective of the external observer by adopting a first-personal participatory stance that makes do without a general interpretive theory. The problems this approach faces, however, are similar to that of a strictly third-personal account (see Bohman 2000: 233). One implication of adopting a first-personal standpoint is the biased projections of the interpreter, a problem that can be explained using Elizabeth Spelman’s notion of *boomerang perception*: “I look at you and come right back to myself.” (Spelman 1988: 12). Boomerang perception lacks the reciprocity of the relation between two subjects interacting as each other’s Alter Egos: like a boomerang, the image returning to the Ego is an unaltered version of their own projection which replicates perceived sameness, erases difference, and therefore produces distorted (self-confirming) visions of others (experienced as Non-Egos) and the self, based solely on the Ego’s own world-disclosure. As a meta-attitude, this blindness to differences is often operative in colorblind ideology, see Medina 2013: 151: “The problem I want to call attention to, echoing Fanon, starts when universalistic claims of [the sort “We are all the same” or “All lives matter,” M.S.] inadvertently promote other-regarding attitudes that erase differences, such as the assumption that all others are, at bottom, just like me. When “we are all the same” becomes “you are all just like me” is when we find a meta-problem, the source of meta-ignorance: not simply a wrong-headed attitude toward specific others, but a restrictive overarching attitude that limits how others can appear to oneself, thus affecting one’s attitudes toward specific others in negative ways, restricting one’s sensitivity to differences and one’s capacity to learn about them. This too (and not just the blatant denials of humanity) makes one blind to human differences and becomes an obstacle to the acquisition of social knowledge.”

¹⁵⁷ Bohman 2000: 223-4.

Taking up the attitude toward another person as one's Alter Ego has effects on one's relation to self because once the Ego relates to the other person as their Alter Ego they realize that to the other person the Ego, too, appears as the second person's Alter Ego.¹⁵⁸ One's ability to adopt the interpretive perspective of another subject (whatever its content) is implied by Du Bois's social conception of double-consciousness which presupposes a framework that captures the intersubjective dimension of understanding oneself in the eyes of someone else, i.e., the second-personal stance that is characteristic of social interactions.

The intersubjective paradigm of communication, first developed by Humboldt,¹⁵⁹ underlies Gadamer's notion of *hermeneutic experience*, the experience of a "Thou" as a "genuine partner in dialogue."¹⁶⁰ Gadamer accentuates another salient feature of the communicative model, namely, the fact that adopting a second-personal stance toward others so to understand them as subjects (i.e., as one's second person interpreting oneself) according to the communicative model also opens up the normative dimension involved in conversation as establishing or maintaining relations between subjects. When speaker and hearer see each other as participants in conversation they relate to each other in ways that are open to the normative interpretations and expectations of the other. Hermeneutic experience is special because "the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us" and for this reason this kind of experience as well as the understanding about the other person we derive from it is, in Gadamer's broad construal of the term, a "moral phenomenon."¹⁶¹ And as a result of their "moral" quality, social,

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Habermas 1992: 189.

¹⁵⁹ See Taylor 1985: 256 ff.

¹⁶⁰ TM 352.

¹⁶¹ TM 352.

cultural, and linguistic phenomena can be experienced and understood only from the perspective of a participant within this dialogical subject-subject model:

“In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou – i.e., *not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us*. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond.”¹⁶²

This reciprocal openness to the meaningful claims of others and the inherent notion of symmetry of the communicative relation does not figure in the subject-object relation as it cannot distinguish, say, between the force of habit and rule-following, which is characteristic of the second-personal standpoint.

At this juncture, in order to round off our discussion of the hermeneutical-pragmatic notion of experience with a view to the experience of hermeneutical injustice and in order to, in a further step, utilize these insights to develop a more comprehensive theory of ideology,¹⁶³ there is yet another issue to be addressed. Said issue is a deep-seated conviction running through the hermeneutic tradition that experience is not exhaustively characterized by the cognitive import of our understanding of the world. As various thinkers in the hermeneutic tradition from Dilthey to Heidegger to contemporary figures like Charles Taylor point out, a fuller picture of human experience needs to account for the affective and conative dimensions of experience that complement its cognitive component.¹⁶⁴ The underlying idea is that language is not only

¹⁶² TM 355. Gadamer’s notion of hermeneutic experience is geared toward the interpretation of classical texts. He is primarily concerned with the experience of tradition, which he conceives of as “*language* [which] expresses itself like a Thou.” (TM 352) This view comes fraught with problems, some of which it inherits from taking Heidegger’s conception of language and its inextricable link between meaning and validity for granted. I will address some of these problems *infra* III.2. For now, introducing the idea of double-consciousness and establishing its link to the model of communication only serves to prepare our analysis of social experiences such as the experience of sexual harassment.

¹⁶³ See chapter 2, I.2.

¹⁶⁴ See, for instance, the famous dictum from the preface of Dilthey’s *Introduction to the Human Sciences*: “In the real-life process, willing, feeling, and thinking are only different aspects” (Dilthey 1989: 51; see also Davey 2013: 75). To be sure, for Dilthey, the several aspects play out in the distinct domains of “inner” and “outer” experience.

constitutive of what and how we intellectually grasp worldly phenomena but also how we feel and our dispositions to act. If language is indeed constitutive of our access to the world and if, additionally, our understanding is not merely a matter of our engaging with the world in a purely mental, disembodied, and disinterested way then it should come as no surprise that our emotions and volitions have interpretive power and shape our experiences.

In his Heidegger-inspired paper *Self-interpreting animals*, Charles Taylor foregrounds the constitutive role of language for our emotional access to the world. He argues that language is “the medium in which all our emotions, articulate and inarticulate, are experienced,”¹⁶⁵ which has the consequence that human emotion is always interpreted.¹⁶⁶ For Taylor, feelings are a mode of interpreting the world because in a symbolically pre-structured world emotional interpretations convey an embodied sense of a situation that can channel a particular insight. As he puts it, “feelings incorporate a certain articulation of our situation, that is, they presuppose that we characterize our situation in certain terms.”¹⁶⁷ The feeling of remorse, for instance, involves the sense that the agent did something wrong and regrets it. Likewise, feeling ashamed, to use another one of Taylor’s examples, denotes for the agent that they or someone else has done something humiliating, dishonorable, or unworthy. It is in this sense, that emotions – as

The split follows Kant’s distinction between internal (temporally organized) and external reality (spatially organized). Feeling and volition are at work merely in the psychic processes, the domain of inner experience (for emotions and conative states are given without the mediation of the senses), whereas outer experience (i.e., sense perception through vision and touch) is the exclusively representative, sense-mediated consciousness of physical facts, see Dilthey 1989: 374-5. On the ontic level, Heidegger thinks of Dasein’s moods and attunement as world-disclosing (see BT sect. 29). For the ontological level of world-disclosure through *Befindlichkeit*, see my discussion of anxiety below.

¹⁶⁵ Taylor 1985: 74-5 and 63.

¹⁶⁶ Although Taylor’s focus does not explicitly lie with the conative dimension of experience, he includes volitional states in his discussion of “experienced motivation” which, for him, encompass feelings, desires, purposes, and aspirations (see Taylor 1985: 47-8). We should also note that Taylor’s notion of “experience” is slightly nontechnical. It refers to a state of awareness of a certain situation; among the different and interlacing modes of accessing the situation, “feeling is an affective awareness” (ibid 61 and 48).

¹⁶⁷ Taylor 1985: 63-4.

interpretations – are charged with meaning and provide fallible access to the world. When I feel ashamed, I am under the impression that something shameful happened to me, that is, I understand whatever I did or whatever was done to me as shameful; but, as with every interpretation, on further examination, it could turn out that I was wrong about it. In addition to the fallible nature of our emotional interpretations,¹⁶⁸ Taylor calls our attention to the possibility that our emotional access to the world remains indeterminate: “Thus while a feeling of remorse implies our sense that our act was wrong, [...] it is quite a common experience for us to feel remorse without being able fully to articulate what is wrong about what we have done.”¹⁶⁹ Taylor’s insight and the idea of the embodiment of interpretation will not only help us to understand the experience of sexual harassment but also prove crucial to my notion of ideology as an embodied interpretive schema.¹⁷⁰

II.5. The full picture of the counter-experience of sexual harassment

Before piecing together and applying the various components of the hermeneutical-pragmatic notion of experiencing to the case of hermeneutical injustice, in order to present a fuller picture of the experience of sexual harassment, I want to give a more detailed statement of Carmita Wood’s account regarding the conduct of her boss, Boyce McDaniel. As Wood’s recalls, McDaniel’s “palpable sexual gestures,” moving his hands inside his pockets “as if he were stimulating his genitals,” leaning against her and brushing against her breast, came hand in hand with an outright disdain for the women working at the lab whom he objectified. Wood testified that he would “never look a woman in the eye but instead move his eyes up and down her body

¹⁶⁸ Which, in this regard, are no different from, say, our cognitive interpretations.

¹⁶⁹ Taylor 1985: 63.

¹⁷⁰ See chapter 2, I.

below the neck.”¹⁷¹ But when Wood and other women came forward to complain to the executive officer of the lab about his behavior, their concerns were brushed aside as “personal” issues these women were well “capable of taking care of themselves” and they were advised “to try not to get into those situations.”¹⁷² Given her economic vulnerability as a single mother of two and the lack of institutional support, this seemed to be the only viable option for her at the time. So, Wood devised strategies to avoid future encounters. She began to take the stairs instead of taking the elevator at work where McDaniel had force-kissed her when she was leaving the annual Christmas party, where he had previously pulled her on the dance floor and pulled up her clothes, coercing Wood to dance with him with her back exposed.¹⁷³ But even in the absence of her tormentor, who went on a semester-long leave shortly after the party, her mental and physical health did not improve. Anxiety over McDaniel’s return triggered psychosomatic symptoms. Her right thumb grew numb and she developed chronic neck and back pains. Finally, after her request for a transfer failed, she quit her job. When she was denied unemployment benefits, she called for a hearing to make her case. Two female co-workers accompanied Wood to the hearing, one of whom confirmed her story and testified to McDaniel’s misogynist behavior and repeated sexual advances. But the women’s testimony did not change the officer’s mind who, like the lab’s executive officer before him, maintained that her reasons to resign were “personal”¹⁷⁴ and “uncompelling.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Baker 2008: 28.

¹⁷² Baker 2008: 28.

¹⁷³ Baker 2008: 28; Brownmiller 1999: 515.

¹⁷⁴ Baker 2008: 28. On Brownmiller’s account (1999: 515) Wood admitted to “personal” reasons under duress: “When the claims investigator asked why she had left her job after eight years, Wood was at a loss to describe the hateful episodes. She was ashamed and embarrassed. Under prodding—the blank on the form needed to be filled in—she answered that her reasons had been personal.”

¹⁷⁵ For a more consequentialist reasoning, see the opinion of District Judge Herbert Jay Stern referencing the incident at the Christmas party in *Tomkins v Public Service Elec. Gas Co.* 422 F. Supp. 553 (D.N.J. 1976) who worries that the US legal system could break down under the strain of sexual harassment cases: “And if an inebriated approach by a supervisor to a subordinate at the office Christmas party could form the basis of a federal

Less than two months after Wood's unemployment claim was denied, the Human Affairs Program at Cornell organized a speak-out to break the silence and to raise consciousness about the newly coined term "sexual harassment." The posters for the event read "IS THIS REALLY FUNNY? ASK ANY WORKING WOMAN – Sexual harassment on the job is no joke!"¹⁷⁶ 275 women attended the meeting and about twenty of them, including Carmita Wood, shared their experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. The women recalled feelings of "self-blame, shame, and fear" and they described their experiences as "dehumanizing."¹⁷⁷ Of those who spoke out against sexual harassment many viewed it as a structural issue and an "abuse of power" directed against women in the workplace.¹⁷⁸ The speak-out proved important for the political movement against sexual harassment and preparing legal action; for sharing and debating the interpretations of their experiences helped determine the scope and detail the content of the new concept of sexual harassment.

Given our hermeneutic-pragmatic account of the making of a new experience as an embodied process in which an agent's expectations are frustrated, we are now in a position to understand the above sequence as a series of instances in the evolution of the counter-experience of sexual harassment through resignification and transformation of the agents' cognitive, affective, and conative interpretations in virtue of the new disclosure of sexual harassment.

lawsuit for sex discrimination if a promotion or a raise is later denied to the subordinate, we would need 4,000 federal trial judges instead of some 400." See also, along those lines and with a belittling reference to the trope of flirting, the opinion of District Judge Spencer Williams in *Miller v. Bank of America*, 418 F. Supp. 233 (N.D. Cal. 1976): "It is conceivable, under plaintiff's theory, that flirtations of the smallest order would give rise to liability. The attraction of males to females and females to males is a natural sex phenomenon and it is probable that this attraction plays at least a subtle part in most personnel decisions."

¹⁷⁶ Baker 2008: 33. The poster shows a cartoonish drawing of a female secretary running from the hands of her male boss, who is trying to make a pass at her, and exclaiming "My dictation speed is 40 mph."

¹⁷⁷ Baker 2008: 32.

¹⁷⁸ Baker 2008: 32.

For many women the new experience first manifested emotionally as the feeling of shame, a “painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behaviour.”¹⁷⁹ But this description leaves open the crucial question of who caused the distress.¹⁸⁰ I can feel ashamed for something I have done or because of something that was done to me. And this ambiguity over whether the shame they felt was self-inflicted or brought upon them corresponds to the testimony of the women at the speak-out where some of them described episodes of self-blame which comes from feeling responsible, at least in part, for their shame. Moreover, said ambiguity also affected the conative component of their experiential interpretation as it promoted divergent escape routes to evade shameful situations in the future. The women’s actions confirm this sense of confusion as in the case of Carmita Wood, who not only tried to avoid further encounters with her harasser by taking the stairs instead of the elevator and requested a transfer but also started to wear pants to work so that he could no longer stare at her legs¹⁸¹ – as if wearing a skirt or a dress and exposing one’s legs were an invitation that made a woman complicit in the objectifying gaze of her male co-workers. Having such guilt-induced inclinations and searching for what oneself could have done wrong can be linked to a sexist cultural stereotype according to which any woman who dresses provocatively or promiscuously (whatever the perceived criteria for dressing that way) is either intentionally leading somebody on or, at least, shouldn’t complain if men are made to believe that she is and act on it.¹⁸²

From a Heideggerian perspective, Wood’s anxiety and the somatic reactions it provoked further speak to the indeterminate being of the phenomenon. Anxiety, for Heidegger, is world-

¹⁷⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3rd ed., 2015, online version).

¹⁸⁰ The *Cambridge Dictionary* describes shame as “an uncomfortable feeling of guilt or of being ashamed because of your own or someone else’s bad behaviour.” <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/shame>>.

¹⁸¹ Baker 2008: 28.

¹⁸² For a contemporary depiction and embrace of that stereotype, see Koenig 1976: 90.

disclosing in a very basic sense, for anxiety – unlike fear – is not concerned with any specific object in the world:

“That in the face of which one has anxiety is not an entity within-the-world. (...) *That in the face of which one is anxious is completely indefinite.* (...) Nothing which is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety is anxious. (...)

Accordingly, when something threatening brings itself close, anxiety does not ‘see’ any definite ‘here’ or ‘yonder’ from which it comes. (...) Anxiety ‘does not know’ what that in the face of which it is anxious is.”¹⁸³

Once we know the object of our anxiety, that in the face of which anxiety is anxious, anxiety gives way to feelings such as fear which is about threats emanating from concrete objects, persons, or events and thus reestablishes one’s involvement with the world. To the contrary, anxiety creates a defamiliarizing distance between Dasein and the world so that we no longer feel at home in it. Anxiety feels “unheimlich,” that is, uncanny or unhomely, because anxiety throws Dasein into a state of meaninglessness in which the world as the totality of significance collapses. The metaphor Heidegger uses to illustrate this state is that of a person surrounded by complete darkness. In the dark, the world is still present, it is “there,” but since it cannot be made out it is “nowhere;” it is “already ‘there’, and yet nowhere; it is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one’s breath, and yet it is nowhere.”¹⁸⁴ This is why Heidegger thinks that that in the face of which anxiety is anxious is the world as such. In the state of anxiety, therefore, Dasein’s experience is the experience of negativity, the feeling of being displaced, of “not-being-at-home.” But Dasein’s experiencing of unhomeliness yields the possibility of a specific kind of disclosure. The defamiliarizing feeling of unhomeliness is a defamiliarization with the self-

¹⁸³ BT 230-1 (sect. 40; emphasis added). Fear, on the other hand, is about some imminent and determinate harm (cf. BT sect. 30). We are fearful of a definite danger in the here and now (e.g., Carmita Wood’s boss approaching her in the elevator after the Christmas party). It seems to me that Carmita Wood’s basic *Befindlichkeit*, nonetheless, is best captured as that of anxiety, for it loomed large and manifested in somatic symptoms even in the absence of any imminent threat. We could say that she feared the culprit but the object she was anxious of was the unknown social structure of sexual harassment.

¹⁸⁴ BT 231.

assuring everyday understanding of Being (*das Man*). Anxiety brings Dasein “back from its absorption in the ‘world’. Everyday familiarity collapses.”¹⁸⁵ As one’s everyday familiarity collapses and Dasein is distanced from the particularity of its everyday understanding of Being, it realizes “that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being.”¹⁸⁶ On this view, our feeling anxious or unhomely thus has the potential to restore the sense that our understanding of Being – as it is governed by the public everyday understanding of Being – could be inauthentic without knowing the specific nature of that in the face of which one is anxious.

But we should be careful to note that this route toward, say, self-examining the authenticity of one’s own being which involves bearing with anxiety and could open up the possibility of being otherwise in an alternative world-disclosure, is but a possibility. Another possibility is that of escaping anxiety by letting oneself be drawn back into the public interpretedness of Being. As John Haugeland remarks, “[f]alling back into public life (normality) is a way of escaping anxiety, and the public culture encourages this. Indeed, the culture offers ‘commonsense’ interpretations that tend to minimize anxiety itself – turn it into (confuse it with) some weak-kneed or adolescent self-indulgence. Thus, the very possibility of genuine anxiety is publicly confused and covered up – disguised and forgotten.”¹⁸⁷ When Dasein is drawn back into the familiar and allegedly homey world of public everydayness and its “commonsensical” dominant interpretations depicting sexual harassment as flirting, as a joke,¹⁸⁸ or as a personal matter, the road toward alternative disclosures is foreclosed.

¹⁸⁵ BT 233.

¹⁸⁶ BT 235.

¹⁸⁷ Haugeland 2013: 208.

¹⁸⁸ See below.

As indicated by their embodied understanding of the situation, it seemed clear at this point that the behavior was wrongful and was at odds with what the women expected. What they first experienced was disruptive of their expectations as the incidents of what was to become sexual harassment ran counter to what they perceived as fair and respectful treatment by their male colleagues and superiors in the workplace. It was evident to them that the denigration was sexual in nature and directed against women. However, they didn't know whether their experiences of wrongfulness were indicative of a structural issue – an awareness which began to surface only after women were able to compare their experiences to those of other women, understand their similarities, and notice patterns – and not the deed of a single “dirty old man.”¹⁸⁹ Moreover, they didn't know what exactly that structure or the nature of the wrong was, if maybe they were involved in it and how they were involved in it.¹⁹⁰ This is the sense in which the women were at a loss to comprehend their social situation regarding this new experience. Doing so required further “conceptual labor in company with others” (Mills) to determine, *inter alia*, the moral character of the wrong, establish its “dehumanizing” and “objectifying” and therefore unjust nature as a structural “abuse of power,” and delineate its scope vis-à-vis alternative notions such as “sexual intimidation,” “sexual abuse,” “sexual coercion,” or “sexual exploitation.”¹⁹¹ And, of course, it required refuting the existing dominant misinterpretations and stereotypes which characterized the behavior as flirtatious (and hence either harmless in nature

¹⁸⁹ This is how Carmita Wood described McDaniel who treated her and other women as “second-class citizens, and inferior beings” (Baker 2008: 28).

¹⁹⁰ they experienced: Does it constitute a form of sexualized or psychological violence, gender dominance, psychological abuse, intimidation, exploitation, or coercion? Is it ethical, legal, or moral in kind? Is the issue confined to the environment of the workplace or does it affect other social spheres? Which of the behavioral patterns they observed could it be attributed to? Is the cause of the wrong to be sought in the individual behavior of the agent or a larger social power structure? Are there others, besides the culprit, who are complicit in this behavior? Who is to be held accountable for it and how? These are only a few of the questions involved in the process of “conceptual labor” the women participating in the speak-out had to approach “in company with others” in order to arrive at the notion of sexual harassment as a new disclosure.

¹⁹¹ Cf. the discussion over some of the alternatives in Brownmiller 1999: 515.

or even a sign of respect), trivialized its abusive character by dismissing it as mere jokes (that women shouldn't take too seriously, for, after all, silliness and an easygoing attitude are good for office moral), essentialized gender roles à la "boys will be boys", and framed the issue as a "personal" matter which, by implication, meant that women have a personal responsibility to not get themselves into such situations and should take care of it on their own. All in all, it was (and still is!) a concerted communicative effort which eventually determined the conceptual contours of sexual harassment which, in turn, had repercussions on the affective and conative components of the experience.¹⁹² How this enhanced understanding transformed the affective and conative interpretations shows, *inter alia*, in how their feeling of self-blame subsided and in how their disposition to act shifted from a path of avoidance to active resistance in the process of the counter-disclosure of sexual harassment taking shape.

In consequence, it seems correct to me to say that what women initially experienced was not yet the experience of sexual harassment. Rather, they experienced an indeterminate sexualized wrongdoing in the negative sense that their embodied expectations were frustrated.¹⁹³ This new experience gradually and – by virtue of the "conceptual labor in company with others" – retrospectively evolved into the confirming experience of sexual harassment. To be sure, this does not imply, in turn, that at first there was no thing and thus no experience where the word "sexual harassment" was lacking. They certainly made a new experience in the hermeneutic-

¹⁹² On how further clarity and articulacy can transform our emotional and conative interpretations of a phenomena, see Taylor 1985: 69-72, who argues that with a "move from the inchoate to the articulate," which is "precisely the change which language brings about," our "emotions themselves are transformed."

¹⁹³ In some passages, Mason's analysis seems to be closer to my own. For example, when she writes that it was "women's interpretations of their treatment as wrongful and unjust that fueled the resistance movement that was responsible for naming sexual harassment" (Mason 2011: 298). Here the experience is not identified as that of sexual harassment, the concise descriptive content of the wrongful and unjust treatment is left indeterminate. Nonetheless, as I try to argue, even from that perspective it is not merely about naming the experience but a matter of working out its content in terms of its articulacy. As Charles Taylor (1985: 70-1) puts it: "It is not just applying the name that counts, but coming to 'see-feel' that this is the right description; this is what makes the difference. Language is essential here because it articulates insight, or it makes insight possible."

pragmatic sense I have tried to develop,¹⁹⁴ but their initial experiential interpretation of the phenomenon was, so to say, still in the making. The numerous aspects of the conceptual labor that was (and still is!) involved in this process and to which I tried to call attention in the foregoing analysis speak to my thesis that what was at stake here was not a matter of simply naming an experience that was already there. Such a nominalist understanding would neglect the constitutive role of language and its world-disclosing function for the making of an experience. Therefore, a better way to characterize their hermeneutic condition is indeed to say that the world-disclosing resources at their disposal did not allow them to make (sufficient) sense of the experience they made, i.e., they were not able to fully access, understand, and articulate the wrong of sexual harassment.

Experiencing sexual harassment in the sense of going beyond the negative indeterminacy of the new experience required a new disclosure of the phenomenon which made it intelligible and hence fully experienceable as the specific wrong of sexual harassment. Being able to fully understand that experience is the product of a process in which the concept of sexual harassment and inferentially related concepts, which together constitute a counter-disclosure,¹⁹⁵ emerged by way of the embodied experiences of women and their re-signification in light of the “conceptual labor in company with others,” which enabled a new understanding of the phenomenon.¹⁹⁶ This collaborative achievement did not take place inside a hermeneutical blank space. The women’s attempts to make sense of their situation ran up against and had to overcome numerous cultural

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *supra* II.2. and II.3.

¹⁹⁵ The concept of sexual harassment alone does not yet constitute a counter-disclosure. The scope of the counter-disclosure is broader than the single concept of sexual harassment. It encompasses an entire semantic field of concepts that are inferentially connected to sexual harassment (e.g., marital rape), and which together make up an interpretive schema – analogous to the set of concepts (“flirting,” “joking,” and “personal matter”) they call into question. For an analysis that shows the scope of such a counter-disclosure, see chapter 3, IV.

¹⁹⁶ As an interpretation of the phenomenon, this understanding is of course fallible and subject to review and constant resignification.

stereotypes and misinterpretations. This is why we have to understand sexual harassment as a counter-disclosure that enables a counter-experience.

However, even if – as the case of sexual harassment shows – agents are able to make sense of their experiences on the basis of counter-disclosures, on the idealist view it would be impossible to learn from such experiences. This is the result of a particularly strong version of meaning holism, the thesis that meaning determines reference, and the normative status of the perfect tense *a priori*.¹⁹⁷

Meaning holism holds that the most basic unit of significance in a language is not an individual word or sentence but in fact the entire language,¹⁹⁸ so that “[o]ne might say that language as a whole is presupposed in any one of its parts,”¹⁹⁹ or that, in Wittgenstein’s words, “to understand a sentence means to understand a language.”²⁰⁰ Thinking of language as a holistic structure of significance is characteristic of the HHH-tradition.²⁰¹ Heideggerian linguistic idealism, however, subscribes to a particularly strong version of meaning holism according to which language not only discloses the world but where the particular world-disclosure in which one happens to find oneself monopolizes meaning, determines our experience, and acts as the final court of appeal for our knowledge about the world, so that we ultimately cannot learn from new experiences.

¹⁹⁷ This is what Heidegger (1984: 64) means when he explains that the *a priori* is that which is both “before” and “above” any singular entity, that which “grounds” the entity.

¹⁹⁸ Putnam 1990: 283.

¹⁹⁹ Taylor 1985: 230.

²⁰⁰ Wittgenstein 2009: sect. 199. On this view, all meaning is contextual and the context in which linguistic signs become meaningful is ultimately language in its entirety. Since all meanings hang together, one could not individualize any primary class of building blocks, starting from which one could generate the meanings of larger strings of linguistic units, or isolate any context-transcending “literal meaning” – as atomistic views of language try to do.

²⁰¹ See Taylor 2016: 18-23.

As we have seen, the hermeneutic *as*, situated in the fore-structure of understanding, determines the ontology of a language: it decides a priori what there is and what there can be.²⁰² As a consequence, our a priori knowledge of language is constitutive of our knowledge of the world and determines our experience.²⁰³ The result is that we cannot learn from experience either from within or without: Whatever constitutes experience cannot be contradicted by said experience. Inversely, any attempt to correct one's knowledge of the world through new disclosures is likewise destined to fail. This is because competing conceptual schemas or rival theories are *incommensurable*, a conclusion Heidegger finds himself forced to accept as a result of abandoning the universal validity of a priori knowledge. Incommensurability does not allow a universalist perspective regarding different paradigms or concepts²⁰⁴ as it makes the notions of reference and validity dependent on the prior understanding of Being:

“Indeed, if the background knowledge shared by speakers in virtue of the world-disclosing function of language determines that to which they refer with their linguistic signs, but the holistic character of this background knowledge makes it impossible to draw a boundary between knowledge of meaning and knowledge of the world, then the slightest difference in the speakers' background knowledge will prevent them from talking about the same thing.”²⁰⁵

Any attempt to communicate one's insight across the boundaries of conceptual schemas is rendered meaningless – speakers would be talking past each other because their expressions referred to different entities. By virtue of the ubiquitous *as*-structure of interpretation (successful) reference always presupposes that the subject attributively uses a linguistic term or expression to

²⁰² Whenever we attempt to understand something, we cannot but “always already” understand this something *as* something – not merely in the predicative sense of attributing certain properties to an object (apophantic *as*) but in the prior hermeneutically attributive sense of disclosure (hermeneutic *as*), i.e., placing it within the domain of projected possibilities given by the ontology of language. See Heidegger (1978: 228): “World is the totality expressing the quintessence of a priori determinations which state that which belongs to the essence [‘Wasgehalt’] of a possible being.” (my translation)

²⁰³ This does not follow from meaning holism alone, but requires the additional claim that meaning determines reference, which commits Heidegger to an indirect theory of reference, see Lafont 2000: 189-99.

²⁰⁴ As a result of his commitment to the strong version of meaning holism, Heidegger (and Gadamer) can conceive such a perspective only in the guise of an (unattainable) God's eye view, see *infra*.

²⁰⁵ Lafont 1999: 234.

identify an entity pursuant to its true essence as given by the prior understanding of Being. On this view, neither can experience relative to a specific interpretive schema or worldview contradict the a priori knowledge that is constitutive of said experience nor can a new experience (based on an alternative disclosure) work as a corrective and initiate a process of learning through (new) experience. Thus, Heideggerian hermeneutic idealism cannot explain any rational learning process from within or without.²⁰⁶ It is at a loss to explain the rational choice between different bodies of theory or scientific paradigms; nor could it explain how the term sexual harassment could come about and/or how it could begin to challenge dominant disclosures. As per the holistic structure of language and its constitutive role in disclosing the world we are trapped inside the circle of understanding into which we are thrown. This considerable shortcoming of philosophical hermeneutics calls for an alternative, which I will present in the next section.

III. Critical hermeneutics

In the absence of the referential use of language the combination of a strong version of meaning holism and the immunization of a priori knowledge against criticism, hermeneutical idealism absolutizes the world-disclosing function of language and thus cannot accommodate the kind of learning process we have seen through the experience of sexual harassment. Arriving at a truly critical hermeneutics requires de-absolutizing linguistic world-disclosure so that the a priori background knowledge and the world-disclosing concepts and meanings (situated in the fore-structure of understanding) can be subjected to criticism. As Cristina Lafont has shown, such a

²⁰⁶ Lafont 2002: xv.

critical hermeneutics presupposes both a weaker version of meaning holism and a further de-transcendentalization of the synthetic a priori, which can be found in Putnam's fallibilist notion of the contextual a priori.²⁰⁷ In conjunction with the referential use of language, this addition yields the possibility of the comparative standpoint as the first step toward establishing a critical hermeneutics (III.1.). If, against this background, the theory of direct reference is further incorporated into Habermas's theory of communicative rationality (which transforms the hermeneutic model by introducing the idea of a counterfactual agreement and a formal notion of world), we end up with an account of hermeneutics that can accommodate the possibility of a context-transcending critique and learning processes on the basis of third-personal knowledge as well as new disclosures without breaking the dialogical symmetry of the model of understanding (III.2.). In the next two chapters, I will develop the argument that such a critical hermeneutics is necessary not only to understand the nature of ideology as an embodied interpretive schema but also to critique ideologies. But before putting critical hermeneutics to the test, the final section of this chapter addresses the quandary of totalizing ideology. In doing so, my analysis will not only call attention to the structural similarities between the former and the absolutization of world-disclosure but also argue that, from a hermeneutic perspective, we can develop an in-principle objection against the possibility of an all-consuming ideology (III.3.).

III.1. On the way to critique: the contextual a priori and the comparative standpoint

Given the desideratum of de-absolutizing the notion of linguistic world-disclosure so that our fore-understanding and background knowledge can be revised in light of new experiences, we shall first look for an alternative conception of the synthetic a priori that preserves the

²⁰⁷ Lafont 2000: 275-88.

situatedness of our understanding resulting from Heidegger's de-transcendentalization, but instead of revering hermeneutic primordially, pushes this idea further in order to do away with the transcendental remains that have survived in the component of necessity. As has been argued, such an alternative can be found in Putnam's theory of the contextual apriori.²⁰⁸

To begin with, Putnam agrees that the distinction a priori/a posteriori is (still) significant insofar as there are statements (e.g., basic propositions, definitions in scientific theories) which can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed by observation or experience alone. Statements expressing the basic propositions or definitions of a specific conceptual schema can be regarded as having contextually a priori status only from a perspective internal to the conceptual schema or theory. As a consequence, the a priori status of such statements is subject to change and no longer has any absolute authority. Stripped off their status as universal conditions of the possibility of experience these statements are merely "*quasi-necessary*," i.e., necessary relative to a specific conceptual schema.²⁰⁹ While such a quasi-necessary statement enjoys a special role within the conceptual schema, this does not imply that "the statement is necessarily *true*, although, of course, it is thought to be true by someone whose knowledge that [conceptual schema, M.S.] is."²¹⁰ Contextual apriority thus understood maintains that such statements cannot be refuted by empirical knowledge alone. What their invalidation requires is a new conceptual schema or theory:

"there are statements in science which can only be overthrown by a new theory – and not by observation alone. Such statements *have* a sort of 'apriority' prior to the invention of the new theory which challenges or replaces them: they are *contextually a priori*. Giving up the idea that there are any absolutely *a priori* statements requires us to also give up the correlative idea [...]"

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Putnam 1994: 251.

²¹⁰ Putnam 1979: 240.

that *a posteriori* statements [...] are always and at all times ‘empirical’ in the sense that they have specifiable confirming experiences and specifiable disconfirming experiences.”²¹¹

To illustrate his claim, Putnam adduces the example of the failure of Euclidean geometry as a model for physical space. Euclidean geometry, Putnam explains, was always revisable in light of an alternative geometry but this abstract revisability became a live option only with the advent of an actually conceivable rival theory that would invalidate the former as empirically false. In this context, commenting on the example of Euclidean geometry, Putnam writes in a later essay:

“I argued against the idea that the principles of Euclidean geometry originally represented an empirical hypothesis. To be sure, they were not necessary truths. They were *false*; false considered as a description of the space in which bodies exist and move, ‘physical space,’ and one way of showing that a body of statements is not necessary is to show that the statements are not even true [...]. But, I argued, this only shows that the statements of Euclidean geometry are synthetic; I suggested that to identify ‘empirical’ and ‘synthetic’ is to lose a useful distinction. The way in which I proposed to draw that distinction is as follows: call a statement empirical relative to a [conceptual schema, M.S.] B if possible observations [...] would be known to disconfirm the statement (without drawing on anything outside of that [conceptual schema, M.S.]). [...] The putative truths of Euclidean geometry were, prior to their overthrow, simultaneously synthetic and necessary (in this relativized sense [of being necessary relative to a conceptual schema, M.S.]). The point of this new distinction was, as I explained, to emphasize that there are at any given time some accepted statements which cannot be overthrown merely by *observations*, but can only be overthrown by thinking of a whole body of alternative theory as well.”²¹²

The upshot of Putnam’s analysis is that some statements such as the definitions and basic propositions of a conceptual schema possess a priori status if, in fact, it is impossible to determine precisely how to invalidate them from within this conceptual scheme, i.e., if no possible observations are known to disconfirm the statement without drawing on external resources.²¹³ However, the “contextually a priori” status such statements possess is considerably

²¹¹ Putnam 1983: 95.

²¹² Putnam 1994: 250-1 (internal footnote omitted; my modifications reflect the new terminology as laid out by Putnam in this paper).

²¹³ Putnam (1994: 251) points out that this is not a question of our imagination: “I would further emphasize the nonpsychological character of the distinction by pointing out that the question is not a mere question of what some

weaker than preceding notions of apriority. Neither does the descriptive content of the terms have unconditional authority over our knowledge (only “*quasi-necessity*”) nor are their meanings “fixed once and for all”:

“Because, when an entire body of beliefs runs up against recalcitrant experiences, ‘revision can strike anywhere,’ as Quine has put it. Even if a term is originally introduced into science via an explicitly formulated definition, the status of the resulting truth is not forever a privileged one, as it would have to be if the term were simply a synonym for the *definiens*.”²¹⁴

An important lesson of Putnam’s critique is that the received permanency of the dichotomy of unrevisable a priori (ontological) and revisable a posteriori (ontic) knowledge and their respective accounts of truth (primordial unconcealment and standard correctness) no longer stand to reason. Once disconfirmed in light of a rival theory, the same statement previously regarded as a priori true is now considered a posteriori false. Since the validity of contextually a priori statements *can* be questioned from the standpoint of a new conceptual scheme about the same entity or phenomenon which, for that purpose, must provide a way of showing exactly why such a statement is to be regarded invalid a posteriori,²¹⁵ their apriority is only a temporary feature of such statements.

It is the critical potential inherent in the fallibilism that follows consistently from the possibility of using linguistic expressions referentially that establishes a standpoint from which, first, we can access the same entity or phenomenon under various descriptions and, second, can compare those descriptions as materially distinct but equally meaningful attempts to grasp the referent. The prospect of such a *comparative standpoint* that enables agents to judge the

people can imagine or not imagine; it is a question of what, given a conceptual scheme, one knows how to falsify or at least disconfirm.”

²¹⁴ Putnam 1991: 9.

²¹⁵ Putnam (1979: 239-42) exemplifies this by explaining how eventually the general theory of relativity proved the Euclidean conception of physical space wrong.

presumed validity of contextually a priori statements was impossible from the perspective of hermeneutic idealism. Due to the infamous commitment that the understanding of Being projects a prescriptive and unalterable ontology, the idealist stance on meaning holism implies that a difference in meaning of the a priori statements belonging to different conceptual schemas (“projections”) issues in their reference to different entities: If definitions operate attributively, then different definitions must refer to different entities. Thus, because of the incommensurable ontological projections of alternative conceptual schemas, their respective a priori statements could never pick out the same referent. Identity of reference, however, is the first necessary condition for establishing a comparative standpoint.²¹⁶ This point is stressed by Putnam’s fallibilist take on meaning holism on the basis of a direct theory of reference. When a priori statements are used referentially the identity of their referents is what makes the comparison of descriptions belonging to different conceptual schemas possible; it establishes a point of convergence between opposing yet equally meaningful viewpoints that unlocks the semantic potential for comparing alternative descriptions – the baseline requirement for critique and processes of cognitive learning.

It is implausible to think – as the linguistic idealist does – that the referent(s) of the old theory vanish or are supplanted with the emergence of a new theory. There is no good reason to believe that after the term “sexual harassment” and the portending descriptions had emerged, women no longer understood interpretations of sexual predations as flirtatious boyish pranks,

²¹⁶ For Heidegger, this is not an option. As a result of their pedigree and his commitment to incommensurability, comparing (a priori) statements belonging to different conceptual schemas (projections of Being) is a meaningless undertaking. Any such attempt would run up against the insurmountable problem that it lacks a point of comparison where the two projections (or the two descriptions) could converge, for the only conceivable point of convergence, for Heidegger, is the identity of meaning. Otherwise their comparison proves to be meaningless because from the perspective of one conceptual schema the meaning of the statements of the alternative conceptual schema (as well as the objects they refer to) are not accessible.

etc.; that is, these interpretations were still meaningful to them as interpretations of that same behavior – yet invalidated. Having a new description at one’s disposal to get into linguistic contact with the referent does not ipso facto render the precursor meaningless.

Similarly, one does not have to endorse the new conceptual schema as a better interpretation of the referent and agree with its descriptive content in order to understand it. What is required is merely that, in a given context, the speaker understands a certain expression as the referential use of a fallible description and realizes that this description is about the same object or phenomenon their own description picks out.²¹⁷ When, for instance, the lab’s executive officer dismissed Carmita Wood’s request on the basis that in his view (i.e., according to one of the dominant interpretations) the reported incidents appear as a “personal matter,”²¹⁸ nothing indicates that he did not understand himself to be talking about the same actions described by Wood or that there was doubt about whether or not the incidents were part of the same social world of phenomena existing independent of their conceptualizations. Likewise, when the author of the article *The Persons in the Office: An Ardent Plea for Sexual Harassment* states that “[h]arassment – or, as some of us would call it, flirting – is a happier assertion of humanness than sabotage or shoplifting,”²¹⁹ she does not suggest that some use the terms “harassment” and “flirting” synonymously or that they refer to different social phenomena. To the contrary, her use of the term indicates that she is well aware of “harassment” and “flirting” being alternative

²¹⁷ This still requires shared meanings but not in the sense of a shared world-disclosure or background understanding but in the sense of a factual agreement between speakers in a given context.

²¹⁸ A statement characterizing the reported incidents as “personal matters” must be considered synthetic a priori from the point of view of their conceptual scheme. There is no observation or available experience prior to the introduction of the concept of sexual harassment to contradict it, for there does not exist any projection of meaning from within that world-disclosure that would readily mark the behavior as unjustifiable. The concept of sexual harassment alone does not even suffice to debunk the claim as it required further feminist critique to dismantle the systemic sexism inherent in the liberal conception of the public/private-divide, see the classic Pateman 1988.

²¹⁹ Koenig 1976: 90.

descriptions of the same actions. The very fact that she disagrees with using the term “harassment” further gives the impression that she indeed has a grasp of the new concept as an alternative way of accessing the phenomenon but prefers to continue to embrace it as a flirtatious “assertion of humanness.”

This reconstruction of the comparative standpoint thus refutes the incommensurability of conceptual schemas (or paradigms) and proposes, in Putnam’s words, that the “idea that paradigm shifts are just things that *happen* has been replaced by the idea that it can be justified to start looking for a paradigm to replace one’s existing paradigm, and it can be *justified* to decide that one has found a good paradigm to serve as the replacement.”²²⁰ As a result, agents can *rationally* choose between a priori statements belonging to different conceptual schemas and justify their choices vis-à-vis others.

The possibility to assume a comparative standpoint as a function of Putnam’s weaker version of meaning holism and the contextualized a priori puts us in a position to address the final systematic objection rooted in the strong version of meaning holism, which holds that by way of the universality of the mode of understanding speakers cannot adopt an objectifying attitude toward language and their tradition without at the same time reifying language and breaking dialogical symmetry. This claim is one of the key controversies in the debate between Habermas and Gadamer over the possibility of hermeneutical model for ideology critique.²²¹ In the next section, I will present Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality as providing a compelling solution to the problem of how to incorporate third-personal knowledge, which is essential for learning processes within and across conceptual schemas.

²²⁰ Putnam 1990: 125, emphasis added.

²²¹ See the contributions in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971). On the debate between Gadamer and Habermas, see Ingram 1983; Jay 2010; Misgeld 1977.

The theory of communicative rationality replaces the traditional hermeneutical notion of world as the “totality of significance” with a formal one. In a realist fashion, this formal notion merely requires that speakers presuppose the existence of a world that is not identical with their interpretations of it. When speakers access entities or phenomena under this presupposition, they assume an objectifying attitude toward the interpretandum. Since this externalist attitude is grounded in the communicative competence of all speakers, introducing third-personal knowledge does not break dialogical symmetry. As a result of the realist presupposition, the validity claims of speakers depend, in part, on whether or not the non-epistemic conditions obtain and thus necessarily transcend the interpretive context or tradition. In the final analysis, we arrive at an account of hermeneutics which opens the possibility of a context-transcending critique and, coincidentally, makes the critique of ideology possible.²²²

III.2. It's a formal world after all: The full picture of critical hermeneutics

Meaning holism is rooted in the contextualist insight that any attempt to distance ourselves from our understanding of entities in order to make them transparent requires further meanings. These meanings come from the stock disclosed by the understanding of Being. Heidegger hermeneutically rephrases this last point in his explanation of the circle of understanding: “Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted.”²²³ We find ourselves “always already” inside the circle of understanding. Just as in *Being and Time* there is no standpoint for grasping the “totality of significance” from outside an understanding of Being; after the *Kehre* (“language is the house of Being”) there exists no extra-

²²² See chapter 3.

²²³ BT 194.

linguistic standpoint, we could adopt to look at language and the prior structure of intelligibility setting the standards for our access to reality from the outside. Heidegger reiterates this point in *The Way to Language*: “In order to be who we are, we human beings remain committed to and within the being of language and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else.”²²⁴ This point is reiterated in Gadamer’s statement that “[w]e cannot see a linguistic world from above in this way, for there is no point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could become an object.”²²⁵

Gadamer stresses that according to philosophical hermeneutics we understand ourselves and the world as partners in conversation. In dialogue we encounter others from the internal standpoint of a participant. But as partners in conversation we are also historical beings situated in a given tradition that molds our fore-understanding in the form of prejudices, pre-conceptions, and interpretive schemas. Our pre-understanding determines the scope of possible meanings and thus the scope of plausible agreements for the members of a particular linguistic community.²²⁶ Transcending the interpretive context of one’s tradition proves impossible because it is through her tradition that the agent understands the world and herself. Thus, for Gadamer, critique is possible only within the enabling limitations of a tradition, for he thinks that the conditions that guarantee the objectivity of understanding are the very same that guarantee the intersubjectivity of communication. In addition, since it is language (the tradition that speaks to us like a “Thou”²²⁷) that enables us to access reality in the first place, we cannot abandon our linguistically mediated tradition and adopt the neutral stance of an external observer, who looks

²²⁴ OWL 134.

²²⁵ TM 444 and 449.

²²⁶ TM 294.

²²⁷ TM 352: “tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is language – i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou.” Thus, “language is already present in any acquisition of experience, and in it the individual ego comes to belong to a particular linguistic community.” (TM 342)

at it from the outside. Such a third-personal approach to language and understanding would reify language by attempting to grasp it “simply as a fact that can be empirically investigated,” treating language as an object where, in reality, language “comprehends everything that can ever be an object.”²²⁸

From the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, it is a mistake to assume that we could adopt an extra-linguistic (and hence extra-worldly) standpoint for any access to a referent is through a sign imbued with the meanings of one’s tradition. Philosophical hermeneutics rejects the positivist dogma of the neutral observer who produces objective (meaning value-neutral, unprejudiced) knowledge from an extra-linguistic standpoint, i.e., a standpoint outside the linguistically mediated practices of the tradition. Given the view of language as world-disclosing, the critic cannot put aside the fore-understanding that situates her in a historical tradition. Assuming an (allegedly neutral) external standpoint would break dialogical symmetry. While in psychoanalytic therapy²²⁹ and some other contexts participants can voluntarily recognize the authority of the expert, we simply cannot assume that citizens voluntarily submit to the critic’s

²²⁸ TM 405.

²²⁹ The context of the debate between Gadamer and Habermas was the latter’s depth-hermeneutic approach to ideology critique modeled on the psychoanalytic situation (the therapeutic dialogue between analyst and patient). From Gadamer’s perspective the psychoanalytic model appears problematic because it departs from the hermeneutic conception of dialogical symmetry. In psychoanalytic dialogue, the patient identifies as someone who seeks help and recognizes the authority of the therapist based on the latter’s scientific merit. Recognition of therapeutic authority is voluntary; it can be withdrawn at any given time and legitimizes therapeutic discourse as a relation between non-equals. In a socio-political setting, however, we cannot assume general voluntary consent on the part of the addressees that could legitimize the authority of the critic. Unlike the patient, other members of society do not submit to the authority of the critic and recognize the latter’s expertise for no good reason. In giving unsolicited advice from the standpoint of an external observer, the critic renounces the role of a partner in conversation and imposes her own conception of the good life on others. Thus, the model of the doctor patient-relation, Gadamer argues, does not apply to interlocutors in the social arena, for they must engage with each other as social partners on equal terms. Freud himself, in anticipation of an all-too hasty application of psychoanalytic therapy to the social realm, has voiced a very similar concern: “I would not say that an attempt of this kind to carry psycho-analysis over to the cultural community was absurd or doomed to be fruitless. But we should have to be very cautious and not forget that, after all, we are only dealing with analogies [...] And as regards the therapeutic application of our knowledge, what would be the use of the most correct analysis of social neuroses, since no one possesses authority to impose such a therapy upon the group?” (Freud 1989: 110).

expert authority in socio-political matters. Stepping outside the role as a participant in dialogue by adopting the external perspective of an expert to liberate social agents from their collective delusions, the critic merely imposes her views about the good life on others and immunizes her position against objections from within the tradition. Thus, for Gadamer the critic of ideology is nothing but a technocrat, a “social engineer who creates without liberating.”²³⁰

In this way, philosophical hermeneutics “makes the claim to universality.”²³¹ But in propagating the universality of understanding and, by implication, rejecting the possibility of taking an objectifying stance toward language philosophical hermeneutics faces a significant methodological problem in the form of an explanatory deficit. The hermeneutic model is limited insofar as speakers as participants in dialogue do not have access to the kind of empirical (causal or quasi-causal) knowledge that the natural and social sciences provide. The sciences acquire such knowledge from a third-personal standpoint that identifies, for instance, the non-intentional effects of actions and social structures, unintended consequences and byproducts of interactions that are not under the agents’ full voluntary control or go completely unnoticed from the perspective of participants. As a structure that operates behind the backs of subjects, the fore-structure of understanding could never be subjected to scrutiny from the perspective of participants who, in communication and for establishing consensus depend on the pre-conceptions and prejudices this very structure provides.

Since Gadamer inherits Heidegger’s view on language and conception of “world” as the “totality of significance” his own version of philosophical hermeneutics runs up against the same

²³⁰ Gadamer 1990: 293.

²³¹ Gadamer 1990: 277. The passage continues: “This claim rests on the view that understanding and agreement [...] are the culminating form of human life, which in its final formalization is a speech community. Nothing is left out of this speech community; absolutely no experience of the world is excluded.”

problems. What guarantees the identity of reference, as the *conditio sine qua non* for understanding and establishing mutual agreement between speakers, is the prior identity of meaning. On this view, mutual understanding presupposes a shared linguistic world-disclosure or common tradition that passes on the projected possibilities of a horizon of expectations within which speakers establish the plausibility of options and come to agreement. In line with Heidegger this pre-existing consensus, on the basis of which understanding becomes possible, is invested with normative authority which, analogously, is secured internally by the claim that meaning determines reference and externally by the thesis of incommensurability.

In his debate with Gadamer, Habermas is in agreement with the former's claim that factually we always already find ourselves in a tradition that frames our understanding. As interpreting and self-interpreting subjects our understanding is bound to a linguistically structured context that precedes us. But Habermas rejects Gadamer's attempt to rehabilitate tradition by investing our *factual* dependence on shared meanings and background knowledge to come to an agreement with normative authority. Because it "turns the context-dependency of the understanding of meaning [into] the ontologically inevitable primacy of linguistic tradition,"²³² philosophical hermeneutics has nothing to offer to critique the linguistically mediated prior structure of intelligibility:

"The objectivity of a 'happening of tradition' that is made up of symbolic meaning is not objective enough. Hermeneutics comes up against walls of the traditional framework from the inside, as it were. As soon as these boundaries have been experienced and recognized, cultural traditions can no longer be posed as absolute. It makes good sense to conceive of language as a kind of meta-institution on which all social institutions are dependent; for social action is constituted only in ordinary language communication. But this meta-institution of language as tradition is evidently dependent in turn on social processes that are not exhausted in normative relationships. *Language is also a medium of domination and social power.* It serves to legitimate relations of organized force. In so far as the legitimations do not articulate the relations of force that they make possible, in so far as these relations are merely expressed in the legitimations,

²³² Habermas 1990b: 265.

language is also ideological. Here it is not a question of deceptions within a language, but of deception with language as such. Hermeneutic experience that encounters this dependency of the symbolic framework on actual conditions changes into the critique of ideology.”²³³

But if language itself can be “a medium of domination and social power” then it

“would only be legitimate for us to equate the supporting consensus which, according to Gadamer, always precedes any failure at mutual understanding with a given factual agreement, if we could be certain that each consensus arrived at in the medium of linguistic tradition has been achieved without compulsion and distortion.”²³⁴

On this score, historically, the odds are against Gadamer.²³⁵ What Habermas proposes in order to avoid the conservative tendencies of traditional hermeneutics and salvage the project of a truly critical hermeneutics is to replace Gadamer’s factual consensus as the basis for agreement with the idea of counterfactual consensus predicated on the formal notion of world – not the shared content of a common tradition. This idea is brought to fruition in *The Theory of Communicative Action*.²³⁶ Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality is centered on the speaker’s communicative competence which describes her pre-reflective or intuitive ability to participate in conversations with other speakers and come to a mutual understanding with them about something in the world.²³⁷ Formal pragmatics is Habermas’s project of a rational reconstruction of the empirical practice of communicative action in terms of the rational presuppositions without which this practice cannot succeed. Formal pragmatics thus explicates the communicative competence of speakers by making explicit the formal presuppositions they have to adopt (if only implicitly and counterfactually) if they want to reach mutual understanding.

²³³ Habermas 1990a: 239-40 (internal footnote omitted; emphasis added).

²³⁴ Habermas 1990b: 266. See also Habermas 1973: 17: “Competent orators know that every consensus attained can in fact be deceptive.”

²³⁵ See, for example, the discussion of sexual harassment *supra*.

²³⁶ At the time of the debate with Gadamer, Habermas could only formulate the goal of such a critical hermeneutics (Habermas 1990b: 268): “It is only the formal anticipation of an idealized dialogue [...] which guarantees the ultimate supporting and counterfactual agreement that already unites us; in relation to it we can criticize every factual agreement, should it be a false one, as false consciousness.”

²³⁷ TCA I, 287.

According to Habermas's rational reconstruction, the communicatively unavoidable presuppositions for reaching understanding include, *inter alia*, that participants are able to differentiate between the three validity claims to truth, normative rightness (justice), and sincerity, and the corresponding formal world-relations raised with their utterances. When speakers employ linguistic expressions in an utterance, they raise truth claims about something in the objective world, justice-related claims about something in the social world, as well as claims about the sincerity of their subjective experience. The validity claims raised in the speech act – whether explicitly or implicitly – prompt hearers to take a (rationally motivated) “yes” or “no” position toward them (or suspend judgment),²³⁸ which exposes the validity claims to the possibility of critique.²³⁹ If challenged by others, speakers – by virtue of the rationality inherent in the structure of communicative action – can reasonably be expected to stand in for the validity claims they raised in their speech acts, that is, they can be expected to justify them by giving reasons or supporting evidence. Essentially then, their communicative competence also equips speakers with the ability to participate in argumentative practices where the validity claims raised in utterances can be problematized by asking for justification.

Argumentative practices or discourses are “a reflexive form of communicative action”²⁴⁰ because participants are relieved of the pressures to act. Ridding themselves of the pressures to act and, more generally, the pressure to achieve the extra-communicative goals determined by the specific context of action allows them to adopt a hypothetical attitude toward the validity claims which, because they were called into question, put a halt to the flow of communication

²³⁸ TCA I, 38.

²³⁹ BFN 322: “In everyday life, the mutual understanding between communicatively acting subjects is measured against validity claims that [...] call for the taking of yes/no positions. Such claims are open to criticism and contain, together with the risk of dissent, the possibility of discursive vindication as well.”

²⁴⁰ Habermas 1998: 309.

and prompted a shift to the level of reflection. Taking such a “detour” via discursive probing and clarification of the validity claim(s) that have become problematic is necessary to restore the practice of communicative action in a given context. It presents itself as the only option to repair the break in communication in a way that enables speakers to return to communication aimed at reaching mutual understanding.

We should note that communicative rationality (embodied in speech) neither replaces other conceptions of rationality such as epistemic rationality (embodied in the propositional structure of knowledge) or instrumental rationality (embodied in the teleological structure of action) nor does communicative rationality encompass or ground these latter structures of rationality. Rather, all three structures of rationality are independent and irreducible. But while they are regarded as self-standing, they do not merely stand alongside each other unrelatedly. As Habermas explains, discursive rationality – the rationality inherent in argumentation or practices of giving reasons – interrelates these three structures:

“The structure of discourse establishes an interrelation among the entwined structures of rationality (the structures of knowledge, action, and speech) by, in a sense, *bringing together* the propositional, teleological, and communicative roots. According to such a model of *intermeshed* core structures, discursive rationality owes its special position not to its foundational but to its integrative role.”²⁴¹

The reason, discourse can fulfil this integrative function is the internal relation between rationality and intersubjective justification. What Habermas alludes to is that holding a belief, which turns out to be false, or endorsing a norm, which turns out to be unjust, does not per se render the agent irrational. An agent’s view does qualify as irrational, however, if it is not responsive to reasons, i.e., if the agent continues to endorse her view but cannot justify it in light

²⁴¹ Habermas 1998: 309.

of the counterarguments leveled against it. What makes a view rational then is that it is rationally acceptable in the sense that it is “held to be true [or just, MS] on the basis of good reasons in the relevant context of justification.”²⁴² According to Habermas, we regard those as rational who, when prompted to justify their claims, are able to defend their validity by providing reasons and let go of their views when they are presented with compelling reasons to the contrary.

The success of communicative action relies on “idealizing yet unavoidable pragmatic presuppositions.”²⁴³ These counterfactual and formal presuppositions represent unavoidable pragmatic preconditions for reaching non-violent and inclusive consensus. They are counterfactual insofar as – whatever the real circumstances – participants in communication aimed at reaching consensus must act “as if” all speakers adhere to them.²⁴⁴ Though there is no enumerative list of the counterfactual presuppositions, they can be divided into four basic groups; they are oriented toward: establishing publicity and inclusivity, promoting communicative equality among all speakers (which implies that participants act sincerely and mean what they say), preventing manipulation and (self-)deception, and warranting the unforced

²⁴² Habermas 1998: 312.

²⁴³ Habermas 1992: 47; BFN 323. Counterfactual presuppositions can become social facts: “every factually raised claim to validity that transcends the limits of a given lifeworld generates a new fact with the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses of its addressees. Mediated by this cognitive-linguistic infrastructure of society, the results of the interplay between inner-worldly learning processes and world-disclosing innovations become sedimented [in social reality].” (Habermas 1993: 165)

²⁴⁴ Counterfactual presuppositions “have nothing to do with ideals that the solitary theorist sets up in opposition to reality; I am referring only to the normative contents that are encountered in practice” (Habermas 1994: 102). As a reflexive test for the unavoidable presuppositions of communicative action and argumentation, Habermas introduces the argument from performative self-contradiction (see 1990d: 80, 93-101). The “vocabulary of the as if” (Habermas 1996a) is the product of a series of revisions of the original “ideal speech situation.” After reworking their status, counterfactual presuppositions are neither conceived as the “prefiguration of a form of life” which would have exposed them to the criticism that they, too, are ideological in nature (see Gadamer 1990: 287) nor are they viewed as (quasi-)transcendental conditions for understanding, for they can be violated in practice.

force of the better argument – the idea that the taking of a Yes/No position by a speaker vis-à-vis the validity claims of others is motivated solely on the basis of the better argument.²⁴⁵

The formal nature of the unavoidable presuppositions for reaching mutual understanding yield a procedural conception of communicative rationality operative in communicative action and argumentative practices that complements the formal (“reflective”) notion of world(s). Communicative rationality is not grounded in any ultimate foundation – whether it be the transcendental subject of knowledge or a meta-subject of history; it is embodied in the formal structure of everyday speech aimed at reaching mutual understanding and, for that reason, does not depend on a pre-existing and shared supporting agreement or tradition whose validity cannot be questioned.

What makes a claim rationally acceptable is that it can be justified or discursively redeemed through an argumentative process whose procedural rules do not exclude any content from critical evaluation (including the very norms that constitute the practice of argumentation) and thus render the argumentative process open-ended, self-reflexive, and open to revision. Moreover, these procedural rules of communicative rationality are anchored in the hermeneutic practice of reaching mutual understanding with someone about something in the world. The formal rules of argumentation are neither imported from an external source nor are they imposed on participants in discourse from the outside; rather, they represent a standard that is embodied in everyday communicative practices which means that the standard is available (if only intuitively or implicitly) to all participants who, in addition, can evaluate the validity of the standard itself by way of their communicative competence. This is why communicative rationality constitutes

²⁴⁵ Habermas (1996: 1518) himself regards this particular formal presupposition concerning the speakers’ validity claims as “the nerve of my entire theoretical undertaking.”

“a voice of reason which we cannot avoid using whether we want to or not when speaking in everyday communicative practice.”²⁴⁶

The point of departure is the hearer’s ability to say “no” to the validity claims raised in a speech act, which marks the “potential for critique built into communicative action” and discourse.²⁴⁷ Once a participant refuses to accept any of the claims raised by the speaker, the only way to continue the process of reaching mutual understanding is to problematize their validity in discourses where participants adopt a reflective (hypothetical) stance toward the validity of said claims. This reflective stance is continuous with the communicative competence of participants in communicative action, for it is “[t]he same structures that make it possible to reach an understanding [that] also provide for the possibility of a reflective self-control of this process.”²⁴⁸ However, validity claims become criticizable only against the background of a formal notion of world:

“In communicative action we today proceed from those formal presuppositions of intersubjectivity that are necessary if we are to be able to refer to something in the one objective world, identical for all observers, or to something in our intersubjectively shared social world. The claims to propositional truth or normative rightness actualize these presuppositions of commonality for particular utterances. [...] *Validity claims are in principle open to criticism because they are based on formal world-concepts.* They presuppose a world that is identical for all possible observers, or a world intersubjectively shared by members, and they do so in an abstract form freed of all specific content.”²⁴⁹

The lesson learned from the pitfalls of philosophical hermeneutics is that speakers

“have to avoid prejudicing the relation between language and reality, between the medium of communication and that about which something is being communicated. [...] Only then can we form a concept of a cultural tradition, of a temporalized culture, whereby we become aware that interpretations vary in relation to natural and social reality, that beliefs and values vary in relation to the objective and social worlds.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Habermas 1991: 243-4.

²⁴⁷ TCA I, 121.

²⁴⁸ TCA I, 121.

²⁴⁹ TCA I, 50.

²⁵⁰ TCA I, 50-1.

In a realist manner, discursive reflection presupposes that participants distinguish between the interpretandum and their interpretations of it, i.e., that they must distinguish between what one says or claims in one's interpretations as being independent of what one's interpretations are interpretations of. What this requires, however, is precisely the formal presupposition according to which participants presuppose the existence of a single objective and/or social world that is identical for everyone regardless of how any one of them experiences or interprets it.

This formal ("reflective") notion of world²⁵¹ can be distinguished from its substantive and factual opposite by virtue of not presupposing any shared agreement among participants that normatively grounds their interpretive efforts. Since the presupposition of a formal/reflective world is "freed of all specific content,"²⁵² participants must not, on a fundamental level, always already agree on how exactly they experience the world before they can even set out to reach agreement over conflicting interpretations. All that is required from participants is the logical presupposition that there exists a world that is, in principle, experienceable/intelligible by everyone – whatever this world turns out to be.

Such a formal notion of world does not prejudge the relation of language and reality – as opposed to traditional hermeneutics where this relation is predetermined in favor of language and a priori knowledge. As Habermas explains in his *Reply to Critics*, the presupposition of a single world "that is the same for all participants in communication only has the formal meaning of an

²⁵¹ TCA I, 69.

²⁵² TCA I, 50.

ontologically neutral system of reference. It only implies that we can refer to the same – reidentifiable – entities, even as our descriptions of them change.”²⁵³

Insofar as the participants’ validity claims are about an objective or social reality that is not identical with their interpretations of it, the validity of their interpretations also depends on whether or not those non-epistemic conditions obtain. But if the validity of their claims depends on more than the context-dependent epistemic conditions, they necessarily transcend the interpretive context. Crucially, however, referring “to the same – reidentifiable – entities, even as our descriptions of the change” requires a theory of direct reference. As Cristina Lafont has argued, Habermas’s realist presupposition of a single world *per se* is not yet sufficient for the possibilities of mutual understanding and context-transcending critique. A truly critical hermeneutics must supplement the realist notion of a formal world with a non-epistemic conception of reference pursuant to which meaning does not determine reference,²⁵⁴ so that our *a priori* knowledge of language does not determine our knowledge of the world.

According to the theory of direct reference, meaning plays an instrumental, not a constitutive, role for the referential use of language: In referring to the interpretandum, the meaning is employed by the speaker in her speech act only to pick out a specific entity. The content of the description is not used to attribute any propositional content to the interpretandum and, as a consequence, reference does not fail only because something is falsely identified. The propositional content employed by the speaker only serves to make the interpretandum available

²⁵³ Habermas 1996a: 1527. The participant can adopt such a perspective not only vis-à-vis her own interpretations but equally with respect to the interpretations of other participants by presupposing that their interpretations, too, are not identical with the object or phenomenon itself and vice versa. It is in that sense that, by introducing a formal notion of world, various interpretations can become the objects of analysis and conflicting interpretations come to appear as possible candidates for referring to the interpretandum, equally meaningful yet not automatically valid alternatives to be further examined for truth or justice.

²⁵⁴ Lafont 1999: 227-74.

to all participants in a particular context for further signification to ensure that their interpretations are about the same entity or phenomenon. The referential use of language complements the realist presupposition of a single world that makes mutual understanding and critique possible because it is on the basis of such a non-epistemic theory of reference that participants are able to recognize conflicting interpretations as different ways of describing the same entity or phenomenon.

Ultimately, it is through the activity of non-epistemically referring under the realist presupposition of a single objective and/or social world that participants realize that the validity conditions for the claims they raise in their interpretations cannot be entirely epistemic. Insofar as their claims to truth and normative rightness are intended to be about an objective or social reality that is taken to be independent of them, the validity of their interpretations also depends on whether or not those non-epistemic conditions obtain.²⁵⁵ And this is the reason why, as participants in communicative action and discourse, our validity claims necessarily transcend the interpretive context: If speakers make claims about the world, of which they formally presuppose that only one exists, and recognize that what they say is not identical to whatever they are referring in that world, then the validity of the claims they raise in their interpretations depends on more than the context-bound epistemic conditions; it also depends those realist conditions which are independent of the given interpretive context and thereby transcend it.

Adopting an externalist attitude toward the interpretandum, that is, seeing it as an object of analysis that is independent of one's (potentially false) interpretations of it, is precisely the objectifying attitude that bears a potential for critique and mutual learning. As interpreter, the speaker can adopt this stance toward the validity claims of others, i.e., take them seriously – at

²⁵⁵ Lafont 1999: 279.

least counterfactually – as the offerings of a subject who believes them to be valid without accepting them, in other words, regard them as merely one possibility among a myriad of non-identical claims which all need to be examined as possible candidates for truth or normative rightness.

Since adopting such a reflective attitude toward the interpretandum, which establishes the possibility for critique, is part of the communicative competence of speakers, it is in principle open to everyone and, pace Gadamer, does not break dialogical symmetry. As Habermas points out, the interpreter

“can start from the always implicitly shared, immanent rationality of speech, take seriously the rationality claimed by the participants for their utterances, and at the same time critically examine it. In thematizing what the participants merely presuppose and assuming a reflective attitude to the interpretandum, one does not place oneself outside the communication context under investigation; one deepens and radicalizes it in a way that is in principle *open to all participants*.”²⁵⁶

This means that any participants’ ability to transcend the interpretive context via the non-epistemic conditions of the validity claims raised in their speech acts does not come at the cost of requiring the critic to assume an epistemically privileged position. In this sense,

“[speakers] cannot transcend their factual epistemic situation in the sense of being able to reach a privileged epistemic perspective; there is no ‘God’s eye point of view.’ But *to the extent that their knowledge claims purport to be about a (nonepistemic) reality*, we can always ask about the appropriateness of any factual epistemic means for expressing these claims. Whenever speakers raise universal validity claims (i.e., cognitive claims), their particular epistemic ways of expressing them can *in principle* always be corrected. It can be criticized or put into question from an alternative epistemic perspective, interpretation, or the like.”²⁵⁷

The “reflective attitude toward the interpretandum” is the point of view of the “virtual participant,” which is Habermas’s model for the social scientist, who “in principle [must orient

²⁵⁶ TCA I, 130, emphasis added.

²⁵⁷ Lafont 1999: 277.

herself, MS] to the *same* validity claims to which those immediately involved also orient themselves.”²⁵⁸ When examining divergent interpretations as possible candidates for truth and justice, the critic as virtual participant taps into the same resources as the participants involved in the social practices into which she enquires, for adopting this critical stance is as much a function of her communicative competence as it is a function of the communicative competence of any other participant. In making use of the same formal structures of intelligibility she does not therefore lay claim to a position that would grant her privileged access to validity vis-à-vis the participants. What distinguishes her from the participants is that she neither shares nor pursues their extra-communicative goals (i.e., the goals participants want to achieve through coordinating their actions on the basis of mutual understanding) but focuses on the intra-communicative goal of reaching mutual understanding.²⁵⁹ She does not partake in their coordinating efforts and the success or failure of their collective action plans does not concern her. As virtual participant, her own goals are located outside the system of action or practice she interprets.²⁶⁰

As such, the *virtual* participant is not a disembodied observer assuming a God’s eye perspective but merely unconstrained by the specific restrictions of action in a given context. In interpreting the participants’ claims, she taps into the same (formal) structures of intelligibility as the former and enjoys no privileged access to validity vis-à-vis the participants.

“If the social scientist has to participate virtually in the interactions whose meaning he wants to understand [...] then the social scientist will be able to link up his own concepts with the conceptual framework found in the context of action only in the same way as laymen themselves do in the communicative practice of everyday life. He is moving within the same structures of possible understanding in which those immediately involved carry out their communicative actions.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ TCA I, 130; see also TCA I, 112-3.

²⁵⁹ TCA I, 114.

²⁶⁰ TCA I, 113-4.

²⁶¹ TCA I, 120.

It also follows from the irreducibility of the critic's (virtual) orientation to the very same validity claims as those who are immediately involved in the social practice that the critical analysis of social phenomena cannot exclusively rely on the critic's theoretical knowledge of the interpretandum (epistemic knowledge she gained through the objectifying attitude of the (subject-object relation, S-O)).²⁶² In order to criticize the validity claims raised by participants on the basis of an explanatory or normative theory and the supporting evidence, the social critic must take the validity claims of the participants seriously and to this end she must adopt a performative attitude of a participant in communication. For it is only through (at least virtually) adopting the performative attitude of someone who wants to reach understanding with another about something in the world (subject-subject-object relation, S-S-O) that she can access the meaning of their speech acts as making criticizable validity claims about something in the world for which they, if prompted, could stand in by adducing reasons.²⁶³ And in doing so, the participants and the social critic alike are (factually) bound to the interpretive context and have equal standing insofar as their claims are mutually criticizable in the sense that they owe each other justifications.²⁶⁴

The theory of communicative rationality thus gives a cogent response to the Gadamerian challenge, namely, the inevitable demand to incorporate external knowledge on the basis of an explanatory or normative theory, which is at the same time out of reach from the performative attitude of participants in the communicative situation but also necessary for transcending the interpretive context of a tradition. And it does so without giving in to the paternalistic tendencies

²⁶² See McCarthy 1978: 181-91, 355-7.

²⁶³ See TCA I, 115 ("For reasons are of such a nature that they cannot be described in the attitude of a third person").

²⁶⁴ Habermas, 1983: 256; TCA I, 119.

of historicist or positivist approaches that break dialogical symmetry.

But Habermas's democratic turn to critique goes beyond the in-principle observation that all participants can adopt an objectifying attitude toward the interpretandum necessary to access, revise, and produce the kind of external knowledge that enables them to conceptualize alternative interpretive schemata and establish the comparative standpoint. His proposed form "of criticism is not only open to all participants but is also publicly addressed to them."²⁶⁵ It is in light of these conditions that Habermas famously observes that while "the vindicating superiority of those who do the enlightening over those who are to be enlightened is theoretically unavoidable," this vindicating superiority is at the same time "fictive and requires self-correction: *in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants.*"²⁶⁶

Once critics actualize the critical and transformative potential immanent to communicative practice in attempts to refute dominant interpretations and propose alternatives for social change, they must validate them in public discourses as a participant on par with all other affected participants. The critic cannot impose her own views on others but must ultimately adopt a second-personal perspective of a participant to defend them in actual discourse. The critical standpoint of the virtual participant thus preserves the symmetry of communication aimed at reaching consensus between critic and addressees and rubs off the stench of paternalism.

We have thus established the full picture of a critical hermeneutics by means of which in the next two chapters we are able to, first, explain the full scope and radical nature of the phenomenon of ideology as an embodied interpretive schema and, second, establish a theory of

²⁶⁵ Lafont 2018: 56.

²⁶⁶ Habermas 1973: 40.

ideology critique that corresponds to the task set out by this new understanding of the object of critique in combining an immanent procedure with a context-transcending notion of rationality. In conclusion of this chapter and as a transition to the next, I will address the spectre of totalizing ideology, i.e., the worry that we may be trapped in an all-encompassing and inescapable ideology. The reason for addressing the perplexity of a total ideology at this point is that it shows some striking parallels with the absolute notion of world-disclosure we found in Heidegger.

III.3. A note on totalizing ideology

Once we recognize that “language is also a medium of domination and social power,”²⁶⁷ we may worry that our interpretive resources could be hijacked, so that we are cut off from making new experiences because cannot experience our condition as unjust, harmful, or wrong. This challenge is presented most clearly by Robin Celikates. Celikates believes that ideologies often “go deeper” than hermeneutical injustice insofar as they prevent agents from making certain experiences at all.²⁶⁸ The examples Celikates gives to elucidate his claim are underpaid adjunct instructors at neoliberal universities or women in traditional, that is, patriarchal family settings. What these agents have in common is that they may not experience their conditions as precarious, exploitative, or oppressive.

As I understand Celikates’s claim, the problem comes in two versions. The first version, endorsed by Celikates, is about what I have identified as the multi-dimensionality of experience. Celikates believes that the workings of ideologies can cause our moral sensibilities to deteriorate so drastically that we can become indifferent to the suffering of others as well as our own. He

²⁶⁷ Habermas 1990a: 239.

²⁶⁸ Celikates 2017: 58-9.

tentatively refers to such scenarios of moral atrophy as forms of “experiential” or “phenomenological” injustice.²⁶⁹ The second version of the problem holds that ideologies can become so utterly pervasive and all-encompassing that no act of criticism could possibly escape them. This is the well-known problem of totalizing ideologies and although it is not explicitly endorsed by Celikates himself,²⁷⁰ it can be derived from his worry about moral atrophy without difficulty. Given our hermeneutic outlook, we will discuss it as the problem of closed linguistic world-disclosure in how it relates to linguistically disclosed experience.

In response to the first version, we can note that it is not at all uncommon that sometimes the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of our experience do not align. Ideologies can paralyze our emotional sensibilities and agency in that we may recognize something as an injustice but do not feel moved to do something about it. Conversely, we may feel that something is wrong without being able to put our finger on what it is exactly. In this case, we have to first determine, the nature of the wrong, what it is about and what follows from it; on the other hand, we may of course find out that we erred in our interpretation and there was nothing wrong after all.²⁷¹ Accordingly, we could say that the intimated instances are not so much signs of ideologies going deeper but of a broadening of their reach. As such, cases of this sort do not present an in-principle challenge to the view I have outlined above, for the hermeneutic-pragmatic account of embodied experience accommodates moral atrophy as well as other forms of numbness and indifference across the entire experiential spectrum.

²⁶⁹ Celikates 2017: 58-9. See also chapter 3, IV., for a more detailed discussion of the concept of “social alexithymia” and a hermeneutical account of this phenomenon in the context of colorblind racist ideology.

²⁷⁰ In fact, Celikates rejects it (2006: 35).

²⁷¹ Charles Taylor (1985: 70) gives the example of someone who initially felt ashamed of their social background and then comes to realize that there is nothing to be ashamed of, that quite to the contrary, they realize that there is “something demeaning precisely about feeling such shame,” and in recognizing this the former objects of shame “undergo a transvaluation. They too are seen under different concepts and experienced differently.”

But what if our various experiential sensibilities are not just out of sync, but rather grow numb altogether? What if, behind our backs, our expectations had been manipulated to eradicate the possibility of epistemic friction, objective resistance, or performative failure of our actions? On a weaker reading, this means that at least some social agents, including some of those negatively affected by an ideology such as the exploited adjunct instructors or the women caught up in patriarchic family structures, are not experiencing their condition as wrongful or harmful to them. On a stronger reading, this means that ideology can “go all the way down” and pervade society as a whole. This is known as the dystopia of a totalizing *Verblendungszusammenhang* (Adorno),²⁷² the perfect storm of total ideological sabotage: By virtue of their powers of autoimmunization, ideologies subject social agents to a condition in which their experiential-interpretive resources consistently fail to register the wrongness produced by ideology’s own feat and prevent them from learning through new experiences.

From a hermeneutic standpoint, the possibility of a totalizing ideology, mirrors the effects of Heidegger’s absolutizing conception of world-disclosure. Recently, Karen Ng has accounted for the “problem of totalization” in the language of the participants’ involvement in a practice they seek to criticize. This characterization is helpful because it shows the similarities in understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of Western Marxism and philosophical hermeneutics. The “problem of totalization,” she writes, is the problem of “being unable to step outside of a form of life in order to criticize it, in living in, by, and through the very conditions

²⁷² See, for instance, Adorno’s claim about the universality of the exchange principle in advanced capitalist societies which Adorno perceives as the “social twin” of the identity principle: Adorno 1973b: 47, 146-8; see also Adorno 2016: 315 ff. We find similar remarks about the “almighty totality” or the “total effect” of the *Culture Industry* and “total mass culture” in Adorno 2001: 63, 68, 83, 106, and Adorno 1973. However, in the later essay *Free time*, Adorno (2001: 196-7) seems to qualify his claims when he notes: “It is obvious that the integration of consciousness and free time has not yet completely succeeded. The real interests of individuals are still strong enough to resist, within certain limits, total inclusion.” On the ambivalence in Adorno’s thought on totalizing ideology, see Jay 1984: 264-71.

that one seeks to understand, critique appears to be so fully integrated into that which it criticizes that it becomes very difficult to distinguish between ideology and non-ideology.”²⁷³

A number of objections have been raised against the idea of totalizing ideology. It has been noted that this view is predicated on an overly homogenizing account of society which illegitimately abstracts from the various differences that exist between societal groups, social milieus, cultural communities,²⁷⁴ and their distinctive world-disclosures. It especially disregards the alternative disclosures of non-dominant discourses²⁷⁵ and grossly neglects the diversity that exists even among members of the same social group.²⁷⁶

From the critical hermeneutical perspective I developed in this chapter, I want to suggest a different, in principle, objection to the possibility of a totalizing ideology. What is at stake in this debate, can be seen most clearly, I believe, in Heidegger’s discussion of *das Man*. The One, as we have seen,²⁷⁷ is the anonymous standpoint of the “generalized other” that represents general social norms. The trouble with social norms is that they are necessarily general and, in their plurality, do not come presorted. As a function of their generality, the public norms, maxims, or principles do not come with instructions for how they are to be applied to every particular situation. Since there are a great many such norms, they can come into conflict. Even in the event that there are secondary norms that regulate such conflicts, they do so in a general manner, which leaves open the issue of their application. There is no way to escape this perennial

²⁷³ Ng 2015: 394-5.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Alcoff 2006: 189.

²⁷⁵ See Mason’s criticism with respect to Fricker’s notion of hermeneutical gaps (2011: 301-3).

²⁷⁶ In his essay *Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary* Cornelius Castoriadis (1997: 327) claims with respect to the sensory imagination: “Suffice it to say that here representations (and affects, and intentions or desires) emerge in an ‘absolutely spontaneous’ way, and even more: we have affects and intentions (desires, drives) which are creations of this a-causal *vis formandi* in their sheer being, their mode of being and their being-thus (*Sosein*). And, for all we know, this stream of representations *cum* affects *cum* desires is absolutely singular for each singular human being.”

²⁷⁷ See *supra*, I.2.

question of rule-following even for the most conformist person, who aims to believe and act exactly as *one* does.²⁷⁸ Hence, even the most craven conformist is condemned to being authentic. For Dasein, the fate to live authentically presents itself in the situation, the specific set of circumstances in which Dasein faces a choice (between norms, etc.),²⁷⁹ for it can never fulfill all social normative expectations at once. For the One, the concreteness of the situation which presents the need to be authentic, is not accessible, all it knows of is the general condition (*allgemeine Lage*).²⁸⁰

The contrast between the global character of general norms and the local character of their particular fulfillment creates a tension internal to the norms themselves, but the nature of this tension is always local and contextual. It manifests, for instance, in the form of a cognitive dissonance, a sense of being wronged (without quite understanding why and what follows from it, as in the case of sexual harassment). When certain normative expectations are frustrated, because not every single one of them can be fulfilled at the same time, it creates the possibility for new experiences that arises in the rift of non-fulfilled expectations. While it is not a sure-fire success that new experiences become productive and initiate learning processes,²⁸¹ the internal

²⁷⁸ See Egan 2012: 295-6: “Even if we wanted to subsume all our decisions to the dictates of the impersonal authority of social norms, we could not live on auto-pilot: these norms point in many different directions at once.”

²⁷⁹ For Heidegger, it is in the choice that the authentic self takes responsibility and thus emancipates itself from the one-self, see BT 288, where he discusses this issue in the context of the call of consciousness and its critical function.

²⁸⁰ SZ 300: “Dem Man dagegen ist die Situation wesentlich verschlossen. Es kennt nur die ‘allgemeine Lage’.”

²⁸¹ This is where ideological understanding enters, for example in the form of available dominant concepts or interpretations which are over-generalized in a particular context. Heidegger explains this phenomenon through the workings of the average understating in idle talk (*Gerede*) in the negative/passive sense, which makes for “the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one’s own.” (BT 213) On the two senses of *Gerede* and its communicative function, see Lafont 2005b: 510-6, who shows that the problem, for Heidegger, is not that speakers can acquire knowledge by description through communication, i.e., understanding something without previously making the thing their own (which would require knowledge by direct acquaintance), as long as they acquire their indirect knowledge from experts whose knowledge does not just stem from the average understanding that linguistic competence provides. The danger of *Gerede* in the negative sense lies in the over-generalization of knowledge by description.

tension itself is irreducible – which implies that the possibility for new experiences cannot be ruled out. Thus, the tension between general norms and expectations, which are not always already sorted out, and their particular fulfilment speaks against the nightmare scenario of a totalizing ideology. To sustain the possibility of a totalizing ideology, one would in fact have to endorse the highly problematic version of Heideggerian or Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics, which eliminates opportunities for learning through new experiences. In the next chapter, I will introduce the hermeneutic notion of ideology as an embodied interpretive schema, which will shed further light on the essentially local or contextual character of the phenomenon.

Chapter 2: Disclosing ideology

In this chapter, I articulate a hermeneutic conception of ideology that foregrounds the constitutive role of language for understanding in disclosing the world to us. On this view, ideologies are characterized as *embodied interpretive schemas whose world-disclosure makes possible ways of understanding reality which can be shown to be epistemically flawed and to produce or perpetuate forms of injustice*.²⁸²

²⁸² The theory of ideology I propose in this chapter and the subsequent notion of ideology critique defended in the next chapter are limited to a subset of issues in light of which ideological understanding is to be criticized as normatively wrong. The subset in question are matters of moral rightness which I will refer to as matters of justice. In this regard, my approach is indebted to a realist re-conceptualization of Habermas's discourse ethics. As a deontological approach to the moral point of view, discourse ethics treats questions of justice (moral rightness) as categorically different from ethical questions that concern rival conceptions of the good life (see Habermas 1993: 1-17) and prioritizes the right over the good (ibid 88-96). Questions of justice are truth-analogous, i.e., they are treated as cognitive questions in the strict sense. Their truth-analogous status implies that the unconditional validity of social norms depends on their context-transcending rightness which requires cognitive justification – as opposed to the limited validity of ethical decisions, which are valid only relative to a particular community and thus require only de facto legitimation (ibid 1). As in the case of truth (and theoretical discourse), practical discourse commits participants to the logical premise of a single right answer. As a consequence of the realist presupposition of a single social world, the validity of their claims depends not only on their epistemic conditions – as defined by their interpretive context – but on whether or not the non-epistemic conditions obtain, namely, the existence of generalizable interests that all those affected by a social norm have in common. Because of this realist presupposition, the logical premise of a single right answer does not commit the cognitivism underlying discourse ethics to the epistemic premise of a single right interpretation of said generalizable interests. Rather, on Lafont's realist conception, discourse ethics is compatible with ethical pluralism (and multiple ways of conceptualizing the generalizable interests) without collapsing into relativism and accepts the various internal (ethical) perspectives through which participants access and interpret their interests as a necessary condition for participating in practical discourses where they could affirm or renounce that a social norm safeguards an interest they identified as generalizable regardless of their interpretations of it (Lafont 1999: 355-60). As such, the restriction to questions of injustice has two major implications: First, on the above picture, questions of justice transcend the “context-dependent questions of the good life” (Habermas 1993: 91) and thus enable the kind of context-transcending critique that is necessary for the critique of ideology (see below and chapter 3) while preserving ethical pluralism and acknowledging the need for the participants' internal (ethical) perspective for practical discourses. Second, prioritizing the right over the good, has a crucial implication for the theory of ideology critique: If the critic voices her concerns from a moral point of view (claiming that the social norm or practice under consideration is not “equally in the interest of everyone”), her criticism is not open to the Gadamerian objection that she acts as a “social engineer” (1990: 293) who simply imposes her conception of the good life or political preferences on the ones she criticizes. Rather, she must redeem her normative criticism in practical discourses to substantiate her claims about the non-generalizability of the interest at stake (see esp. chapter 3, IV.1.). Limiting the normative dimension of the critique of ideologies to questions of justice, however, does not render the account incompatible with more demanding conceptions which (in addition) critique ideologies in light of ethical questions.

Unpacking this definition²⁸³ in the following sections serves three main aims: to emphasize the critical insights of a hermeneutic approach in determining the target of ideology critique and defending it against rival conceptions, to indicate its implications for the critique of ideology, and to position it in the tradition of Critical Theory.

Characterizing ideologies as *embodied interpretive schemas* indicates a fundamental reconceptualization of ideology in the traditional sense of “false consciousness” that reveals its radical and comprehensive nature (I.). In recognition of the radical nature of ideology in disclosing the world to subjects beyond their explicit (and implicit) mental attitudes, I argue that we must depart from the notion of ideology as “systems of belief.” The failure of this cognitivist notion to capture essential ideological phenomena yields a hermeneutic re-conceptualization that describes ideological understanding as providing social agents with *interpretive schemas*. These structures of intelligibility comprise the concepts, pre-understandings, and meanings that enable and frame their understanding of the world – including the formation of beliefs. Situating ideology at this fundamental level of understanding explains the persistence and recalcitrance of ideological understanding even after subjects change their beliefs (I.1.). Another principal shortcoming of purely cognitive theories of ideology is their narrow scope and subsequent neglect for the equally significant *embodied* forms of understanding. In that sense, I argue that ideological understanding must incorporate the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of understanding to obtain a fuller picture of ideological phenomena. The hermeneutic approach allows us to conceptualize these non-discursive modes of understanding and devise a more comprehensive account of ideology that transcends the cognitivist bias of classic conceptions (I.2.).

²⁸³ On the perils of “defining” ideology, see Schnädelbach 1969: 71-3.

Characterizing embodied interpretive schemas as *epistemically flawed* and contributing to injustice indicates a pejorative conception of ideology in continuity with the tradition of Critical Theory since Marx (II.). Ideologies do not perpetuate lies or utter nonsense and the ideological subject is neither a cynic nor a bigot. Following Adorno, I claim that ideologies rationally mediate forms of violence and that we must therefore conceive of ideology as propagating *half-truths*. On this view, ideological understanding typically proves to be valid in a particular context but never discloses the whole truth about the matter (II.1.). The seminal contribution of my hermeneutic approach is to offer an explanatory theory of what complicates the process of recognizing and analyzing their epistemic flaws, namely the peculiar power of ideologies to make themselves true. To this end, I suggest that there are two senses in which *ideological truth-making*, which I take to be an immediate consequence of the world-disclosing function of an ideological interpretive schema, manifests. In the first sense of truth-making, ideological understanding “delivers” a *false diagnosis* of reality which obfuscates a correct interpretation of the situation or phenomenon as exemplified in the case of “sexual harassment” (II.2.). In the second sense of truth-making, ideological understanding commends a *false therapy*. Here, the focus is not on the subject’s false understanding of themselves or the world. Their diagnosis is indeed correct. What is in fact problematic are the normative conclusions ideological understanding draws from these truths in prescribing the right course of action (II.3.).

I. Ideology as an embodied interpretive schema

Essentially, an interpretive schema is a linguistically mediated structure or frame of understanding that enables subjects to access the world and make sense of it. Previously, we

followed the insight of the “triple-H” tradition, namely that as linguistic and self-interpreting creatures, language is constitutive of our relation to the world and not merely a vehicle for our thoughts and other mental states, attitudes, and productions. Rather, as this tradition holds, it is in the medium of language that our mental activity takes place, for instance, when we form beliefs and make judgments.

With that said, I will advocate, first, for a notion of the interpretive schema that incorporates the world-disclosing character of language found in the hermeneutic tradition and the fact that we access the world only through meaning. On the cognitive level, an understanding of the interpretive schema as radical as the one I propose will factor in the meanings and concepts that first disclose the entities and phenomena that our beliefs and judgments are about.

Moreover, the suggested radicalism of hermeneutics opens up a pathway to transcending the reductionism of cognitivist accounts of ideology altogether. In my discussion of the concept of experience after the so-called linguistic turn I argued that language does not only mediate our cognitive activity but also shapes the ways in which we affectively and conatively experience the world. In short, our emotions and dispositions to act are linguistically mediated embodied interpretations of reality anchored in our linguistic world-disclosure.

If this is correct, the implications for the critique of ideologies, I believe, are quite profound, beginning with the very concept of ideology and its hermeneutic centerpiece, the embodied interpretive schema. My aim in this part is therefore not only to radicalize this notion by reconstructing it on the basis of the constitutive role of language and its world-disclosing function. I want to further establish a more comprehensive notion that integrates our embodied interpretations and thereby expands the range and purchase of the hermeneutic concept of ideology. The systematic point of these efforts is to advance an explanatorily superior alternative

that addresses the cognitivist bias and the individualistic tendencies commonly found in classic theories of ideology.

1.1. Beyond belief: Ideology and world-disclosure

Depending on the theory at hand, the cognitivist bias of classic theories of ideology comes to the fore when, in one version or another, they speak of ideology as a “system of thought/ideas” or a “system of belief” and then take a mental inventory.²⁸⁴ Among the paradigmatic statements of ideology of this kind, the characterization of ideology as “false consciousness,” a truism often wrongly attributed to Marx²⁸⁵ and widely associated with the idea that ideologies either cause distortions of the subjects’ representations of reality or illusions, is possibly the most infamous example. For an instance of this cognitivist bias in the Marxist tradition take Stuart Hall’s definition of ideology in his well-known paper *The Problem of Ideology*, where he identifies ideology as being constituted by “mental frameworks”: “By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.”²⁸⁶

The cognitive focus in Hall’s definition, which I take to be representative of an array of conceptualizations of ideology with a mentalist bias – whether they come with or without a Marxist pedigree –, is further complicated by both an underlying representationalist

²⁸⁴ Tommie Shelby’s (2003) notion of a “form of social consciousness,” which – like my notion of “interpretive schema” – serves as a neutral starting point for his ultimately pejorative account of ideology, will be discussed in detail below. It is, in part, because of the cognitivist tendencies of traditional theories of ideology that some theorists have abandoned the project of ideology critique altogether, see Jaeggi/Celikates 2017: 107.

²⁸⁵ It is Engels who, in a letter to Mehring (1893), once uses this definitional short-cut which afterwards has taken on a life of its own.

²⁸⁶ Hall 1986: 29.

epistemology and a neglect for the constitutive role of language for understanding. In sum, these misgivings are responsible for the particular (yet again very common) framing of the problem of ideology which Hall casts as a problem of materialization that “concerns the ways in which ideas of different kinds grip the minds of masses, and thereby become a ‘material force.’”²⁸⁷ In other words, Hall’s characterization of the problem of ideology could be restated in the form of a question: How does thought become reality? Presenting the problem as such reveals the familiar gap between the mind of the subject and the external world. If ideology is all in the head, then how does it get out there and materialize as a socially effective force? In that respect, however, it makes no difference whether one’s starting point is the mind, or, as historical materialism has it, the material forces and relations of production which determine one’s consciousness,²⁸⁸ the gap between mind and world needs to be explained.

So far, I have identified three interrelated problems of traditional accounts of ideology, one explicit and two implicit: focusing almost exclusively on mental faculties, states, and activities, they prioritize the cognitive aspects of ideology; by and large, their cognitivism is complemented (or even supported) by a representationalist epistemology that misses the constitutive role of language for understanding. In what follows, I will, first, demonstrate the explanatory deficits of overly cognitivist accounts of ideology using the model of the white gaze, a learned way of embodied interpretation, through George Yancy’s analysis of the “elevator effect.” Second, I will show how this relates to their neglect of the constitutive role of language

²⁸⁷ Hall 1986: 29.

²⁸⁸ It is clear that Marx’s statement from the preface of his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) (“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their *social* being that determines their consciousness.” – emphasis added) is misrepresented if we understand it as marking a materialist standpoint in any ontological sense. If, however, through the concept of “production,” as Schnädelbach, in my view correctly, argues (1969: 81-2), Marx’s inversion of the thesis about being and consciousness is intended to shed light on the independence of consciousness as itself being a historical product, then we still need to know what kind of structure allows for the mediation between mind and world (subject and history).

for understanding and, third, building on the work in the previous chapter, I will introduce and elaborate the notion of the “embodied interpretive schema” as the first component of the hermeneutic concept of ideology that is intended to remedy the identified deficits of the classic formulations. We will return to the problem of representationalism and the gap between mind and world when evaluating the notion of the epistemic flaw of ideologies.

A first key claim is that our concept of an “interpretive schema” must recognize the constitutive role of language for understanding. Recognizing that language plays this central role for understanding has significant implications for a hermeneutic account of ideology both in terms of the scope of the mental ontology underlying the notion of ideology and by expanding the sphere of ideological phenomena beyond the cognitive domain. First, with their focus on explicit cognitive states or attitudes, traditional characterizations that identify ideology as a “system of belief” miss crucial aspects of our mental lives. For instance, other than the racist bigot, many truthfully self-proclaimed anti-racists do not endorse explicitly racist beliefs in, say, the existence of different races and a naturally or culturally determined hierarchy among them. At the same time, however, they may believe that “All lives matter” is not a reactionary response to “Black lives matter” but indeed a commendable avowal of the universal worth and dignity of all humankind.²⁸⁹ But their anti-racist convictions and rejection of explicitly racist tenets may not only clash with some other (ultimately racist) beliefs they explicitly hold. Our explicit doxastic attitudes may also be contradicted by attitudes of an implicit nature which cannot be accessed by an agent introspectively.

The phenomenon of implicit bias with regard to the race-based misperception of weapons has received a lot of scholarly attention as an example of structural racism that is connected to

²⁸⁹ See my discussion in chapter 3, IV.1.

the struggle of the BLM movement against anti-Black police violence. A series of psychological studies found that subjects primed with photographs of the faces of black males tend to not only faster identify images of guns as guns but also tend to misidentify images of ordinary tools or toy guns as guns.²⁹⁰ In 2020, 1,100 people in the US were killed by the police, 80 of whom were unarmed; 45 victims were people of color and 27 of them were Black.²⁹¹ Whatever the disagreement over the exact nature of the phenomenon of implicit bias, its existence is beyond reasonable doubt²⁹² and there is a growing consensus among psychologists and philosophers that implicit biases are not “beliefs;”²⁹³ and growing scholarly consensus holds that they should be linked to a background ideological structure.²⁹⁴ If this is correct and non-explicit mental attitudes such as implicit biases, stereotypes, prejudices and so on cannot be categorized as beliefs but nonetheless bear on how agents understand the world, perceive objects, or make judgments in ways that appear ideologically relevant then the cognitivist outlook seems incomplete on its own terms because it would miss these unconscious aspects of our mental lives and their practical import.

²⁹⁰ Payne 2001; Conrey et al 2005. The studies are confirmed by more recent shooting task experiments. There, participants are shown images of Black and White “targets” holding either a gun or a neutral object. They are instructed to shoot “targets” holding guns while their accuracy and response-times are measured. A meta-analysis of 42 different shooting task studies (Mekawi/Bresin 2015) found that across all studies participants were faster to shoot armed Black “targets” compared to armed White “targets;” in no-gun-trials participants were slower not to shoot unarmed Black relative to unarmed White “targets;” error rates (shooting an unarmed or not shooting an armed target) did not differ for Black vis-à-vis White “targets.”

²⁹¹ See <https://policeviolencereport.org/>. According to the 2020 Police Violence Report, Black people are not only more likely to be killed by the police but also more likely to be unarmed and less likely pose a threat when killed.

²⁹² Jost et al 2009.

²⁹³ See Madva 2016. A popularized account of implicit attitudes such as implicit bias is Tamar Gendler’s notion of “alief;” see Gendler 2011, 2008a and 2008b. For an alternative conception, see Madva/Brownstein 2018. For a rejection of the explicit/implicit binary, see Machery 2016.

²⁹⁴ Sally Haslanger argues that “implicit biases explanations are stronger if they are linked to a shared ideology.” (Miegunyah Philosophy Lecture: “Ideology Beyond Belief: Social Practices and the Persistence of Injustice,” <https://vimeo.com/178865791>); see also Haslanger 2015a. For an attempt to link implicit bias to colorblind racist ideology, see Blum 2016: 151.

Some theorists are receptive to this challenge and aim to rectify the explanatory deficit by adding implicit attitudes and mechanisms to the cognitive attitudes their account of ideology accommodates. One such progressive account, which even puts a premium on the role of implicit attitudes, is that of Tommie Shelby. The theoretical backbone of Shelby's theory of ideology is what he calls a "form of social consciousness." A form of social consciousness is a set of beliefs that are widely shared among members of a relevant group, shape their outlook and self-conception, form or are derived from a *prima facie* coherent system of thought, and have significant practical import.²⁹⁵ Beliefs, on Shelby's account, are "mental representations within the consciousness of individual social actors [that] express or imply validity claims, that is, knowledge claims about the way the world is or about what has value."²⁹⁶ Given its focus on belief and the somewhat ambiguous relation of belief and the system of thought they either constitute or follow from, Shelby's view is properly characterized as cognitivist. However, Shelby also admits that social agents are not always fully conscious of the representational content of the forms of social consciousness they endorse insofar as they "may be only implicit in the behavioral dispositions, utterances, conduct, and practices of social actors."²⁹⁷ Be that as it may, according to Shelby the primary unit of analysis as well as the primary target of ideology critique are ideological beliefs and belief systems.²⁹⁸ This cognitivist analytic thus treats social practices, institutions, and spontaneous forms of embodied symbolic representations as

²⁹⁵ Shelby 2003: 158.

²⁹⁶ Shelby 2003: 157.

²⁹⁷ Shelby 2003: 160. Paraphrasing the 2003 version of his own account of ideology in a later paper (2014: 66 – original emphasis), Shelby writes: "*An ideology is a widely held set of loosely associated beliefs and implicit judgments that misrepresent significant social realities and that function, through this distortion, to bring about or perpetuate unjust social relations.*" From this definition follows his claim that racism is a type of ideology: "*Racism is a set of misleading beliefs and implicit attitudes about 'races' or race relations whose wide currency serves a hegemonic social function.*"

²⁹⁸ Shelby 2003: 157-8.

epiphenomenal to the belief systems which constitute the main target of analysis and criticism. Social practices and institutions may properly be called ideological insofar as they disseminate or support ideological beliefs. Symbolic representations, which are “embodied not in the consciousness of individuals, but in discourse and cultural products”²⁹⁹ are deemed ideological insofar as they give expression to ideological beliefs and reproduce their content.³⁰⁰

In light of this cognitivist outlook, it seems odd then, when Shelby contends that what the social critic is really after “are those messy forms of social consciousness,” by which he refers to ideological phenomena of consciousness such as implicit beliefs, stereotypes, clichés, fragmented narratives, etc. which he characterizes as the “half-baked, diffuse, and crude ideas” that sometimes serve as the (empirical) substratum of systematizing theoretical accounts by professional ideologists who synthesize them.³⁰¹ But if the real target of ideology critique is the messy forms of social consciousness, the “jungle of ideas,” then Shelby’s cognitivism may not be cognitivist enough; for singling out implicit ideas and beliefs as the primary target relegates explicit theoretical accounts, scientific models or religious canons (originally the primary objects of ideology critique, at least in the Marxist tradition³⁰²) to a peripheral status. It is peculiar for a

²⁹⁹ Shelby 2003: 158. For Shelby, such embodied symbolic representations include jokes, slogans, advertisements, music, art, and different media.

³⁰⁰ The reason Shelby wants to limit ideological forms of consciousness to sets of (explicit and implicit) beliefs is conceptual clarity, but such a heuristic reason, I believe, cannot outweigh the explanatory deficit regarding the target phenomenon that comes with it.

³⁰¹ Shelby 2003: 161 (such professional ideologists include intellectuals, politicians, theologians, philosophers, scientists, etc.).

³⁰² See, for example, Marx/Engels from the preface to *The German Ideology* (CW 5, 23): “Hitherto men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relations according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The products of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against this rule of concepts.” See also *ibid* 36-7, 53.

view that defends ideologies as “essentially forms of social thought”³⁰³ to drive out theories – the cognitive products par excellence – from the center of analysis.

But while shifting the target of analysis and critique of ideology by creating an internal hierarchy that puts implicit attitudes on top causes some difficulties for the internal consistency of Shelby’s account,³⁰⁴ it is the cognitivist bias of his view that raises systematic concerns. An excessively cognitivist understanding of ideology, I argue, is both too narrow and not radical enough to capture the target phenomenon and explain how an ideology emerges, stabilizes, and persists even after persuasive cognitive challenges have been brought forward to refute it.

We may think, of course, that a system of belief can adjust over time, namely, by adducing a different set of reasons to support its claims. Historically, this has occurred, in various degrees, in the case of racism. If racism was once centered on the belief that humankind is divided into distinct “races” and the concurrent belief about the inferiority of non-white “races” on the basis of immutable biological features, cultural racism has supplanted the biologicistic narrative with an explanation about the irreconcilable cultural differences between members of different racial groups; sometimes this is done with and sometimes without an explicit appeal to the superiority of white cultural productions. But if the explanatory basis of racist beliefs (i.e. beliefs about the superiority of certain races which those who hold such beliefs take to be justified) can be replaced, the beliefs themselves are defeasible, too, for on this cognitivist picture the reasons for believing ϕ is simply another set of beliefs. If the purpose of

³⁰³ Shelby 2003: 158.

³⁰⁴ It seems peculiar also in the face of Shelby’s second doxastic property: forms of social consciousness are sets of beliefs which must either form or derive from a (prima facie) coherent system of thought. While we may plausibly conceive that (some) implicit beliefs derive from such a prima facie coherent system of thought, I don’t find it particularly convincing to think of a system of thought that is constituted by (largely) implicit beliefs and meets the criterion of prima facie coherency – for to judge the coherency of the system of thought one must make the beliefs that constitute it explicit.

the concept of ideology is to explain why certain forms of injustice persist, then, according to the cognitivist logic, eradicating racist beliefs will put an end to racial injustice. The problem is that this is highly implausible. First, beliefs that do not assert racial hierarchies (e.g. the allegedly universal belief that all lives matter), can perpetuate racial injustice.³⁰⁵ Second, the case of implicit racist bias indicates that individuals who sincerely do not hold racist beliefs can nonetheless perpetuate racism. It is true, of course, that the latter phenomenon is the reason why theorists like Shelby have expanded the cognitivist domain to include non-explicit or unconscious cognitive attitudes which are more difficult to track, refute, and unlearn and therefore seem to offer a satisfactory answer to the question why ideologies are so recalcitrant.

In her incisive critique of cognitivist accounts of ideology, Sally Haslanger contends that such views suffer from four characteristic defects: (1) they can neither explain how ideologies become culturally shared, public, and dominant, (2) nor can they explain “experiential breaks” that serve as the basis for critique of dominant belief systems, (3) they are too individualistic, and (4) they cannot account for how explicit attitudes are connected to our implicit attitudes (“unthinking responses”) and “our bodily comportment, the social and material realities that constitute our milieu.”³⁰⁶ Any theory of ideology, Haslanger contends, must offer a back-story about where an ideology comes from, how it became publicly available, and shared among a multiplicity of individuals, some of whom are privileged, some of whom are marginalized by it. Haslanger believes that when the cognitivist refers to explicit and implicit beliefs as the locus of ideology, he only defers the question, for we could ask, where they come from, how it is possible that different individuals share the same (ideological) beliefs, and how our explicit and implicit

³⁰⁵ See my analysis in chapter 3, IV.1.

³⁰⁶ Haslanger 2017: 9-13.

attitudes are connected? To remedy this explanatory deficit of cognitivist views, she proposes that the explicit and implicit attitudes must be linked to a shared background ideology that we should think of as a source for beliefs rather than a collection of them. Her claim echoes Robin Celikates's intuition that ideology "goes deeper"³⁰⁷ in the sense that ideology should be "located" where beliefs are made possible, pre-structured, *prima facie* made plausible, and so on.

On Haslanger's view, ideology is best understood as a "framing device" that manages our experiences of the world, shapes our cognitive attitudes and our possibilities for action. For this reason, she describes ideology as supplying a cultural *technē*:

"[I]deology provides a cultural *technē*, a set of dominant public meanings, scripts, patterns of thought and reasoning, that guides our coordination in ways that, often unintentionally, sustains injustice. People, often unthinkingly, enact patterns of interpretation and action because they are guided by a cultural *technē*: they engage in the local practices which rely on the shared meanings (schemas) and have also shaped the environment to prompt the relevant action."³⁰⁸

Here, ideology is characterized as supporting a cultural *technē*, a "frame of social meanings and social practices" that facilitates the practical orientation of social agents³⁰⁹ by making available

³⁰⁷ Celikates 2017: 58-9.

³⁰⁸ Haslanger 2015b: 34. Within her theory of ideology, the notion of a "schema," which she uses as a "placeholder," (although much wider in scope) is the functional equivalent to Shelby's forms of social consciousness and my notion of an "interpretive schema." For Haslanger, schemas are "standard convention[s]," "clusters of culturally shared mental states and processes, including concepts, attitudes, dispositions, and such, that enable us to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect." Like linguistic meanings, the cultural schemas we are interested in are "abstract entities" which are "instantiated in particular psychological states of individuals" and consist in positively or negatively valued associations (ibid 21-2; 35-6). Haslanger's theorizing about ideology shows a general and ever-stronger emphasis on the importance of language and meaning that must be welcomed. Though, from a hermeneutic perspective, the status of language and the linguisticity of interpretation is often ambiguous. On the one hand, for instance in the passage cited above, she highlights the *enabling* function of cultural schemas which include the concepts in terms of which we identify resources, register and process information, and coordinate action – which could be read as buying into the hermeneutic claim about the constitutive role of language. On the other hand, at times she seems to endorse a more instrumentalist view, for instance, when she refers to concepts etc. as "tools" for our understanding, when noting that "some cognitive selection occurs naturally" (ibid 37), or that entities can exist "[o]utside of any interpretive frame" (ibid 22). Moreover, not resolving this tension has important implications for her notion of experience and the conceptual relationship between theory and practice including her "practice first" approach to ideology.

³⁰⁹ Haslanger 2015b: 46-7.

to them the cultural tools to think and act.³¹⁰ This set of cultural tools that shape the practical outlook of individuals includes propositional attitudes but should neither be limited to them nor to the epistemic question of whether or not our propositional attitudes are true or false.³¹¹ Rather, when ideology is conceptualized as a cultural *technē*, Haslanger argues, in addition to the attitudes themselves, it must include the psychological mechanisms that “sort, shape, and filter what can be the objects of our attitudes” as well as the very meanings, concepts, and terms we use to describe the objects, facts, states of affairs, etc. that our propositions are about.³¹²

Now, the key question is “What is the right kind of ‘framing device’ that comprises all these individual ‘components’ and where do we look for it?” Haslanger herself does not provide a straightforward answer to this question. What we get, however, are occasional hints gesturing at a possible linguistic explanation. Emphasizing the cognitivist’ individualistic bias she notes that

“on the cognitivist account it remains the individual’s thinking or reasoning that is in error, not the very tools that our *language* and culture provide us in order to think. But what we absorb through socialization is not just a set of beliefs, but a *language*, a set of concepts, a responsiveness to particular features of things (and not others), a set of social meanings. The cognitivist emphasis on shared beliefs and patterns of reasoning is too limited to accommodate all this.”³¹³

³¹⁰ Haslanger 2017: 15 (“ideology as a set of cultural tools that shape the practical orientations in a group”); see also the hermeneutic slant in Jaeggi/Celikates (2017: 103 and 107), who remark that ideology constitutes a “formation of meaning” (“Sinnformation”) that provides a “horizon for interpretation” (“Deutungshorizont”), and Jaeggi 2009: 64: “ideologies constitute our relation to the world and thus determine the horizon of our interpretation of the world, or the framework in which we understand both ourselves and the social conditions, and also the way we operate within these conditions.”

³¹¹ For how we must understand the epistemic flaw of ideologies in view of the implications that follow from our understanding of linguistic world-disclosure, see below.

³¹² Haslanger 2017: 16, 19.

³¹³ Haslanger 2017: 9, emphasis added, internal footnote omitted. See also *ibid* 10. Referencing Stuart Hall’s definition of ideology (Hall 1986: 24, see *supra*), she states that “ideology is not best understood as a set of shared beliefs or other cognitive states, but should be extended to include the ‘concepts and *languages* of practical thought.’” Haslanger 2017: 15, emphasis added.

While Haslanger's suspicion ultimately points us in the right direction, her account obviously lacks some determinacy and specificity. I agree that language is key to understanding ideology. As such, bringing language into focus proves critical for completing the first leg of addressing the explanatory deficit of cognitivist accounts and for developing a more radical and comprehensive concept of ideology. But, most of all, we need to be more specific about what aspect of language we are after. In keeping with our findings about the world-disclosing function of language in the previous chapter, my claim is that it is linguistic world-disclosure that must loom larger in any more radical and comprehensive account of ideology such as the one Haslanger indicates in response to the shortcomings of excessively cognitivist views.

The ways in which we encounter objects and phenomena takes place against our preunderstandings of them, the projection of their possible meanings: how or *as* what they appear to us always already takes place within a linguistically disclosed world. The hermeneutic concept of world does not denote a totality of objects but a totality of significance that determines an implicit pre-ontology of what these entities can possibly be – how or as what they can be meaningful – for us. As Heidegger put it, the “disclosedness of the world sketches out the possibilities of understanding.”³¹⁴ This historically contingent and culturally variant world-disclosure lays out the meaningful possibilities that mold our expectations, guide our questions, and channel our efforts to further interpret the entity or event in order to make sense of it. Inadvertently, we get a sense of the significance of the hermeneutic concept of world when, somewhat in passing, Haslanger describes what an interpretive frame or schema does. For example, she says that it “enables us to interpret a nut as a kind of food.”³¹⁵ In this statement,

³¹⁴ BT 186; see also BT 192 about the phenomenon of projection in which “entities are disclosed in their possibilities.”

³¹⁵ Haslanger 2015b: 22.

Haslanger insinuates the *as*-structure of interpretation. When we interpret something as a nut, it appears to us *as* food, i.e. as something meant for human consumption. Thus, the intelligibility of the object, a nut, is already disclosed to us within the projected horizon of meaningful possibilities.

What makes linguistic world-disclosure in this sense possible is the prior linguistically mediated structure of intelligibility situated in the “fore-structure of understanding.” The fore-structure reveals the contextual, perspectival, and conceptual pre-structuring that governs our understanding and without which we would be at a loss to further determine the object of interpretation – i.e. substantiating and choosing between the different possibilities appearing before us against the backdrop of this linguistically mediated fore-understanding that constitutes the world as a totality of significance.³¹⁶ Although the “hermeneutic *as*,” which is revealed by the fore-structure, precedes the “predicative *as*” of interpretation (that which specifies the object or event, e.g. interpreting the entity as something for something), the two complement each other and jointly facilitate the “specific disclosing function of interpretation.”³¹⁷ The world we come to inhabit and learn to navigate is a world that is always already interpreted for us. The various cultural traditions we are exposed to in this process supply the meanings that enable, guide, and limit our attempts to access and interpret the world.

At times, Tommie Shelby could be read as gesturing at this hermeneutic model when he notes – without further engaging this line of thought – that “the locus of ideology is common sense, that reservoir of background assumptions that agents draw on spontaneously as they

³¹⁶ The fore-structure of understanding consists in the triad of fore-having (*Vorhabe*), fore-sight (*Vorsicht*), and fore-conception (*Vorgriff*), cf. chapter 1, I.3.

³¹⁷ BT 192-3 and BT 190: “interpretation functions as disclosure.”

engage in social intercourse.”³¹⁸ As we have seen,³¹⁹ Heidegger’s *das Man*, the average everyday way or “common sense manner”³²⁰ in which things have been interpreted “determines what and how one ‘sees’.”³²¹ The disclosedness that inheres in this everyday understanding or “common sense” is what makes understanding possible and gives us access to a world and its entities.³²² And this commonsensical way of understanding resides in and exerts its power through language.³²³

Language mediates power in many different ways. But Haslanger observes something important about how dominance features in the world-disclosing aspect of language, namely, that the road to ideology starts well before anyone uses concepts for predication in any particular instance.³²⁴ We noted that objects or phenomena always already appear as something that makes them available for further interpretation via predication against the projected possibilities of a particular world-disclosure. Concepts frame our “vision” of reality and some of them turn out to be at fault for ideologically priming our attempts to make sense of the world. Some ideological concepts Haslanger invokes are “*chaste*, *slutty*, and *ghetto*.” If we recognize the world-disclosing function of language, ideology begins well before someone applies one of these terms in interpretation, i.e. prior to someone predicating a person as being “chaste,” or “slutty”, or “ghetto.” Recognizing the world-disclosing function of language implies that ideology is already operative when we access the world through the interpretive grid of concepts and categories that

³¹⁸ Shelby 2014: 67. The passage continues: “These assumptions are often held without full conscious awareness, creating various forms of unconscious bias.” On race and racial ideology (esp. the ideology of color-blindness) operating on the level of common sense, see also Omi/Winant 2014: ix, 4, 126-7.

³¹⁹ See chapter 1, I.2.

³²⁰ BT 357 and 343.

³²¹ BT 213.

³²² BT 214.

³²³ Heidegger 2002a: 64 (“The one dwells, has its primordial dominance in language.”)

³²⁴ Haslanger 2017: 9-10.

frame our social cognition and pre-package experience by shaping expectations so that people can potentially show up as “chaste,” “slutty,” or “ghetto,” or that someone’s actions can be interpreted as “flirtatious” or “joking” rather than an act of sexual harassment. It is therefore crucial to note that ideology is at work in the very concepts, terms, categories, etc. that disclose the world to social agents and make it meaningful and intelligible to them – whether they provide dominant meanings or block the invention and cultivation of new concepts etc. to resist and dismantle a dominant world-disclosure.

This commonsensical understanding becomes available to us as we are being enculturated through various meaningful everyday practices and discourses. We are initiated into a world that is already interpreted for us. Growing up, we are exposed to the various influences of cultural traditions and the meanings that are made available to us by that tradition; we become familiar with its discursive and non-discursive products and practices.³²⁵ A linguistically mediated cultural tradition may instill certain explicit beliefs (e.g. the belief that the earth revolves around the sun) or implicit stereotypes and biases in us, but it certainly instills in us the meaningful concepts, terms, categories etc. in light of which we access the world. As a propositional attitude about something in the world (state of affairs, facts, etc.) being true, a belief presupposes that a world is already disclosed, so that, whatever our attitude is about, can appear as such against the backdrop of the projected meaningful possibilities. Being initiated into a culture takes place in the medium of (natural) languages. Language, however, is never an entirely private affair.³²⁶ Language is a shared practice with an intersubjective structure (I – Thou). Unlike beliefs that are

³²⁵ See BT 213: “In no case is a Dasein, untouched and unsexed by this way in which things have been interpreted, set before the open country of a world-in-itself, so that it just beholds what it encounters. The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world ‘matter’ to it. The ‘they’ prescribes one’s state-of-mind [Befindlichkeit], and determines what and how one ‘sees.’”

³²⁶ See Wittgenstein 2009: sect. 243.

“in the head” of an individual, linguistic meaning – *pace* intentionalist theories of meaning – is not coextensive with the intention of a speaker. The speaker’s intention and processes of belief formation are already mediated by language. And the linguistic meaning of the terms, concepts, and expressions we use when forming beliefs etc. is necessarily contextual. Each particular context and the meanings available in it are beyond the authoritative reach of any particular speaker. Since meanings are contextually shared, establishing, changing or even flipping the meaning of a term as well as creating new meanings requires the collaborative semantic effort of many members of a linguistic community.

The commonality of a world-disclosure provides a shared and publicly accessible vantage point. This is neither to say that all members of a linguistic community necessarily have an identical world-disclosure nor that the meanings of all concepts etc. are fully known by all members of that community. It is hardly deniable, however, that the forces of socialization in the spontaneous and established cultural practices and institutions of a linguistic community from child-rearing to the labor market and so on can have extraordinary standardizing effects in the course of which some become more dominant than others.³²⁷

In calling our attention to the critical role of our linguistic world-disclosure, hermeneutics also offers a cogent explanation why ideologies can be so persistent and why ideology critique requires such extraordinary communal semantic effort (“conceptual labor in company with others”). If ideology, in its cognitive dimension, must be conceptualized so radically as involving our linguistic world-disclosure then ideology is about more than the inconsistency and false application of systems of beliefs and critiquing ideology must target the world-disclosing components of our interpretive schema in addition to the set or cluster of ideological beliefs and

³²⁷ Cf. Bourdieu 1991 (esp. part II).

implicit attitudes. Ideology (and its critique) comprises (and targets) the very structure which makes the entities that our propositional attitudes are about appear in the first place and thus makes (ideological) beliefs possible. Hence, as a first conclusion of this discussion, the radical notion of the embodied interpretive schema I want to devise is centered on the constitutive role of language for our understanding, in particular the world-disclosing function of language.

1.2. Beyond cognitivism: Ideology as embodied disclosure

As opposed to cognitivist accounts, a hermeneutic theory of ideology based on linguistic world-disclosure thus appears to be a more viable candidate overall for explaining the shared, public, persistent, and dominant nature of ideologies. But such a radical understanding of the interpretive schema can do even more than that. Designating our linguistic world-disclosure as the “source” of our cognitive attitudes paves the way toward a more comprehensive notion of the interpretive schema, one that ultimately allows us to expand the theory of ideology beyond beliefs and implicit cognitive attitudes and thus remedies the explanatory deficits of cognitivist accounts. Once we have identified the “source” of beliefs and other cognitive attitudes in our linguistic world-disclosure, I argue, we can also broaden the scope of the interpretive schema to achieve a richer understanding of ideology that accommodates affective and conative phenomena. To show how a radical understanding of our interpretive schema that employs the explanatory power of linguistic world-disclosure facilitates a more comprehensive notion of ideology, I will build on the work in the previous chapter regarding the hermeneutic-pragmatic concept of experience.³²⁸

In my discussion of the hermeneutic-pragmatic concept of experience, I showed that the

³²⁸ See chapter 1, II.

hermeneutic tradition opens up a new way of understanding experience as linguistically mediated. The fact that we access the world through meaning is the bedrock principle of that tradition. I also argued that a fuller picture of experience needs to account for its affective and conative dimensions which complement its cognitive component and that understanding should not be reduced to purely mental, disembodied, and disinterested ways of engaging with the world. The constitutive power of language exceeds mediating our propositional attitudes, how we intellectually grasp worldly phenomena; additionally, it structures our affective and conative understanding of the world, how we feel and what we want to do about the entities that are disclosed to us. Human emotions and volitions are available to us through meaning regardless of their level of articulacy or our awareness of it. In that sense, our emotions and dispositions to act are symbolically pre-structured ways of accessing the world, embodied and fallible interpretations of reality that shape our experiences.³²⁹

If this is correct, then our notion of the interpretive schema must follow suit. If our linguistic world disclosure structures our cognitive expectations as well as projects the possibilities of our embodied interpretations of the world, then a hermeneutic notion of the interpretive schema and, by extension, an adequate concept of ideology must be extended to render it sensitive to these important non-cognitive, non-discursive dimensions. Thus, extending the breadth of the interpretive schema is intended to make those ideological phenomena that typically escape the cognitivist grid appear. To motivate this view and give an illustration of the scope of ideological phenomena omitted by cognitivist theories, I present George Yancy's autobiographical analysis of the confiscation of black bodies in his seminal paper *The Elevator*

³²⁹ See Taylor 1985: 74-5 and 63, who states that language is "the medium in which all our emotions, articulate and inarticulate, are experienced."

Effect.³³⁰ Yancy's account of his silent encounter with a white woman in a public elevator gives a striking impression of the plethora of embodied racist phenomena which would remain largely unaccounted for on a purely cognitivist view. Though Yancy does not connect the woman's racist "body language" to linguistic world-disclosure and racist ideology per se, he understands it as deriving from a racist interpretive script or schema and is well aware of the hermeneutic character of the woman's emotions and dispositional attitudes that become legible through her bodily comportment.

As Yancy steps into the elevator, he notices that the presence of his black male body immediately fills that social space and oversaturates it with meaning. For this, the white woman does not have to say a single word, it is her body language that tells the story of racism. Her body signals affective and conative responses to the presence of the black body. Yancy is dressed in a suit and tie, but despite his formal attire and calm demeanor, the woman's bodily reactions mark the appearance of his black body as an immediate threat. Her heart beats faster, she clutches her purse and her palms start to sweat, the muscles in her face and body tighten, she begins to tremble and her body hovers. With her eyes wide shut she tries to look at the black intruder without looking at him. Yancy reads her bodily reactions as the "deep-seated emotive responses" tied to a "racist socio-historic schematization" which without uttering a single word function as an insult, an "act of epistemic violence." The racialized schema that informs her suspicion and guides her affective responses marks the black body *as* an "indistinguishable, amorphous, black seething mass, a token of danger, a threat, a criminal, a burden, a rapacious animal incapable of delayed gratification."³³¹ Thus her somatic reactions "form part of a white *bodily* repertoire" and

³³⁰ Yancy 2017: 17-49.

³³¹ Yancy 2017: 18.

must be interpreted as expressing feelings of apprehension, anxiety, and trepidation, which even have the power to prolong her phenomenological perception of time as the elevator travels. The observable or legible instantiations of her embodied interpretations, Yancy contends, her white gaze and bodily comportment including her gestures, spatial positioning (backing away, poised to take flight), and facial expressions (e.g. when the woman fakes a smile), are all part of a learned “tacit racist script” that supports and sustains her whitely being-in-the-world. In the “*hermeneutic* transactional space”³³² of the elevator, the white woman interprets him through this racist script, a script that makes Yancy appear as a black body that poses a threat to her, a script that is not merely cognitively internalized but becomes an embodied way of being-in-the-world. But her “seeing” him as an objectified, un-individuated threat to her (“Look, *the* Black!”), Yancy insists, is not an individual act; rather, her performance of whitely being-in-the-world is a “cultural achievement,” a product of the socio-cultural tradition of which she is a part and that systemically generates a “racist optic” (Mills). One has to be enculturated into “seeing” the world whitely which presupposes, I would add in line with our hermeneutic approach, a white interpretive schema, a web of meanings that renders black male bodies intelligible, discloses them *as* predatory, criminal, threatening, etc. As Robert Gooding-Williams puts it, this “racist optic” presents black male bodies “supersaturated with significance, for they have been relentlessly subjected to characterization by newspapers, newscasters, popular film, television programming, public officials, policy pundits, and other agents of representation.”³³³ In describing the construction of the Black body through the white gaze, Yancy could even be read as adapting the language of world-disclosure: “The point here is that the Black body in relation

³³² Yancy 2017: 30, emphasis added.

³³³ Gooding-Williams 2006: 1-2 (also cited by Yancy 2017).

to the white gaze *appears* in the form of a sheer exteriority, implying that the Black body ‘shows up,’ makes itself known in terms of its Black surface.”³³⁴

What Yancy wants to foreground with his analysis is that the woman’s embodied responses form a central part of her learned way of whitely being-in-the-world. On the one hand, she is a product of this world but, on the other hand, this world is reproduced in her embodied interpretations of the black male body entering the elevator – regardless of any racist intentions she may or may not have. Yancy rejects purely cognitivist accounts of racism (according to which racism is reduced to the set of occurrent racist beliefs or prejudices individual agents possess) on explanatory grounds similar to those put forward by Haslanger. Agent-centered accounts of anti-black racism based on the beliefs of individual subjects miss the structural dimension and systemic character of the target phenomenon. Instead, Yancy emphasizes, in a way that seems to echo Haslanger’s rejection of the reductionism germane to cognitivist theories of ideology, that whitely being-in-the-world “is a form of [practical, MS] orientation replete with a set of sensibilities”:

“My point here is that her racist actions are also habits of the body and not simply cognitively false beliefs. [...] She does not realize the subtle, habitual performances that she enacts in order to sustain the socially constructed nature of her gaze and, hence, to continue to perpetuate the distortion of my Black body as criminal. [...] while she is cognitively dysfunctional through deep-seated racist socio-epistemological forms of belief, her racism involves habitual, somatically ingrained ways of whitely being-in-the-world, and systemically racist institutional structures, of which she is partly a product. [...] the intelligibility and effectiveness of the performative white gaze are always already fueled by a larger social imaginary [...] After all, the shift she underwent is not just a cognitive response, but a profound, affective *embodied* response.”³³⁵

The woman’s whitely being-in-the-world has vast repercussions for Yancy’s agency. As she imposes the white gaze and corporeal schema on him, she confiscates his black body and

³³⁴ Yancy 2017: 38.

³³⁵ Yancy 2017: 39-40.

nullifies his agency to the effect that there is no way for him to escape the grasp of the dominant interpretive schema. Similar to the effects of Althusser's concept of interpellation, her superimposed meanings paralyze him and take control of his actions. But we should note that, contrary to Althusser's famous example, nobody is hailed in the space of the elevator; in fact, no speech act is uttered, the woman does not speak the words "Look, *the* Black!" Still, whatever Yancy's intentions, it is her interpretive schema that sanctions the meanings of his movements, gestures, and speech acts. Any sudden movement, coming too close, or returning her (forced) smile could raise suspicion and heighten her anxiety. If he tries to politely introduce himself as a philosopher with a PhD to convince the woman of his education and civilized manners, he risks that either her body still rejects the message or that by assimilating to the standards and terms of what it means to be a "good black" he subjects himself to the white interpretive schema that supports her perception of him. On the contrary, confronting her by dropping a contemptuous remark or naming her fears would most likely confirm the stereotype of the angry black male that he is trying to shed. The social space of the elevator is so oversaturated with the meanings of the racist "interpretive metanarrative" that it silences him and undermines his agency.³³⁶

Though Yancy himself does not link his observations to a racial background ideology, he considers the observable phenomena to be part of an embodied racist "interpretive metanarrative" or racist "episteme."³³⁷ His explanatory hypothesis stresses the structural and systematic nature of racism and is thus offered as an alternative to the individualism of cognitivist accounts. It is characteristic of third-personal accounts that the observer does not

³³⁶ See Yancy 2017: 30-5.

³³⁷ I do not think, however, that Yancy would reject subsuming the aspects of racism in which he is interested in the paper under the concept of ideology – ideology simply isn't the focal point of his analysis. I thus believe that my ideological framing is compatible with his account.

know the agent's explicit beliefs, let alone their implicit cognitive attitudes which remain unknown even to the agent herself. But whether or not the woman in the elevator actually holds racist beliefs or harbors implicit racist biases is epiphenomenal to the findings offered by Yancy's analysis.³³⁸ At this juncture, and for our purposes, the point I try to make is not about the empirical correctness of Yancy's claim regarding the woman in the elevator or about her holding racist beliefs or not. My point is that a merely cognitivist account is unable to rationalize the embodied interpretations in the first place because they would probably not even show up on its analytic radar. Even if they did, the most likely option for a traditional cognitivist view would be to psychologize them as rooted in the agent's personal biography and psyche.³³⁹ The (ideological) effect of this individualistic tendency eventually obscures the social (shared) and structural (linguistic) aspect of the observed phenomena.

If the first part of my argument is correct and only a radical notion of the interpretive schema that encompasses the world-disclosing function of language proves appropriate to the

³³⁸ Because if the woman does hold racist beliefs/biases then we still require an explanation for how the embodied interpretations are connected to her cognitive attitude. If the woman does not hold any racist beliefs/biases, the legible instantiations and tangible effects of her embodied interpretations still perpetuate racist structures of intelligibility.

³³⁹ Individual psychological trauma is one possible explanation. The woman in the elevator could have been the victim of rape and the (black) male body triggers her memory which could explain her reactions (Yancy 2017: 27-8). Yancy concedes that the woman's biography would in this case falsify his reading of her embodied interpretations. But there is a way in which this agent-centered explanation is troubling in itself. Its methodological individualism obscures *ab ovo* the possibility to resort to the workings of a racist interpretive schema and the latter's systematic and social nature to explain her responses. Yancy makes a similar observation about an issue raised by a white female student who comments that she would feel apprehensive in this scenario regardless of the man's race, suggesting that race is immaterial to the white woman in the elevator whose responses could be triggered by the presence of a male body per se. While Yancy does not intend to marginalize the student's experience, he is deeply concerned about foregrounding gender at the expense of race (and thus discounting how gender and race intersect in the white imaginary): "The fact of the matter is that there is no male qua male. [...] "Are you going to rape me?" is a question that gets inflected in ways profoundly differently in the presence of a Black man than in the presence of a white man. By flattening out the discussion and making it into one that deflects the importance of racism, patriarchy is elevated over the explanatory resources found in exploring the white (i.e., raced) imaginary in greater depth. This flattening not only avoids the subtle power of racism, and how it operates in the everyday lives of whites, but also impoverishes forms of social theory that highlight the complexity at the intersections between race and gender." (ibid 29).

target phenomena (even within the cognitive dimension³⁴⁰), then it seems reasonable to choose the latter as the starting point for any further attempts to map the scope of ideological phenomena more comprehensively. If our linguistic world disclosure not only mediates our cognitive access to the world, i.e., if our emotions and volitions are likewise available to us only through meaning, then we require a broader notion of the interpretive schema that discloses to us the full range of (potentially) ideological phenomena including our deeply ingrained, embodied practical orientations. Language (in particular its world-disclosing function) integrates these different dimensions of accessing and making sense of the world in a way that accounts for their social and structural nature. A radical and more comprehensive model of the interpretive schema which incorporates this deep-seated level of analysis thus enables us to conceptualize ideology as a social structure that “affects not only our perception and belief formation, but also a wide range of affective, conative, and hedonic states and processes, as well as bodily dispositions.”³⁴¹

In addition to providing the means to address the demonstrated explanatory deficit and remedy the individualistic tendencies of cognitivist views of ideology, such a broadened conception of the interpretive schema helps explain the making of new experiences that could eventually give rise to alternative disclosures as the basis of the comparative standpoint which, I argued,³⁴² is required for challenging the world-disclosure of ideological schemas. In my discussion of the experience of sexual harassment I showed that victims of sexual harassment were unable to fully make sense of and articulate their experiences of the phenomenon prior to the conceptual labor that allowed them to designate the meaning and the bounds of the new

³⁴⁰ As the “source” of both conscious/explicit and unconscious/implicit propositional attitudes which also explains the shared and persistent nature of certain ideological phenomena despite beliefs changing over time and varying between individuals, see *supra*.

³⁴¹ Haslanger 2015: 35.

³⁴² See chapter 1, III.1.

concept.³⁴³ But their cognitively coming to terms with sexual harassment was predicated on or supported by the world-disclosing function of their embodied interpretations which frustrated their expectations, implanted a sense of being wronged and thus initiated the process of conceptual labor. Seen in this light, the importance of including our embodied interpretations in a more comprehensive account of the interpretive schema for the sake of building an analytically more fine-grained and explanatory superior theory of ideology looms even larger. Employing this more robust notion not only has the potential to disclose new ideological phenomena beyond the cognitive realm but also pinpoints an additional point of intervention for practices of resisting ideology as well as helping to explain their emergence.

II. The pejorative conception of ideology

The proposed notion of the embodied interpretive schema, which I presented as the cornerstone of a more radical and comprehensive account of ideology, is in itself a neutral concept. It is neutral in the sense that having an interpretive schema is as such necessary for all understanding. This does not imply that any specific interpretive schema is normatively neutral. If, however, we equate a normatively neutral understanding of the concept of the interpretive schema with that of ideology, we end up with a non-evaluative version of the latter. On that view, most prominently articulated by Karl Mannheim, ideologies capture the sense that the viewpoints or perspectives of individuals or groups are influenced by their social position, either in the local sense that prompts skepticism toward someone else's particular opinions or beliefs or in the global sense that it

³⁴³ See chapter 1, II.5.

shapes the worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of an entire epoch or social class.³⁴⁴ The decisive property of ideology in this descriptive sense is that the practical orientation it offers is socially determined as a function of the “life-situation” or social position of a person or group. Hence, one’s practical outlook is ideological to the extent that it is determined by the agent’s or group’s social milieu. As a sociological “device,” ideology in this non-evaluative sense is used to analyze the worldviews of individuals and groups regardless of their content, i.e. without evaluating the validity of one ideology vis-à-vis others.³⁴⁵ The perspectivism of such a non-evaluative approach to ideology, however, falls back to a pre-Marxist level of analysis and quickly escalates into a robust epistemic and moral relativism and with it talk of ideology loses its meaning.³⁴⁶

Standpoint theory, for instance, suggests that a specific social position (although no guarantee for it) can proffer valuable epistemic insights. As we have seen in the case of sexual harassment, the socio-economic position of less privileged agents can enable them to develop a world-disclosing “second sight” (Mills) or double consciousness which may empower them and function as the basis for correcting the practical orientation of socially privileged actors.

Contrary to descriptive approaches to ideology, evaluative ones lay claim to judging the validity of the practical orientations they provide. Positive conceptions of those evaluative approaches typically stress the practical guidance and the power of ideas to mobilize social

³⁴⁴ Mannheim 1998: 49-52. For Mannheim, only the latter, so-called “total conception of ideology,” permeates the noological level and includes the “conceptual apparatus,” (ibid 50).

³⁴⁵ See, for instance, Geertz 1973 and Mannheim 1998: 77. Mannheim himself does not endorse a non-evaluative concept (see ibid 78-87), for he thinks that the validity of ideas is not reducible to their origin. The notion of truth he employs, however, is historical. The truth of an idea or belief is determined by whether or not it is appropriate to reality: “A theory then is wrong if in a given practical situation it uses concepts and categories which, if taken seriously, would prevent man from adjusting himself at that historical stage [...] knowledge is distorted and ideological when it fails to take account of the new realities applying to a situation, and when it attempts to conceal them by thinking of them in categories which are inappropriate.” (ibid 85-6) Ideology is socially determined, antiquated thought, out of touch with the changing reality and “conceals the present by attempting to comprehend it in terms of the past.” (ibid) On this count, it is hard to see how Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge could conceptualize the dynamic structure of ideologies, how they change and adapt over time.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Eagleton 1991: 108-10.

agents. To this end, the ideology outlines a desideratum, an ideal form of life for a certain social group or class.³⁴⁷ The locus classicus is Lenin's somewhat maieutic doctrine according to which the organic intellectual helps articulate, synthesize, and organize the standpoint of the working class that reflects their real interests – a task they could have accomplished by themselves in more favorable conditions. Ideology, in this case Leninism, is intended to provide the practical orientation appropriate to the working class (and its historical role) in order to lead and motivate their revolutionary struggle. Indeed, the problems faced by a normatively positive account of ideology are similar to those inherited by critical conceptions. Among other things, it would have to explain why it designates a specific social group (e.g. the proletariat) as the subject of history (typically provided by a teleological philosophy of history), justify how it ascertains their real interest and, of course, legitimize its ideological fallout, namely the negative effects on other social groups to the latter.

In most of Critical Theory ideologies have a bad name. In this pejorative sense, ideologies are said to distort or obfuscate social reality; in particular, they conceal structures of domination and cloak social conflicts in ways that reproduce a dominant or hegemonic order. The hermeneutic concept of ideology I want to propose is decisively pejorative and, in that regard, joins the ranks of critical conceptions of ideology in the Marxist tradition. But what exactly turns an interpretive schema, which we have determined to be a neutral concept by virtue of its constitutive role for understanding, into the beast called ideology? There are, at bottom,

³⁴⁷ Recently, Thomas Piketty has seemingly used ideology in this “positive and constructive sense” as a “set of a priori plausible ideas and discourses describing how society should be structured.” (Piketty 2020: 3) Aside from its cognitivism, I believe that Piketty's professedly positive conception turns out to be somewhat of a descriptive conception in disguise. He claims that “every ideology (...) expresses a certain idea of social justice. There is always some plausible basis for this idea, some sincere and consistent foundation (...)” and one of his aims is to “try to reconstruct the internal coherence of different types of ideology” (ibid 9). But if this is what Piketty means by ideology in the positive sense, then he seems to conflate the positive conception of ideology with its half-truth, see *infra* II.1.).

three options for determining the pejorative nature of ideologies which can be summed up as follows: “So the term ‘ideology’ is used in a pejorative sense to criticise a form of consciousness because it incorporates beliefs which are false, or because it functions in a reprehensible way, or because it has a tainted origin.”³⁴⁸ Hence, the ways in which an interpretive schema is judged to be defect or invalid and thus ideological are to be established in epistemic, functional, or genetic/genealogical terms. Some theorists consider these identifying features to be mutually exclusive and single out one predominant property – typically, this is true for views that characterize ideologies as “necessary false consciousness;” others combine them in a two- or three-pronged approach.³⁴⁹

I conceive of ideologies as embodied interpretive schemata whose world-disclosure makes possible ways of understanding reality which can be shown to be epistemically flawed and to produce or perpetuate forms of injustice. What makes an interpretive schema an ideology on this view is a combination of its epistemic and functional properties.³⁵⁰ But how are we to understand their epistemic and functional components? I will begin with the epistemic dimension and account for the ways in which ideologies are epistemically flawed. Unpacking the nature of the epistemic flaw will offer yet another opportunity to demonstrate the systematic advantage of the hermeneutic approach. Appreciating the full explanatory potential of linguistic world-disclosure will help us confront a principled problem many traditional theories of ideology have carried in their wake, namely the problem that ideologies make themselves true. I will address this issue in the context of discussing how Adorno – a key representative of Western Marxism –

³⁴⁸ Geuss 1981: 21 and 12-21.

³⁴⁹ Shelby 2003 uses a three-count approach.

³⁵⁰ I understand the conjunctive as saying that an epistemically deficient structure can rightfully be called an ideology only if it produces injustices. This excludes false beliefs and theories that do not cross this threshold, see *infra* II.3. for a discussion of the functional component of ideology.

thinks about ideology. In doing so, I will also clarify that, pace Adorno, not all of ideology is necessarily about justification but rather that ideology is always about interpretation.

II.1. The half-truth of ideology

For Adorno, ideology is “a consciousness which is objectively necessary and yet at the same time false, as the intertwining of truth and falsehood, which is just as distinct from the whole truth as it is from the pure lie.”³⁵¹ Leaving aside the complexity of the Adornian notion of consciousness, the passage reveals that on this model ideology operates on the basis of legitimating *half-truths* (“For *ideology is justification*.”³⁵²). The standard for truth implicated by Adorno for assessing the falsity of ideologies seems to be the standard of telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth – as replicated, for instance, in the formula used for sworn testimony before a court of law. What this formulaic standard demands, goes beyond a strictly binary conception of truth and falsity and creates the space for half-truths. Ideologies are paradigmatic cases of such half-truths. Although they never disclose the whole truth and nothing but the truth, they nonetheless possess a kernel of truth, i.e., they do not simply propagate lies or blatant falsities.

I suggest that we begin to unpack the puzzle of ideological half-truths by adopting the local conception of ideologies I’ve developed in the previous chapter which opens up the possibility for an understanding of ideologies that presents them as epistemically flawed in some contexts while preserving their truth in other contexts. Contrary to totalizing depictions of ideology (both in the pejorative and descriptive tradition), I have argued that we must understand

³⁵¹ Adorno 1973a: 189.

³⁵² Adorno 1973a: 189.

ideologies as local and contextual phenomena.³⁵³ According to this local theory, ideologies do not take hold of the subjects' entire world-disclosure but affect only some of its domains. Departing from the global conception of ideology in favor of a local understanding of the phenomenon has several important implications for both the theory and critique of ideology. First, it provides a necessary condition for the critique of ideology for making possible, in principle, a standpoint unencumbered by the ideology that is the object of its own critique.³⁵⁴ Second, the local view I advance allows for the analysis and critique of ideologies (plural!) as free-standing, however, mutually interacting interpretive schemas.³⁵⁵ Proponents of the totalizing view, with its commitment to a single, all-encompassing ideology that follows a particular, unifying logic, are forced to accept that, in the final analysis, all ideological phenomena must be subsumed under this singular, over-arching matrix. Thus, they would have to claim, for example, that all forms of racist ideology ultimately emerge from and can be explained by the logic of capitalism. By contrast, the local conception furnishes the conceptual space to analyze ideologies in the plural and examine the complex ways in which they interact with each other synchronically and diachronically without being committed to any reductionist claims. Third, and most important for our discussion of ideological half-truths, the contextual conception has systematic implications regarding the epistemic flaw of ideologies. It helps us to make sense of the peculiar claim that ideologies have a kernel of truth, i.e., the fact that they aren't unconditionally false across the board. Emphasizing the limited scope of ideologies in this way explains their paradigmatic appearance as half-truths whose validity is confined to a particular

³⁵³ See chapter 1, III.3.

³⁵⁴ See chapter 3.

³⁵⁵ See my analysis of the intersection of racism and neo-liberalism in the ideology of colorblindness in chapter 3, IV.

context (where, strictly speaking, one cannot speak of an ideology) but operate ideologically outside this context elsewhere in the world-disclosure. In other words, ideologies are half-truths because they can be and typically are contextually true, but they never disclose the whole truth.

For Adorno, the claim that ideologies possess a kernel of truth is crucial insofar as it is tied to his claim that “*ideology is justification*.” The predicate “ideological” has to be earned insofar as ideologies in the proper sense have to offer some element of reason, something that can be picked apart by rational critique by virtue of the kernel of truth they embody. What separates ideology from bigotry or cynicism is that ideological understanding understands itself as making good on a promise of truth and justice. Contrary to the cynicism of unmediated and unmitigated relationships of power, ideology proper does not understand itself as perpetuating unjust violence. Since structures and acts of violence are either not recognized as such or they are understood as rationally mediated and thus legitimate, the relationships of violence an ideology perpetuates “are not comprehensible to this power itself.” It is in that sense that ideology transpires above the heads of those agents who are under its spell.

An ideology, we recall, must be distinguished from a lie, it is never completely (and intentionally³⁵⁶) false, for “the critique of ideology, as the confrontation of ideology with *its own truth*, is only possible insofar as the *ideology contains a rational element* with which the critique can deal.”³⁵⁷ It is by virtue of this criterion that Adorno distinguishes proper ideologies such as classical liberalism from pseudo-ideologies such as the “*so-called* ideology of National Socialism [...], to which the concept of ideology, of a necessarily false consciousness, is no

³⁵⁶ See Adorno 1973b: 271, where he argues – correctly in my view – that intentional, manipulative uses of “ideology” are to be considered propaganda.

³⁵⁷ Adorno 1973a: 190, emphasis added.

longer directly relevant.”³⁵⁸ His paradigmatic example of a proper ideology is bourgeois consciousness.³⁵⁹ Though liberalism’s individualistic conceptions of autonomy, freedom, and equality are not utterly misconceived, their narrow, formal understanding is too restrictive.³⁶⁰ Limiting equality to (formal) equality before the law, for instance, ignores the material and social conditions that enable social agents to exercise their freedoms; the formal framework treats them as mere contingencies that do not fit the criteria for rational justification and thus actively excludes them from the set of reasons that matter for establishing equality and freedom. In Adorno’s view then, liberal conceptions are false in the ideologically relevant sense because they do not express “the whole truth” of these ideals.

On this account, ideologies proper epitomize values and ideals which objectively stand to reason (even if they are realized in degenerate or diluted form), whereas pseudo-ideologies such as National Socialism are characterized by a complete lack of rational substance which, in turn, exempts them from becoming the proper object of any rational critique. If totalitarianism operates through intellectually unmediated violence and terror, the logic goes, then totalitarian “thought” is not intended to justify this violence.³⁶¹ Nazism ridicules reason and Adorno claims that neither the propagators of Nazi “pseudo-ideology” nor its subjects ever believed it or took it seriously. Where we find the cynicism of raw violence instead of the (ultimately failed) attempts

³⁵⁸ Adorno 1973a: 190, emphasis added.

³⁵⁹ Adorno 1973a: 189.

³⁶⁰ The root of their ideological character can be found in “identity thinking” and its functional equivalent in the social realm, namely, the exchange principle, see, for instance, Adorno 1973b: 146-8. At the same time, however, it is more than just the perfect instantiation of ideology, for Adorno contends that the “nature of ideology itself” is bourgeois (1973a: 191), i.e., the ideals of classical liberalism herald the beginning of the ideological age.

³⁶¹ See Adorno 1973a: 191: “For ideology in the proper sense, relationships of power are required which are not comprehensible to this power itself, which are mediated and therefore also less harsh. Today society, which has unjustly been blamed for its complexity, has become too transparent for this.” We find similar claims about the pseudo-ideological character of Nazism and this version of the end of ideology thesis (according to which ideologies become extinct because of the alleged self-transparency of modern societies) in Habermas 1973: 437 and TCA II, 196, 354. For a persuasive critique of Adorno’s claim, see Haug 1980.

to rational justification, the critique of ideology is “replaced by an analysis of *cui bono*.”³⁶²

Whatever the merit of Adorno’s analyses of bourgeois consciousness and totalitarianism in terms of their ideological credentials, on a systematic level they assert the connection between the requirement of the kernel of truth, the claim that ideologies are half-truths, and the claim that “*ideology is justification*.” For ideology to become operative in practices of justification, it must offer a version of truth and justice to either mediate or obscure forms of violence. Ideology cannot administer unmediated violence by being evidently cynical or proclaiming utter nonsense, for where “purely immediate relations of power predominate, there are really no ideologies.”³⁶³ And it is in virtue of their kernel of truth, interpreted on the local conception as their contextually limited validity in some context(s), that ideologies typically acquire false justificatory plausibility – for explaining phenomena or legitimizing a course of action – in other contexts.

From a hermeneutic standpoint, ideological understanding acquires its false plausibility through various forms of analogizing. Principally, interpretation (understanding something *as* something) is understanding by analogy,³⁶⁴ that is, understanding by transferring meaning from one domain to another and applying the information about one particular (source) to another particular (target).³⁶⁵ When we analogize, we extend our understanding of an object we are

³⁶² Adorno 1973a: 190-1.

³⁶³ Adorno 1973a: 190.

³⁶⁴ On the claim that analogies (proportional correspondences) have a logical function insofar as they “serve the definition of concepts,” but, furthermore, themselves correspond to the “fundamental metaphoricity of language,” see TM 429. On likeness and the Heideggerian “as,” see North 2021: 221-2. On analogy and concept formation, see Hofstadter/Sander 2013, who (without reference to hermeneutics) defend the thesis that “without analogies there can be no concepts.”

³⁶⁵ In stating this, I do not intend to imply that analogy only works across different domains. For, quite often, the (contested) boundaries that separate domains from each other are exactly what’s at issue for the critique of ideology. Further, I do not claim that analogous understanding is limited to modes of reasoning or argument by analogy. Rather, it spans the entire spectrum of cognitive, affective, and conative modes of understanding. On argument by analogy, see Juthe 2005, who claims that such arguments are not reducible to deductive, inductive, or abductive reasoning and therefore constitute arguments in their own right. What sets arguments by analogy apart from the other types of arguments discussed is that the former make an “inference from particular to particular and by the fact that the conclusion never follows solely in virtue of the semantics or the syntactical structure of the argument.” (ibid

(more) familiar with to another object we are less familiar with and we do this on the basis of their (perceived) likeness, where likeness refers to a correspondence of relation, properties, or function. In projecting what we know and expect about one object onto another we take to be similar in some aspect(s), analogies can enable us to understand new phenomena and act in situations we have never before encountered. Determining the likeness of source and target, interpretation by analogy, or simply: interpretation, enables an understanding of new phenomena. At the same time, analogous understanding is facilitated by established general meanings and concepts which disclose new phenomena in ways that may not give them their due in their novelty as particulars and thus limit and falsify our understanding of them, so that there are apt and inapt, appropriate and inappropriate analogies. With that said, grasping interpretation as interpretation by analogy reveals two important ways in which ideologies can be flawed in the sense that they do not tell the whole truth and Hobbes's infamous analogy of Leviathan or the state as an "artificial man" is a perfect example:

"For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, (in Latin CIVITAS) which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which, the *sovereignty* is an artificial *soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; the *magistrates*, and other *officers* of judicature and execution, artificial *joints*; *reward* and *punishment* (by which fastened to the seat of the sovereignty, every joint and member is moved to perform his duty) are the *nerves*, that do the same in the body natural; the *wealth* and *riches* of all the particular members, are the *strength*; *salus populi* (the people's safety) its *business*; *counsellors*, by whom all things needful for it to know, are suggested unto it, are the *memory*; *equity* and *laws*, an artificial *reason* and *will*; *concord*, *health*; *sedition*, *sickness*; and *civil war*, *death*."³⁶⁶

In this paragraph, as in the rest of the work, Hobbes uses several explicit correlations to

illuminate a counterpart-correspondence of state and "natural man." Analogous to natural man,

24) Identifying the movement from particular to particular as analogy's distinctive mode of inference must, however, be qualified: the general (conceptual) is necessary not only to identify that about which we want to make a similarity claim, i.e. the objects in comparison, but further to determine the point of comparison (*tertium comparationis*), the aspect in virtue of which their similarity is judged.

³⁶⁶ Hobbes 1998: 7.

the body politic is made up of artificial counterparts of the former's soul, joints, nerves, etc. which resemble a likeness in terms of the role they play for the state's preservation and growth. In sum, the series of functional analogies suggests that we are to imagine the state *as* an artificial human organism. In this passage, the functional aspect under which the analogy coheres is, arguably, most explicit in the correspondence of reward/punishment and the nerves. The nerves, it is understood by Hobbes, connect the joints to the soul which gives life and motion to the organism. The nerves "move" the joints so that each part of the body can fulfill its tasks as determined by the soul. Likewise, rewards and punishment play the role of social steering mechanisms "moving" the public officials to perform their duties via a series of motivational strings that originate in the seat of government (sovereignty as the artificial soul of the state).

For our purpose, an analysis of the correspondence relations is valuable since exposing the flaws of Hobbes's analogy will reveal the two principal ideological stratagems and show how they relate to analogous understanding and the claim that ideologies possess a kernel of truth. Understanding the motivational force of reward and punishment in the domain of human interaction analogous to the neuronal stimulus that causes the movement of one's limbs is not only deficient as an undue extension of merely causal explanations of human behavior and thus presents an over-generalization of knowledge beyond the physical domain; in presenting human interaction as governed by causal forces, Hobbes's empiricism further naturalizes the social domain. As a consequence, the analogy presents this as an immutable matter of (natural) fact, i.e. as something that, because it is subject to a natural cause of action, could not possibly be otherwise (at least not without sacrificing social order), and thus suggests a carrot and stick approach to motivating and regulating human action. While the epistemic flaws of ideologies

come in many shapes and forms,³⁶⁷ over-generalization in understanding the world, which includes the formation and use of cultural stereotypes and practices of ideal theorizing,³⁶⁸ and the naturalization or essentialization of social relations (including social categories such as race or gender)³⁶⁹ are among the most common ideological falsities.³⁷⁰ When understanding new phenomena – whether explicit or implicit – false analogizing can account for these paradigmatic flaws. Understanding by analogy can overstretch the knowledge of a particular context (e.g., by overgeneralizing) which, in the cognitive dimension, for instance, produces false first-order beliefs about an entity. In addition, at a meta- or second-order level, flaws in analogous understanding can create false cognitive attitudes about one's beliefs; for example, when as a consequence of transferring meanings and concepts from the natural domain to that of social interaction one's beliefs about the latter – in preserving their status as facts of nature – are presented as invariable (naturalization). It is in that sense, I believe, that we can understand Adorno's claims that ideologies possess a kernel of truth but never tell the whole truth.

³⁶⁷ My goal in this chapter is not to present an exhaustive general typology of the epistemic defects of ideologies.

³⁶⁸ On ideal theory as ideology, see Mills 2005.

³⁶⁹ A telling example of a primarily essentializing ideological understanding of gender-relations is the claim that women are better caregivers than men (see Haslanger 2015: 15, who refers to MacKinnon 1989: 101). Surveys show that women, in fact, do most of the work taking care of members of vulnerable groups whether professionally or informally (i.e., unpaid!). So, on a first glance, the reality of caregiving practices confirms that women are better at it than men which, in turn, is taken to suggest something about what it means to be a woman (Inversely, essentializing women as caregivers would also entail that women who fail at this task aren't "real" women, which indicates the normative potential of essentialization). However, women are not better caregivers by nature, they do not have a genetic disposition to nurse the sick, take care of the elderly, or rear children. Rather, women are culturally initiated into taking on caregiving responsibilities early on, find themselves in social situations that force them to assume the role of a caregiver when much of the labor of caregiving they provide is simply dumped on them.

³⁷⁰ See Celikates 2017: 62. Ideological expressions, for instance, present truths in portions or pronounce truths that are blown out of proportion by asserting problematic universalizations – the oldest trick in the ideology play book. The most infamous example of a problematic universalization from the history of ideology critique is probably that of a particular interest (e.g. that of the bourgeois class) being represented as a general interest. Additionally, ideologies present the context of social action as immutable or preclude possibilities of doing things otherwise by presenting a certain course of action as that which goes without saying. See also Shelby (2003: 166) for further ways in which the epistemic flaw of ideology plays out cognitively: "There are many types of cognitive error that are typical of ideological thinking—inconsistency, oversimplification, exaggeration, half-truth, equivocation, circularity, neglect of pertinent facts, false dichotomy, obfuscation, misuse of "authoritative" sources, hasty generalization, and so forth. This means that we must engage in concrete epistemic evaluations of putative ideologies if we are to uncover their particular cognitive deficiencies."

At this point, however, we must turn to a principal objection against the reconstructed Adornian model: How can we reconcile the assertion that ideologies never disclose the entire truth about a phenomenon with some observations that, when we turn to contexts in which ideologies are presumed to be operative, they do real explanatory or justificatory work to the effect that reality seems to confirm their validity? In keeping with Hobbes's analogy, isn't it true that reward and punishment are effective instruments when it comes to enforcing social order? Doesn't their efficacy prove the underlying causal understanding of human behavior as well as normatively reinforce the carrot and stick approach as commendable to governing human interaction? The problem this objection raises for the critique of ideology is that reality appears to correspond to ideological understanding to the effect that reality, as experienced by agents in the grip of ideology, presents ideological understanding as self-confirming, it appears as tracking the truth. The problem for ideology critique is thus precisely to debunk ideologies despite their appearance as true and the task of a theory of ideology is to explain how ideologies can make themselves true.

In what follows, I want to demonstrate that there are two distinct senses in which ideology acts as its own truth-maker. Ideology makes itself true either by way of delivering a *false diagnosis* or by way of recommending a *false therapy*. In the first sense of truth-making, ideological understanding gives a *false diagnosis* of social phenomena without agents realizing that something is wrong with their understanding of themselves and/or the world. This first sense of truth-making is close to what has traditionally been described as ideological "illusion." However, standard descriptions of such illusions, insofar as they are grounded in correspondence theories of truth, prove inadequate to capture this mode of ideological truth-making. By contrast, I argue that the hermeneutics of world-disclosure overall offer a better explanation of these kinds

of “illusions.” On this view, social agents have a false understanding of reality because their world-disclosure is contextually rigged by ideology to favor certain forms of analogizing and excluding alternative interpretations – as exemplified in the case of sexual harassment. In the second sense of truth-making, ideology creates social reality by suggesting a *false therapy*, i.e. by giving false normative recommendations which, in turn, shape social expectations. Here, the problem is not that agents have a false understanding of themselves or the world; by contrast, one’s understanding of the phenomenon at hand is indeed correct. What is problematic, however, are the normative conclusions ideological understanding draws from these truths in deciding what is or isn’t to be done about the situation they describe. I discuss ideological truth-making as *false therapy* with regard to racial differences in the context of educational “achievement gaps.”

Accommodating both senses of ideological truth-making, however, calls for a more emphatic notion of truth, one that also tracks matters of normative rightness.³⁷¹ Normative issues have been at the very heart of ideology critique since Marx (whether is it about the true economic value of goods in the debate about commodity fetishism or the critique of liberal ideals of political economy).³⁷² From a hermeneutic standpoint, interpretive schemas disclose normative meanings by projecting the possibilities of what can appear as socially justified or acceptable understanding and action and thereby create the normative expectations that shape social reality. The spirit of hermeneutics resonates in Rahel Jaeggi’s comment on the normative dimension of ideological disclosure when she notes that

“ideology, is *always already* both an understanding and an evaluation. Ideologies are normative *as* ways of understanding the world. As worldviews, they determine the limits of possible actions and thereby – in a very profound sense – what one is to do. They stake out the field of possible

³⁷¹ As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I am here concerned with a subset of normative matters, namely matters of justice.

³⁷² See, for instance, Stahl 2016: 251.

actions, and this staking out, determining, and limiting of possibilities is itself a normative matter.”³⁷³

Since the epistemic flaw of ideologies does not merely pertain to the disclosure of entities, facts, states of affairs, etc., as relevant in the case of false diagnosis, the required notion of truth must be broad enough to track epistemic defects in value-related matters concerning the rightness of norms, principles, ideals that regulate and guide human interaction in the social world. The best candidate to accommodate both truth *stricto sensu* and normative rightness is the notion of validity and the epistemic flaw of ideologies thus refers to their invalidity.³⁷⁴ Ideological understanding can be shown to be untrue in the sense of false diagnosis, wrong as in the case of false therapy, or both.³⁷⁵ Vice versa, the kernel of validity of ideology relates to truths and normative expectations confined to specific contexts. To be clear, ideology’s invalidity is unknown at the agential level and has to be established through world-disclosing conceptual labor. The individual proponents of ideology are incognizant of its invalidity – following Marx’s famous line from *Capital I*: “They do not know it, but they do it.”

II.2. *Ideological truth-making as false diagnosis*

When explicating the problem of ideological truth-making as false diagnosis, first, we must not make the mistake to envision ideology as somehow oscillating on a spectrum between truth and falsehood. If we endorse Adorno’s insight about ideology’s kernel of truth, we likewise accept a more convoluted picture of the relation between truth and falsehood: In ideology, truth and falsity become entangled, and their entanglement cannot be dismantled or taken apart by

³⁷³ Jaeggi 2009: 72, emphasis added.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Habermas’s notion of validity in TCA I, 104, 319-20.

³⁷⁵ My discussion of the ideological character of “All lives matter” in chapter 3, IV.1., indicates how questions of fact and value, truth and rightness, are intertwined in the vicinity of ideological understanding.

dissecting the ideological corps and neatly separating truths from falsehoods.³⁷⁶ The reason why such an approach to untying truth and falsehood is ultimately unproductive is that ideologies are not only false but at the same time “objectively necessary.” This peculiar characteristic of ideology means that social reality, as it is experienced by subjects in the grip of an ideology, appears as necessary, as if it could not possibly be (understood) otherwise. The effect of ideological objective necessity is to foreclose any alternative understanding.³⁷⁷ While this experience of reality as necessary is an illusion (“Schein der Notwendigkeit”) it is, however, not a mere fantasy “in the mind” of an individual but an objective “illusion” that forces itself on the subject. Its origin lies outside the individual subject in the material conditions that structure social relations.³⁷⁸ How the subjects of ideology understand reality appears to be true to them because it is how reality is subjectively experienced. In other words, there is a mind-to-world direction of fit between the subject’s representation and the way the world appears to be which confirms the subject’s expectations. Hence, what subjects do experience in cases of seemingly true ideological phenomena (for example when their own intuitions or observations “confirm” cultural stereotypes) are the workings of a successful ideology. How the world appears through ideological disclosure, of course, is not how it actually is and the task of the critic of ideology is to debunk this “illusion” and reveal its untruth.

We can begin to appreciate the full picture of ideological “distortion” (“illusion of necessity”) if we apply the logic of hermeneutic world-disclosure to it. Accepting the basic claim

³⁷⁶ Adorno 1973b: 354: “Ideology is not superimposed as a detachable layer on the being society; it is inherent in that being.”

³⁷⁷ Adorno 1973b: 197, 312, 354-5. The illusion of necessity gives our understanding of the organization of human sociality the appearance of a second nature that imposes itself on the understanding with the seeming rigidity and force of natural laws about human nature. To the extent that sociality appears to be immutable and without any alternative, it materializes as something that is taken for granted because it couldn’t possibly be otherwise.

³⁷⁸ Schnädelbach 1969: 83-4.

that we always already access the world through meaning implies that the world appears in terms of the meanings of concepts, categories, norms, etc. that project our possibilities for understanding and shape our expectations. The reason why ideological agents do not register certain meaningful possibilities in a given context or readily discard them as implausible is that they access the world through an impoverished and/or epistemically flawed interpretive schema that guides their understanding and practical orientation. The meaningful possibilities and expectations available to them by virtue of their interpretive schema disclose social reality through dominant meanings that obscure alternatives (which would be available elsewhere within their world-disclosure). The fact that what ideological agents observe confirms their expectations is a function of their interpretive schema's epistemically flawed but nonetheless real world-disclosure. It is the hallmark of any prolific ideology that it succeeds in limiting the ability of social agents to make new experiences³⁷⁹ by immunizing its dominant meanings against any potential glitches in the matrix. The exclusive effect of dominant meanings constitutes one important sense in which a successful ideology makes itself true by enabling false (i.e. self-conforming) diagnosis. Sally Haslanger captures this point about ideology being its own truth-maker without, however, linking her insights to the significance of world-disclosure:

“The question was how an account of ideology can accommodate the fact that sometimes ideological beliefs are true, because they are *made* true by the power behind the ideology. Beliefs framed with inapt concepts may still be true. However, we may not be fully justified in what we believe for our concepts may be inapt, our way of understanding the world is distorted, incomplete, the evidence may have been misleading.”³⁸⁰

Successful and persistent ideologies operate at the level of world-disclosure by locally pervading our interpretive schema. Their ability to permeate this fundamental level of understanding is the

³⁷⁹ For my pragmatic-hermeneutic concept of linguistically mediated new experience, see chapter 1, II.

³⁸⁰ Haslanger 2015: 24.

reason why they have the power to make themselves true and why, in turn, it does not suffice to change our surface level cognitive, emotional, and conative attitudes to overcome them. This is because in our understanding of entities and the evidence we draw on for forming beliefs, judgments, emotions, dispositions etc. we are guided by deficient concepts, standards, and norms which our experiences of entities and phenomena confirm. The contextually false, dominant interpretations toward which our understanding gravitates are safeguarded by virtue of not allowing agents to have new experiences from which – through conceptual labor in company with others – challenges to the interpretive schema itself could be launched, thereby preserving the status quo. This then is what it means when ideology acts as its own truth-maker in the sense of enforcing a false diagnosis: How entities and phenomena appear and can be understood is a function of the interpretive schema employed by the agents and the understanding of their experiences corresponds to the standards, ideals, norms etc. by which the interpretive schema discloses reality. As a result, the former correspond to the latter because the entities and phenomena observed confirm the projected expectations: from within an ideological interpretive schema our understanding of them appears to be true. Ideologies present phenomena in ways that we experience as true because the concepts and meanings in which our understanding of them takes place disclose them in ways that determine our experience of them.

Once we understand what it means that ideologies can make themselves true (in the sense of structurally enforcing a false diagnosis), we also see that the semblance of truth is weaved into the kind of epistemological framework employed by correspondence theories of truth which, for this reason, cannot account for the complex economy of ideological truth-making.³⁸¹ Traditional

³⁸¹ For a similar claim, see Jaeggi 2009: 83, fn. 17: “Ideology’s odd status between truth and untruth suggests that the concept of ideology introduces an understanding of true and false that does not conform to the traditional representationalist model.”

correspondence theories of truth hold that truth is cashed out in the relation of accurate correspondence between a truth-bearer (e.g. mental representations, propositions, beliefs, ideas, judgments, utterances, sentences) and a truth-maker (e.g. facts, states of affairs, entities, events, etc.): x is true iff x corresponds to the fact. According to this model, ideologies are false because the truth-bearer, for instance, a belief or mental representation, does not correspond to the actual state of affairs. The subject ends up with a distorted view of reality because the mental image does not accurately represent the external entity or state of affairs.³⁸² Epistemic theories of this sort, however, rely, at least implicitly, on the possibility that we already know the truth about the entity or state of affairs under consideration. In other words, they must presuppose that we have direct access to truth (e.g. through perception) so that we can contrast the mental representation (how the world appears to us) with how the world actually is. For otherwise, how are we to judge that the representation does not accurately correspond to reality?

On the contrary, hermeneutics with its underlying constitutive view of language contends that our access to reality is always already mediated by language. The world is disclosed to us in the medium of language which enables the identification of entities and the formation of expectations against the backdrop of projected possibilities: Entities and states of affairs appear

³⁸² From a linguistic perspective, the “illusion” created by ideology is sometimes presented as a problem of false or “empty” reference where the ideological signifier is characterized as a “null-signifier,” i.e., a signifier without signified (reference without referent). James Bohman attributes such a view to Marx on the basis of what, in chapter 1, we have called the instrumental view of language: “As Marx understood it, the critique of ideology deals with the social uses of signs, primarily words, where ideology is a special, pathological case of failed denotation. (...) its signs and symbols ‘represent something without representing anything real’ (*MEW* III, 31). False reference is a basic semantic mechanism of illusion in ideological signification. (...) This gap in denotation creates the possibility of expressions and representations that have a certain ‘meaning’ and acquire a social use without denoting anything real or determinate in the social world. Ideological terms establish a nonreferential discourse [...]” (Bohman 1992: 693; on Marx’s designativism and ideology as false reference, see also Bohman 1985, chapters 1 and 2.1). We find a similar diagnosis in Jason Stanley’s work on ideology, who describes the first conceptual flaw of ideology as propagating empty concepts. And a concept (e.g. “unicorn”) is empty, according to Stanley, “if there is no property it denotes.” (Stanley 2015: 204-7) Again, we find a similar conceptualization in Žižek’s work on ideology. For Žižek, the sublime object of ideology is the Lacanian “Master-Signifier,” the “signifier without signified” (e.g. Kant’s transcendental illusion), see Žižek 1994: 17.

in light of our preunderstandings, the meaningful possibilities projected by the prior structure of understanding (“hermeneutic as”). Entities are disclosed *as* something within a contextual structure of meaning which establishes certain possibilities of intelligibility. In doing so, the interpretive schema discloses some possibilities rather than others or presents some of them as more meaningful, plausible, credible, etc. vis-à-vis the alternatives. Hence, agents understand a phenomenon *as* something rather than something else. For instance, under a dominant sexist interpretive schema, agents were prone to understand acts of unwanted advances as harmless flirtations, even as honoring the subjects of said flirtations in virtue of their sexual attraction, which was understood to be integral to their womanhood, or simply as it being the woman’s own responsibility not to get herself into such a situation. It was among these possibilities of disclosure, which went without saying, that an agent could understand the phenomenon. The alternative possibility of disclosure as sexual harassment was not only inexistant but actively excluded by the dominant meanings. It is in this sense that ideological truth-making as false diagnosis takes place.

Incidentally, we should note that ideological truth-making in the sense of false diagnosis is not a matter of infiltration, manipulation, distortion or “illusion.” Traditionally, ideology is said to “obfuscate” or “mask” reality, which presupposes that ideological understanding has received some uptake and has found its ways into the collective imaginary. But characterizing ideology as “obfuscating” or “masking” conveys the impression that ideological untruth is either in a sense evident or suggests that the ideological lens through which subjects interpret the world is something added on to their otherwise flawless and correct way of understanding reality.³⁸³

³⁸³ Larraín 1979: 38, emphasizes that Marx’s famous image of the *camera obscura* in *The German Ideology* supports this flawed conception of ideology as it “may suggest that consciousness somehow arbitrarily distorts a reality which would otherwise be seen clearly in its true dimension.”

Against this, it should be emphasized that ideological interpretive schemas are part of an agent's world disclosure, that is, they are intrinsic to how they understand and experience the world. It is not as though one had to take off the metaphorical glasses distorting one's view of reality to suddenly see clearly. In *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek uses the 1988 dystopian science-fiction movie "They Live" to visualize this point.³⁸⁴ The protagonist of the film, John Nada, finds a box with sunglasses that, once put on, make the person who wears them see the messages and meanings beneath the surface of productions of cultural ideology. In one scene, Nada walks down a street and looks at a billboard with a tech advertisement promising to create a "transparent computing environment."³⁸⁵ Wearing the glasses, however, reveals to him that the true message behind the advertisement is the imperative "Obey." The purpose this serves is to show that we should not accept the image that ideology is like a pair of (sun-)glasses that distort our vision and that once we take off the glasses, we (again) see through the ideological character of our surroundings. Rather, ideology constitutes the interpretive default, and we need a "second sight" – the metaphorical pair of glasses – to begin to see otherwise.³⁸⁶

II.3. *Ideological truth-making as false therapy*

False therapy is the second sense in which ideological understanding can be considered as truth-making. In contrast to false diagnosis, the analysis of ideological truth-making as false therapy is not concerned with how an interpretive schema surreptitiously but effectively discloses false facts and/or empirical evidence which then leads to a false interpretation of the object of

³⁸⁴ The movie is a cinematic adaptation of Ray Nelson's 1963 short story "Eight O'clock in the Morning."

³⁸⁵ On the ideology of data and tech companies in the Silicon Valley, see Daub 2020.

³⁸⁶ See also Žižek 1994: 7: "The theoretical lesson to be drawn from this is that the concept of ideology must be disengaged from the representationalist 'problematic': *ideology has nothing to do with 'illusion'*, with a mistaken, distorted representation of its social content."

understanding. The effect of false therapy is rather that it creates social reality by virtue of the false normative recommendations about a matter that was in fact accurately diagnosed. Its epistemic fallacy therefore lies with the therapeutic treatment of the object of understanding and how the recommended therapy relates to the reasoning offered to explain the phenomenon.

This sense of ideological truth-making as false therapy is exemplified in the cultural, scientific, and political uptake of educational “achievement gaps.”³⁸⁷ The research indicates that in the US, for example, African American students generally perform worse on standardized achievement tests that measure reading or math skills than same-aged white students. And while the gap has narrowed over time, it remains significant. For example, while the Black-White achievement gap in NAEP scale scores in mathematics (grade 4, public schools nationwide) improved by 6 points from -31 in 1990 to -25 in 2019,³⁸⁸ there is still a very significant gap in assessment scores between these two groups of students. The general consensus in the scientific community suggests that there is nothing wrong with the results (across various demographics³⁸⁹) and the evidence that support it, which implies that there is no good reason to assume that this constitutes a case of ideological false diagnosis. There exists a significant gap in the performance of students of color and white students in standardized tests that measure reading or mathematics.

³⁸⁷ Another example, mentioned by Lafont 2020: 6, concerns the track record of arguments against women’s rights in general and in particular rights to political participation. When evidence of women’s lack of engagement in civil society and political ignorance was used to support the denial of women’s rights (to political participation), the main problem with this type of argument, according to Lafont, is “not the reliability of the evidence it uses but the specific choice of normative recommendation, namely, that instead of fighting to improve their condition, women should accept that condition and let themselves be ruled by men.”

³⁸⁸ See <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/gaps/>.

³⁸⁹ On the website of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) a tool called the NAEP data explorer allows one to determine gaps between groups of students in various subject areas, age groups, etc. See <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing>.

The ideological interpretive flaws occur when it comes to explaining the achievement gaps and, most importantly for our purpose, contemplating whether something can, and if so, what is to be done about them. To this end, let us take a look at what social scientists Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips note about what is and is not to be done about closing the achievement gap:

“Policies that reduce the black-white gap will not, of course, be politically popular if they improve black children’s test scores at white children’s expense. Both school desegregation and eliminating academically selective classes at desegregated schools have aroused strong white resistance because of the perceived cost to white children. But these policies would not do blacks much good even if whites were willing to adopt them. The most promising school-related strategies for reducing the black-white test score gap seem to involve changes like reducing class size, setting minimum standards of academic competency for teachers, and raising teachers’ expectations for low-performing students. All these changes would benefit both blacks and whites, but all appear to be especially beneficial for blacks.”³⁹⁰

In addition, they note that “improving parenting skills may [...] be as important as improving schools,” and urge that “conservatives who want to improve academic achievement should stop emphasizing the relationship between heredity and achievement and play up the importance of another conservative virtue – namely, hard work.”³⁹¹

It is noteworthy that most of the normative recommendations indicated to reduce the achievement gap between black and white students focus on individual efforts (by students, parents, and teachers) rather than structural changes – most notably their endorsement of “hard work” and improved parenting. Prioritizing individual accountability over structural transformations is often identified as a key element of colorblind racist ideology. In the above statement, such a colorblind rationale can be discerned in the reasons for rejecting further school

³⁹⁰ Jencks/Phillips 1998.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

desegregation as a structural means to close the achievement gap.³⁹² The argument against school desegregation is based on the “perceived cost to white children” and/or the assumption that “these policies would not do blacks much good.” In other words, there is doubt that changing the demographic makeup of schools would benefit black students; but even if this were the case and black students could improve their test scores, this would come at the expense of white children’s academic achievement. Hence, one group of students loses either way. From the colorblind perspective, another way to put the zero-sum “dilemma” in the second scenario is to say that school desegregation constitutes a “preferential treatment” of black students. If it improves their educational situation, it can do so only by discriminating against white students – which violates the norm of equal opportunity.

Refuting the hypothesis that black students would not benefit from less segregated learning environments, a recent empirical study found that school composition makes a significant difference to their academic achievement by closing the academic achievement gap, for it showed that the “Black-White achievement gap was larger in the highest [Black student] density schools than in the lowest density schools.” Moreover, countering the claim that the improvement of black students would come at the expense of whites, the 2015 study also concluded that achievement of white students in less segregated schools did not suffer: “White student achievement in schools with the highest Black student density did not differ from White student achievement in schools with the lowest density.”³⁹³

³⁹² On colorblindness and academic achievement gaps, see Gordon 2019. On colorblind racist ideology and “preferential treatment,” see chapter 3, IV.2.

³⁹³ See <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2015018> (“School Composition and the Black-White Achievement Gap”).

How colorblind accounts treat racial differences in academic achievement – the type of therapy they recommend, is paradigmatic for ideological truth-making as false therapy. The scientific correctness of the existence of a gap in educational achievement is not at issue, which rules out an instance of ideological false diagnosis. Instead, the misguided normative recommendation to not implement structural environmental changes such as further desegregating schools misinterprets the normative significance of the gap and contributes to perpetuating injustices against marginalized populations. False therapy thus structures social reality by virtue of discrediting efforts to transform the structural conditions that are conducive to achievement gaps as plausible possibilities for action. In other words, false therapy sidelines the real social causes and effectively precludes efforts to incentivize structural transformation of society which perpetuates the status quo of racial inequality.

In view of this account of ideological truth-making, we are now in a position to fend off the objection stated at the outset of this section. To recall, the objection questioned the plausibility of Adorno's assertion that ideologies never disclose the whole truth (read: validity) by referring to the observation that our understanding of reality seems to confirm their validity because our experience corresponds to our expectations. A hermeneutic theory of ideological truth-making can explain this phenomenon by virtue of the world-disclosing character of ideological interpretive schemas which explains the power of ideology to make itself (appear to be) valid. The previous analysis therefore debunks experiential confirmations as nonetheless epistemically flawed. The semblance of truth or validity is an ideological phenomenon, the effect of truth-making as false diagnosis and/or false therapy.

In the same vein, the theory of ideological truth-making tackles the systematically related phenomenon of true ideologies. Sometimes, it is argued that a comprehensive theory of ideology

must accommodate the category of true or valid ideologies. What seems to suggest the possibility of this category are cases like the following: In the Jim Crow era, the widespread expectation among Blacks that a violent revolt against the oppressive regime was extremely unlikely to succeed. As a result, the majority of African Americans rejected attempts to fight white dominance.³⁹⁴ From what we know historically, the expectation that a violent uprising would be crushed was accurate. The ensuing resignation, on the whole, had the effect of cementing the status quo which prolonged the suffering of African Americans by perpetuating the injustice of racial segregation. Since Blacks were not mistaken in understanding their situation and the improbability of a successful revolt, it is not a case of ideological truth-making as false diagnosis. This, however, does not mean that ideology was not already at work in bringing about the resignation of the subjects, not necessarily because it presents their chances of success slimmer than they may have been but to the extent that it presented a violent general uprising as both the only possible and unviable option, forcing them to accept their “lot” by concealing alternative and more promising (insurrectionary) tactics for liberation. In this sense, the improbability of a successful revolt was not the whole truth. If this is correct, then this case does not support the possibility of entirely true or valid ideologies.

From a systematic standpoint, examples of this sort are occasionally cited either to defend a purely functional account of ideology or to argue that, at least in liminal cases, the functional component of ideology takes precedence over the epistemic component.³⁹⁵ In what follows, I

³⁹⁴ Shelby 2003: 173 and 175-6, where, in a similar vein, he explains how racial ideology makes itself true in the context of racial profiling. See also Geuss 1981: 15.

³⁹⁵ Shelby outrightly rejects such conclusions (2003: 174): “What is more, and this is essential, we need to see that the illusory character and the oppressive function of an ideology are related: it is the former that makes the latter possible. That is, an ideological form of social consciousness contributes to establishing or stabilizing relations of oppression in virtue of its cognitive defect(s). In a word, ideologies perform their social operations by way of illusion and misrepresentation.”

will show how the pejorative account presented in this chapter is continuous with the Marxist tradition that conjoins epistemic and functional aspects as the two necessary conditions of ideological understanding and why, for systematic reasons, it must side with those who defend such a pejorative conception of ideology.

From the outset, the analysis and critique of ideology in the Marxist tradition was equally concerned with the epistemic flaws of modes of interpretation and the structural relations of power as the real effects of such “false consciousness.” The Marxian project of integrating both aspects was not only a matter of delimiting the conceptual contours of ideology, but it was also linked to the epistemic issues of social theory. For Marx, ideology established and perpetuated structural relations of power by concealing material contradictions in the interest of the dominant class.³⁹⁶ The paramount theoretical concern with power and the efficaciousness of “false consciousness” has become known as the functional component of ideology according to which ideologies function to support, stabilize, or (re-)produce forms of domination or injustice.³⁹⁷ This functional component is featured in the hermeneutic account of ideologies as embodied interpretive schemata whose linguistic world-disclosure makes possible ways of understanding reality which can be shown to be invalid and *to produce or perpetuate forms of injustice*. There is no single answer to the question how ideologies accomplish this feat; even less so if one does not limit ideologies conceptually to their cognitive dimension, where standard ways of fulfilling this function include legitimization and justification in various forms (e.g. naturalization and

³⁹⁶ Larraín 1979: 45-8; Eagleton 1991: 3-5. For, after all, one of the main points for Marx (as part of his dual criticism of idealism and materialism) was to show that ideology emerges as a superstructural phenomenon – which in itself is a result of the division of mental from menial labor – but whose significance is by no means confined to the superstructure, for it conceals the real contradictions within social practices to the benefit of the ruling class, practices which mediate the relation between subject and object, consciousness and reality. On ideology as a superstructural phenomenon, see Mills 2003: 10-19.

³⁹⁷ See Geuss 1981: 15-9.

essentializing, overgeneralization and stereotyping, or mystification and mythification³⁹⁸). Since, from a hermeneutical perspective, we cannot limit ideological understanding to its cognitive dimension, we also must account for non-discursive, embodied interpretations that can produce similar effects. Ideologies “infiltrate” subjects’ identities and self-conceptions.³⁹⁹ They take hold of agents’ subconscious habitus, psyche (e.g. implicit bias), affect their movement through social space, and structure material reality. Ideological understanding produces these effects by, for example, guiding our gendered and racialized bodies through a gendered and racialized social space, a space we always already interpret through various signifying divisions. Social space is marked as male or female, safe or unsafe, white or non-white, accessible or non-accessible, clean or dirty, open or prohibited, and so on. The general acceptance of gendered restrooms, for example, legitimizes a particular gender regime that provides a practical orientation in social space and demands subjects to perform a specific gender role which typically preserves the status quo.

Another example of a potentially ideological non-discursive practice is mentioned by George Yancy. When walking down the street, Yancy often notices the clicking sounds of people locking their cars from inside in apprehension of his Black male body approaching. Locking their car doors is an attempt to ensure their safety as a false embodied interpretation in reaction to perceiving the Black male body as a threat. The clicks, Yancy contends, perpetuate forms of injustice:

“The clicks attempt to seal my identity as a dark savage. The clicking sounds mark me; they inscribe me, materializing my presence, as it were, in ways that I know to be untrue. Unable to stop the clicking, unable to stop white women from tightening the hold of their purses as I walk

³⁹⁸ See *supra*. On demythification as the “critical use of evidence and argument to gauge the truth value of the sociopolitical allegories implicit in racial [or otherwise ideological, MS] representations,” see Gooding-Williams 2006: 6. On mystification, see Adorno 1973b: 304.

³⁹⁹ See Larraín 1994.

by, unable to stop white women from crossing to the other side of the street once they have seen me walking in their direction [...] there are times when one wants to become their fantasy, to become their Black monster, their bogeyman. For example, in the case of the clicks, one wants to pull open the car door: ‘Surprise. You’ve just been car-jacked by a ghost, a fantasy of your own creation. Now, get the fuck out of the car!’”⁴⁰⁰

There are several reasons for adding the functional component as a necessary condition of a theory of ideology. The first one is conceptual determinacy. Without a functional component, the scope of phenomena a purely epistemic concept of ideology would track would be too broad.

Relying merely on epistemic invalidity would throw the baby out with the bathwater and deprive the concept of ideology of any added analytical value.⁴⁰¹ From a logical standpoint, some invalidities are grounded in the generality of our conceptual apparatus. As such, they are inevitable and cannot be relinquished without, at the same time, compromising their enabling function of disclosing the world and providing social agents with a meaningful practical orientation. The specific task of the critic of ideology is to sort out those forms of bad analogizing whose world-disclosure is harmful, not to discredit conceptual-interpretive generality tout court.⁴⁰² Second, countless invalidities simply do not result in bringing about injustices. According to a study by the University of Iceland conducted in 2007, more than half the population of Iceland either believes in or does not want to deny the existence of magical creatures, the so-called *huldufólk* (hidden people).⁴⁰³ Likewise, many people seem to believe in the (past) existence of unicorns.⁴⁰⁴ By contemporary scientific standards, such worldviews prove

⁴⁰⁰ Yancy 2017: xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Celikates 2017: 63.

⁴⁰² That is to say that the double-characteristic of world-disclosure, which constitutes the enabling and limiting conditions of understanding, the fact that something rather than something else is disclosed, is not problematic per se. It is, however, the task of ideology critique to identify the ideological blind spots of disclosure when an interpretive schema discloses some possibility at the expense of others and thereby produces or perpetuates injustice.

⁴⁰³ See <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/articles/200805/global-psyche-magic-kingdom>.

⁴⁰⁴ See <https://u.osu.edu/vanzandt/2018/03/07/unicorns-are-real/>.

to be false,⁴⁰⁵ yet they do not produce forms of injustice.⁴⁰⁶ Taken by itself, their invalidity does not distinguish them from ordinary false interpretations.⁴⁰⁷ For a socio-theoretically relevant concept of ideology that is geared toward understanding how interpretive structures maintain structural power relations; however, they are significant only to the extent that they in fact (re-)produce forms of injustice. Nonetheless, from a methodological perspective, the most cogent reason to incorporate the functional component is simply that it is a necessary consequence of the “error theory” implied in the pejorative conception of ideology. In the social domain, functional explanations are predicated on the assumption that the participants are wrong about how they understand the world. The primary aim of functional analysis is to disclose the “unintended consequences of intentional action, the ‘*meanings*’ that actions have beyond those intended by actors and those articulated in the cultural tradition.”⁴⁰⁸ Similarly, the functional analysis of ideology is about revealing the latent functions interpretative patterns serve in particular contexts through the unintended consequences of agents’ flawed understanding of them. The pejorative theory of ideology holds that ideologies are epistemically flawed in that they do not disclose the whole truth/validity about an object. It assumes that, as a function of their false world-disclosure, social agents’ understanding of a practice in which they participate cannot be taken at face value because in evaluating the validity of the latter they err about the meaning of the nature, aims, and norms that ought to structure the practice. In this sense, ideology critique is a variant of “error theory” and requires a functional explanation because,

⁴⁰⁵ I take it that these interpretations must be more than isolated beliefs. They must be embedded in a worldview that provides the logical space for the plausibility of supernatural forces, events, and creatures.

⁴⁰⁶ Since sometimes believers in the *huldufólk* join forces with environmentalists to protect natural elf habitats, their worldview could actually be beneficial.

⁴⁰⁷ Naturally, it is debatable whether or not such worldviews produce forms of domination or injustice – astrology could be a limiting case, see the analysis in Adorno 1974.

⁴⁰⁸ McCarthy 1978: 213, emphasis added.

from a participatory point of view, subjects do not experience the flaws of ideological understanding.

Chapter 3: Disclosing critique

In the last chapter, I argued that ideologies must be understood as epistemically flawed, embodied interpretive schemas that perpetuate forms of injustice. The concept of the embodied interpretive schema allowed us to understand the radical, pervasive, and tenacious nature of ideologies. On this view, ideologies constitute part of the subject's world-disclosure. They pervade subjects' cognitive, affective, and conative understanding of reality in ways that conceal their invalidity and make them appear to be true. As a consequence of their radical nature, it does not suffice to criticize and change subjects' ideological beliefs. Such an approach to critiquing ideologies would fall short of effectively confronting the world-disclosing function of ideology. Hence, ideology critique must examine the ideals, norms, and concepts that disclose entities and phenomena and thus guide subjects' practical orientation.

Internal or purely immanent forms of critique, which call attention to an unrealized potential in the sense that the social reality of a particular institution or practice does not meet the standards set out for it, are not only impractical for criticizing ideology but are, in fact, counterproductive since they do not challenge the norms and concepts implicit in those standards and thus maintain the ideological status quo. In the tradition of Critical Theory, hermeneutic accounts of social criticism are mostly associated with this type of conservative criticism and thus rejected as a viable candidate for the critique of ideology. After all, as Rahel Jaeggi insists, the social phenomenon of ideology “requires *a transformation of both reality and the norms*, rather than a simple adjustment of reality in accordance with the ideals.”⁴⁰⁹ This type of criticism typically goes by the name of immanent critique, however, it should not be confused with the

⁴⁰⁹ Jaeggi 2009: 76.

pure immanence of internal critique, for it aims to not only close the gap between social reality and the standards that govern it, but also challenge these very standards.

My goal in this chapter is not to question the ambition that, for the purpose of critiquing ideology, “immanent” critique must be able to transcend a given interpretive context, so that an unrealized truth content cannot serve as the basis for critique. In fact, this follows from the world-disclosing nature of ideology. But I argue that only the critical hermeneutic alternative I presented in the first chapter can meet the desideratum of “immanent transcendence.”

Essentially, the moment of transcendence is achieved through counter-hegemonic disclosures that articulate a positive, alternative frameworks that enable us to “see what we ‘know’ about the world in a different light”⁴¹⁰ and determine what is wrong with the dominant (ideological) way of understanding the world by positing a valid alternative. Embedded in a critical hermeneutics, which is grounded in a counterfactual model for mutual agreement and subjects the validity of claims raised by speakers to non-epistemic conditions, these new disclosures, I argue, constitute a condition of possibility for ideology critique.

In rejection of the more traditional understanding of the term, however, the criterion of immanence cannot consist in the reliance on a pre-existing or (genealogically) reconstructed “original meaning” that functions as a substantive standard for critique. In this sense, pace Adorno, ideology critique does not confront ideology “with its own truth,” for, in the final analysis, this would amount to the radical immanence the critique of ideology seeks to escape. Rather, the theory I propose is immanent (and hermeneutic) insofar as it is embedded in the formal structures of everyday communication aimed at reaching mutual understanding which are,

⁴¹⁰ Jaeggi 2009: 83.

in principle, open to everybody. In this sense, my theory of ideology critique combines an “immanent procedure with a context-transcending notion of rationality” (Honneth).

The argument proceeds in five steps. My analysis begins with a discussion of Adorno’s take on immanent transcendence in order to introduce the conceptual tension and clarify the sense in which it is understood to bear on the possibility of ideology critique in the tradition of Critical Theory (I.). In the next section, I examine the merits of Rahel Jaeggi’s account of ideology critique, which proposes a way of rethinking the immanent critique of ideology that situates itself in opposition to the hermeneutical model (II.). Assessing her criticism of the hermeneutic position reveals that, for systematic reasons, her left-Hegelian account suffers from the same fatal flaw as the model she criticizes: Neither program can escape the confines of a given tradition and transcend its interpretive context (III.). In response to this dilemma, I introduce the core of my own account of ideology critique which is centered on the necessity of counter-hegemonic disclosures via a discussion of two manifestations of colorblind racist ideology: Proclamations of “All lives matter” as instantiations of ideological false diagnosis (IV.1.) and the rejection of affirmative action as “preferential treatment” as a form of ideological false therapy (IV.2.). In what follows, I connect my approach to the theory of communicative rationality and show how my model reconciles the tension between immanence and transcendence (V.). In conclusion, I defend the theory of communicative rationality against two long-standing, systematic objections relevant to my proposal; first, the charge that the theory of communicative rationality cannot accommodate the effects of domination and power operative within communicative action and discourse (V.1.) and second, the objection that its focus on communicative understanding excludes non-discursive practices and social relations (V.2.).

I. Prologue: The dialectic of immanence and transcendence

Commenting on the critical form of the essay, Adorno notes: “The essay is what it was from the beginning, the critical form par excellence; *as immanent critique* of intellectual constructions, as a confrontation of what they are with their concept, *it is critique of ideology*.”⁴¹¹

Ideology critique, we learn from this passage, is a form of “immanent critique” and immanent critique, in turn, is the kind of critique which confronts the reality of intellectual constructions (“what they are”) with their concepts. The reality of intellectual constructions to which Adorno refers is what these ideological constructs appear *as*, i.e., how social agents understand them, as opposed to their correct understanding in the eyes of the critic. Adorno’s comment is therefore continuous with his general commitment regarding the possibility of a difference between the reality or appearance of an entity and its essence or truth as a necessary condition for ideology critique:⁴¹² “the critique of ideology, as the confrontation of ideology with *its own truth*, is only possible insofar as the *ideology contains a rational element* with which the critique can deal.”⁴¹³

In the previous chapter, we have seen that Adorno employs an emphatic conception of truth that refers to both truth in the epistemic sense and in the sense of normative rightness or justice as truth-analogous.⁴¹⁴ The rational element contained in ideology thus refers to the

⁴¹¹ Adorno 1991: 18.

⁴¹² Dialectics upholds the commitment to the distinction between appearance and essence, see Adorno 1976: 11-12: “dialectics will not allow itself to be robbed of the distinction between essence and appearance. [...] Dialectical thought counters the suspicion of what Nietzsche termed nether-worldly [*hinterweltlerisch*] with the assertion that concealed essence is non-essence. Dialectical thought [...] affirms this non-essence, [...] it criticizes its contradiction of ‘what is appearing’ [*Erscheinendes*] and, ultimately, its contradiction of the real life of human beings.” See also Adorno 1990: 31: “Immanent criticism of intellectual and artistic phenomena seeks to grasp, through the analysis of their form and meaning, the contradiction between their objective idea and that pretension. It names what the consistency or inconsistency of the work itself expresses of the structure of the existent.”

⁴¹³ Adorno 1973a: 190, emphasis added.

⁴¹⁴ See chapter 2; see also Ng 2015: 400.

contextual validity of ideological understanding which constitutes a necessary condition for its critique. When “ideology” manifests as unmediated violence or as the pronouncements of a cynic or a liar it cannot be conceptualized as ideology proper. Only if, by contrast, we can determine a rational element that establishes its contextual validity, a truth short of the whole truth, can we speak of ideology *stricto sensu*. But against the backdrop of the kernel of validity what does it mean then that ideology is to be confronted with *its own truth*? If it were to mean that critique confronts ideology with its own partial validity, then ideology critique would reveal nothing but tautological truths by definition. Ergo, as *critique*, ideology critique would be pointless.

Alternatively, in confronting ideology with its own truth critique could point to a gap or unrealized potential between what is and what should be, between the actual and the desired state of affairs, between “an evaluative promise and its material fulfilment.”⁴¹⁵ Yet the “pure” immanence of such criticism again misses the mark. If ideology critique only criticized that certain accepted epistemic standards or normative expectations are in fact unrealized (instead of demonstrating, say, their systematic unrealizability or *pro tanto* undesirability) it would submit to the immanence of established practices and norms and, again, lose (too) much of its critical edge.

If it is correct that ideology discloses a partial truth which renders it contextually valid, then critique that proceeds merely immanently (as does, for example, bourgeois cultural criticism⁴¹⁶) is overall ill-equipped to denounce the invalidity of ideology. Purely immanent critique fails as an effective mode of criticism for several reasons. First, despite its kernel of validity, ideology does not disclose the whole truth about a phenomenon, so we cannot “trust” the truth of ideology across the board. Second, as we have seen, even if ideological

⁴¹⁵ Honneth 2012: 94.

⁴¹⁶ Adorno 1990: 30.

understanding discloses a (contextually confined) truth, it may either remain silent on what to do about it or lead our normative responses astray. Third and most important for our purpose, the radical nature of ideology – the fact that ideological understanding discloses the world to us through the epistemic standards and normative expectations employed by the interpretive schema – requires a kind of critique that does not stop short of scrutinizing these very standards. Because ideology goes “deeper” than our mental, affective, and conative attitudes, our critique of ideological understanding must extend beyond critiquing the non-fulfillment of standards and norms to the critique of these very standards and norms since they shape our understanding of reality.

Given the apparent pitfalls of the (pure) immanent method, we cannot but look for an alternative model for ideology critique. But what would such an alternative look like if it were to preserve the Adornian desideratum of confronting ideology with its own truth? Or are we simply forced to give up on this criterion in light of the fatal flaws of the immanent method? The seemingly more radical notion of a (pure) transcendent critique, which is traditionally considered a viable candidate for the task of ideology critique and would, as it were, confront ideology with a truth that is not its own, however, is equally undesirable. As Adorno notes, a form of critique which imposes an external truth on ideology ultimately proves deceptive and potentially ideological:

“The transcendent method, which aims at totality, seems more radical than the immanent method, which presupposes the questionable whole. The transcendent critic assumes an as it were Archimedean position above culture and the blindness of society, from which consciousness can bring the totality, no matter how massive, into flux. [But the] choice of a standpoint outside the sway of existing society is as fictitious as only the construction of abstract utopias can be.”⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁷ Adorno 1990: 31.

Adorno states that, at first blush, the transcendent method of critique appears more radical than its immanent counterpart in that it claims to go beyond the limits of possible experience of the participants as it looks at the object of critique from a position “above.” But what appears more radical turns out to be merely more extreme. For according to the transcendent method, at least taken in its pure form, the critic’s standpoint is entirely uprooted, it is detached from the criticized tradition or society “to which alone he owes his discontent.”⁴¹⁸ The Archimedean standpoint, assumed by the transcendent social critic, renders her “blind” to the object of critique.⁴¹⁹

In the above comment, Adorno is primarily concerned with the epistemic implications of the transcendent method in a way that is similar to Marx and Engels’ charge against the Young Hegelians in *The German Ideology*. The objectivity of the critic’s assumed standpoint, he contends, is an illusion (“fictitious”) and ultimately falls back on a naturalist or positivist position, for its “administrative thinking” forgets or represses the (violent) history of the formation of the categories and concepts it employs and therefore reifies its object.⁴²⁰

To oppose the transcendent method for these reasons also means to reject it on systematic grounds. If it is correct that ideological understanding discloses a kernel of truth, then subjecting ideology to the transcendent method of critique would very likely render its rational element invisible. Judging the validity of (ideological) understanding from a perspective completely alien to the standards and concepts of the society or cultural tradition out of which it emerged would

⁴¹⁸ Adorno 1990: 19.

⁴¹⁹ Against this valid concern, see my discussion of Habermas’s response to Gadamer’s charge that the critic of ideology is nothing but a technocrat or “social engineer who creates without liberating” in chapter 1, III.2.

⁴²⁰ Adorno 1990: 32. Compare this to Hegel’s remark on historiography in *Reason in History* (Hegel 1998: 14) in which we can spot his hermeneutical awareness that every interpretation involves a moment of application: “Even the ordinary, average historian, who believes and says that he is merely receptive to his data, is not passive in his thinking; he brings his categories along with him, and sees his data through them. In every treatise that is to be scientific, Reason must not slumber, and reflection must be actively applied.”

go against the goal of confronting ideology with its own truth, for it would threaten to eradicate its rational element. Once it is established that ideologies disclose contextual truths, a transcendent critique in its pure form is no longer in the business of ideology critique.

From a practical perspective, the worry, according to this view, is that in removing herself from the cultural tradition or society that at the same time constitutes the object of critique the critic evaluates the status quo through alien categories and norms. Because the latter are meaningless to the social agents she criticizes, the addressees of her criticism no longer act as interlocutors and discussants on equal footing with the transcendent critic and thus her critique slides into paternalism. The location of the transcendent critic is one from where she neither understands a cultural tradition or society nor from where she could articulate a critical position intelligible and meaningful for those she criticizes.

With both critical methods reaching an impasse,⁴²¹ we have not, however, fully exhausted our options. Adorno finds the answer to the dilemma in renouncing the binary opposition of pure immanence and pure transcendence and announcing their “reunion” in a dialectically re-conceptualized method of immanent critique which lends itself to critical theory in general and to ideology critique in particular:

“The alternatives – either calling culture as a whole into question from outside under the general notion of ideology, or confronting it with the norms which it itself has crystallized – cannot be accepted by critical theory. To insist on the choice between immanence and transcendence is to revert to the traditional logic criticized in Hegel’s polemic against Kant. As Hegel argued, every method which sets limits and restricts itself to the limits of its object thereby goes beyond them.”⁴²²

⁴²¹ While, for Adorno (1990:31), the traditional transcendent critique ultimately leads to a naturalist or positivist version of escapism (“The transcendent attack on culture regularly speaks the language of false escape, that of the ‘nature boy.’”) and is therefore “obsolete” for ideology critique (ibid 33), pure immanent critique, on the other hand, “threatens to revert to idealism, to the illusion of the self-sufficient mind in command of both itself and of reality.” (ibid)

⁴²² Adorno 1990: 31.

Hegel's claim, mentioned by Adorno, is that whoever sets out to draw a line by which to define the purview of, say, immanence and thus attempts to mark the space of possible experience must have already "stepped outside" or "seen" beyond that limit.⁴²³ For to be able to grasp and mark the difference between inside and outside, the surveyor of immanence must have already transgressed the limits of his own method, i.e. he must have experienced what cannot be experienced from within. From that it follows for Adorno that "the very opposition between knowledge which penetrates from without and that which bores from within becomes suspect to the dialectical method [...]."⁴²⁴ Testing the limits of truth from within, Adorno recognizes, requires us to go beyond them as our attempts to come to terms with immanence always already involve a moment of transcendence and that is why the apparent opposition of immanence and transcendence which forces us to choose between one or the other must be abandoned.⁴²⁵ From this perspective, we can restate the task of the immanent critique of ideology: Rather than confronting ideology with its own truth, the task of ideology critique is to confront ideology with the limits of its own truth.

For the purpose of social critique, Adorno identifies the immanent procedure as the "more essentially dialectical" because it respects ideology's kernel of validity.⁴²⁶ In the Hegelian tradition, the distinctive structure of the dialectical method, in its most rudimentary form, can be derived from the three-fold sense of "sublation" (*Aufhebung*): negation, preservation, and elevation. The dialectic of immanent critique would therefore seek to negate the untruth of ideology while preserving the contextual truth of ideology in an effort "to transform this

⁴²³ On this Hegelian claim see, for instance, Deligiorgi (2002).

⁴²⁴ Adorno 1990: 32.

⁴²⁵ Adorno 1990: 32: "Finally, the very opposition between knowledge which penetrates from without and that which bores from within becomes suspect to the dialectical method, which sees in it a symptom of precisely that reification which the dialectic is obliged to accuse."

⁴²⁶ Adorno 1990: 31.

knowledge into a heightened perception of the thing itself,”⁴²⁷ – in other words, a better understanding of its whole truth.⁴²⁸

Indeed, Adorno seems to gesture at the idea that, at least in the case of ideology critique, such a better understanding of the whole truth of the thing itself requires counter-disclosures. In his piece *The Essay as Form*, right after making the claim that as immanent critique the critique of ideology must confront the reality of intellectual constructions with their concepts, he quotes the following passage from Max Bense:

“The essay is the form of the critical category of the mind. For *the person who criticizes* must necessarily experiment, he *must create conditions under which an object becomes visible anew*; and do so still differently than an author does; above all, the object’s frailties must be tried and tested, and this is the meaning of the slight variation the object experiences at the hands of its critic.”⁴²⁹

That being said, Adorno does not pursue this idea any further to draw the connection between the necessity for creating the conditions for making an object visible anew and the need for counter

⁴²⁷ Adorno 1990: 31. Where Adorno departs from Hegel is that the new understanding remains decidedly negative (see Adorno 1973b: xix, 160). Immanent critique is not “constructive” in that it does not posit something better in place of what it criticizes (Adorno 2005a: 287). What the “heightened perception of the thing itself” consists in its positive aspect is but an “index of what is right and better.” (Adorno 2005: 288) For Adorno, we could not overestimate the subtle power of this negative transcendence, notably in view of his diagnosis concerning the fatalist tendency of positivist ideologies which merely duplicate reality (Adorno 2005b: 211) and blur the line between what is (or can be) and what ought to be by making reality, as experienced by social agents, appear as an inevitable necessity, see Adorno 1973b: 268 and 349. On Adorno’s account of positivist ideology, see Cook 2001: 10-4; see also the introduction to Adorno 2001 by Jay M. Bernstein. However, Adorno’s valid concern (that seems to motivate part of his negativist tendencies and links up with the idea of a totalizing ideology) to the effect that ideological understanding discloses the world in ways that make it appear necessary, unalterable, or inevitable and thus leaves agents with a false understanding that things could not be otherwise (in the contemporary debate, this is sometimes referred to as ideology critique’s “second order normativity” that operates “by giving an ‘indication of changeability.’” Jaeggi 2009: 72; see also Jaeggi/Celikates 2017: 109-10) is already included in our critical account of hermeneutics through its acknowledged fallibilism (on this point, see also Mills 2018: 495).

⁴²⁸ See also Jaeggi 2009: 73 who accedes that as a form of immanent critique “[ideology] critique is at once *determinate* and *negative*: [...] it criticizes particular social practices as deficient; but it does this following a pattern of determinate negation [...]: the right follows from a “sublating” overcoming of the wrong.” See also Jaeggi 2018: 291-95. See also the discussion of Gadamer’s model of dialectical experience in chapter 1, II.2. In both the case of Gadamer and Jaeggi (see *supra* III. and IV.2.) it is not clear, however, how determinate negation can transcend a given interpretive context.

⁴²⁹ Max Bense, *Über den Essay und seine Prosa* (1947), p. 420 (emphasis added), cited from Adorno 1991: 18. For a reading that emphasizes the transcendent element in Adorno’s theory of social criticism, see Buchwalter 1987: 298, 304-5: “For Adorno, social criticism must invoke a transcendent conception of the relationship of reason and reality, one which contraposes independent norms to existing conditions.”

disclosures to transcend the interpretive context in the case of ideology critique. This is where my own proposal takes its cue. Having introduced the seeming tension surrounding the desideratum of immanent transcendence, I will argue that it can be resolved by a framework for critique that combines an immanent procedure with a context-transcending conception of rationality (III.-V.). In the next section, I will turn to Rahel Jaeggi's seminal approach to ideology critique, who proposes a way of rethinking the immanent critique of ideology which situates itself in opposition to hermeneutics. My discussion will reveal a tension running through her work between some isolated hermeneutic insights scattered throughout her critical conjectures, on the one hand, and Jaeggi's strong reservations about the hermeneutic model for ideology critique, on the other hand. I argue that her hesitation to pursue the hermeneutic clues further ultimately leads her down the same impasse as the program she sets out to criticize so that, in the final analysis, Jaeggi's critique cannot transcend any given interpretive context (III., IV.2.).

II. Immanent critique and the ominous case against hermeneutics

In the contemporary debate about ideology critique, the torch of this immanent-dialectical model of immanent critique is most prominently carried forth by Rahel Jaeggi.⁴³⁰ In her instant classic *Rethinking Ideology*, Jaeggi situates her version of immanent critique of ideology explicitly within the left-Hegelian tradition. Similar to Adorno, she positions her conception vis-a-vis the normativistic and paternalistic model of external critique (pure transcendence), on the one hand, and internal critique (pure immanence), on the other hand. Moreover, she associates the latter

⁴³⁰ Jaeggi 2009: 71-9; Jaeggi 2018: 174.

with the hermeneutic tradition, which she dismisses as a candidate for ideology critique on the basis that hermeneutics cannot get any serious, context-transcending critical traction. Jaeggi further identifies the target of critique as the kind of norms inherent to and “constitutive for particular social practices and their institutional setting.”⁴³¹ Following Adorno’s claim about ideology’s kernel of truth,⁴³² the norms in questions are “not just factually given, but justified and *reasonable* as well.”⁴³³ What is problematic about these norms is not (so much), as internal (hermeneutical) critique would have it, that they are ineffective or that their normative potential is unrealized in the sense that social reality lags behind their aspirations; on the contrary, these norms are problematic for the very reason that they are effective and realized, for their realization produces “practical contradictions,” i.e. they lead to crises, “to experiences of deficiency or failing”⁴³⁴:

“Immanent critique, therefore, focuses on the *internal inconsistency* of reality itself and of the norms that constitute it. The institutional reality of a society can be ‘internally inconsistent’ in the sense that it constitutively embodies competing and contradictory claims and norms that cannot be realized consistently or that will necessarily turn against their original purpose upon being realized.”⁴³⁵

Since, due to their internal contradictions, these norms cannot be fulfilled without producing practical contradictions, the transformation of social reality – the professed goal of immanent critique – requires that the critique of ideology be geared toward a transformation not only of the deficient reality but more so of the norms themselves: “The inconsistent reality (a reality in

⁴³¹ Jaeggi 2009: 75.

⁴³² Jaeggi 2009: 66-71.

⁴³³ Jaeggi 2009: 75.

⁴³⁴ Jaeggi 2009: 76. Jaeggi contrasts practical contradictions that lead to crises (social conditions that are “morally wrong” and not “working” in a functional sense) with “logical” contradictions (“unthinkable”). Practical contradictions can thus be characterized “by the fact that the obstacles or crises that are part of it are normatively problematic in both senses: something does not work (well), and the way it works is not good.” (ibid 78)

⁴³⁵ Jaeggi 2009: 75.

which the norms can be realized only inconsistently) requires *a transformation of both reality and the norms*, rather than a simple adjustment of reality in accordance with the ideals (either to recapture or to realize a potential).⁴³⁶

Jaeggi's answer to the question "How do we discover the standards by which we are to evaluate the necessary transformation of reality and norms?" is that the critique of ideology remains a largely immanent affair insofar as it "evaluates existing reality according to standards immanent to this reality" and therefore generates the evaluative standards out of the *self-contradictions* of the given norms and given reality.⁴³⁷ To this end, the immanent critique of ideology follows its own method and procedure. From a methodological perspective, ideology critique establishes a link between analysis and critique. Insofar as ideology "is always already both an understanding and an evaluation," the critique of ideology must follow suit and aspire to yield both a different understanding of the social practice or situation as well as a different evaluation of it.⁴³⁸ While the analysis of social reality follows a critical intent (describing the status quo with a view to preparing normative judgments about the object of analysis), critique, in turn, shows how the negative assessment emerges from the analysis of the social condition.

In her *Critique of Forms of Life*, Jaeggi elaborates on the relation of analysis and critique, laying down a step-by-step procedure for immanent criticism, which includes a description of the tasks of the critic. To begin with the procedure, in the first analytic step the critic must demonstrate that a certain norm is operative within a social practice and show that the practice depends on this norm in the sense that the norm is constitutive of it. Second, the critic must lay

⁴³⁶ Jaeggi 2009: 76 (internal footnote omitted).

⁴³⁷ Jaeggi 2009: 73, see my discussion below, where I argue that Jaeggi reaches the same impasse as Adorno when he claims that the critique of ideology results in the confrontation of ideology with its own truth.

⁴³⁸ Jaeggi 2009: 71-2. See also Stahl 2017: 3, who likewise argues that the standard of critique changes within the process of critiquing: "by reconstructing immanent normative principles as a part of reality, these immanent principles are not merely *applied* to reality in critique."

bare the self-contradiction (“inner contradictoriness”) at the heart of the practice, i.e. she must establish the fact that realizing the norm which constitutes the practice necessarily results in a crisis. The critic’s analytic tasks of establishing the connections between social practices and their foundational norm(s) as well as uncovering their contradictory nature are “theoretically demanding”: In virtue of the intricate entanglement of critique and analysis, which presupposes a theoretical framework to produce (rather than uncover) these connections and contradictions, it is fair to say that “immanent criticism [...] needs a ‘good theory.’”⁴³⁹ On Jaeggi’s view, ideology critique is a “method of forging links” between the norms that govern social practices and the practical contradictions they produce in being realized that undermine the agent’s explicit (self-)understanding of the practice. These constitutive contradictions are neither merely “given” nor are they simply “made,” for, much like symptoms, they “announce” themselves in “caus[ing] practical consequences and shifts.”⁴⁴⁰ We have noted that, due to its structural nature, ideological understanding operates behind the backs of social agents. Using the metaphor of a “symptom” to describe the causal effects of ideology, Jaeggi takes up Habermas’s early (hermeneutic) inklings that likened the practice of ideology critique to the psychoanalytic model.⁴⁴¹ The basic premise of this therapeutic model of critique is that the patient’s inner conflict becomes symptomatic in ways he is not aware of. Against the background of her theoretical framework, the analyst deciphers certain behavioral patterns etc. as symptomatic manifestations and thereby establishes a link between the expression of the conflict and its cause.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ Jaeggi 2018: 207, 357; Jaeggi 2009: 69.

⁴⁴⁰ Jaeggi 2009: 79; Jaeggi 2018: 212.

⁴⁴¹ See Jaeggi 2018: 197, 204-5, 254. See also Adorno (1976: 32, 36), who thinks that in sociology interpretation is a “societal physiognomy of appearance” which points to “what is silenced.”

⁴⁴² Cf. Habermas 1972: 219-274, where he claims: “The analyst makes use of a preliminary conception of normality and deviance when he regards certain disturbances of communication, behavior, and organic function as ‘symptoms.’ But this conception is obviously culturally determined and cannot be defined in terms of a clearly established matter of fact.” (ibid 274)

Analogously,⁴⁴³ “discovering” the social symptoms of practical contradictions and establishing their connection requires some form of causal analysis. Such analysis must be embedded in an explanatory theory that reveals that “the way [something] works is not good” in a normative sense and this theory, in turn, must employ the kind of conceptual framework that allows for the discovery of the symptoms.⁴⁴⁴ Developing such a framework, however, itself depends on – because it is triggered by or can be confirmed through – some sort of pragmatic failure, the fact that “something does not work (well)” in a functionalist sense. As both analysis and critique, ideology critique thus “depends on [...] aligning the subjective (agents’) and the objective perspective.”⁴⁴⁵ This is of some relevance for the final step of the procedure where, as Jaeggi explains, the critic cannot simply recommend aligning the deficient practice with the norm(s) that govern(s) it, for that would not take into account the deficiency of the norm itself which produces the practical contradiction and leads to crisis. Instead, the immanent procedure serves as the “ferment” or “catalyst” of practical transformation of both the norm and the practice.

In *Rethinking Ideology*, Jaeggi exemplifies her account by way of discussing Marx’s critique of the ideological functioning of the ideals of freedom and equality in capitalist bourgeois society. This exemplification is helpful in giving us an idea of how the procedure of ideology critique is intended to work. But in doing so, it also allows us to foreground some of the problems associated with her view. Ultimately, I will argue that the mismatch of her theoretical commitments and normative aspirations for ideology critique renders her account of a context-

⁴⁴³ See my objections to this analogy in chapter 1, III.2.

⁴⁴⁴ This, in fact, is why the “discovery” of practical contradictions, in part, depends on interpretation.

⁴⁴⁵ Jaeggi 2009: 78-9. See also Stahl 2013a: 7, 19.

transcending immanent critique of ideology self-defeating,⁴⁴⁶ for it succumbs to the same critical closure as the traditional hermeneutical program her account is set against.

Marx asserts that when interpreted in the natural law tradition, the ideals of freedom and equality factor in the systematic production of coercion and inequality, i.e. they achieve the opposite of their intended effects, their normative goals are inverted: “The normative ideals are, therefore, not merely, not yet completely realized; rather, their realization has been reversed: the pattern of their reversal and inversion is written into the ideas themselves.”⁴⁴⁷ The two parties to the labor contract are regarded as equals in light of a juridical and hence formal understanding of equality which does not take into account the material inequalities that exist between the capitalist and the wage laborer and which force the latter to enter generally unfavorable legal obligations. Although the formal understanding of the ideals of freedom and equality freed the wage laborer from the shackles of serfdom, the material precarity (which these ideals do not register, or rather actively deny) drives her into an exploitative and ultimately alienating labor relation which maintains and even exacerbates her state of unfreedom and inequality.

Jaeggi connects the systematic nature of the contradiction between the ideals and the social praxis permeated by them to the concept of necessary false consciousness which, as she explains, must be understood as consisting of different layers:

“(1) On the one hand, the consciousness is false (as tradition has it), since it contains a false interpretation and understanding of reality. (2) However, if the consciousness is to be ‘necessary’ as well, than [sic!] this must be because it simultaneously corresponds to reality, after all. (3) Third, it is, [...] both at once: necessarily false [...] because it cannot be anything but false; not because it necessarily deludes itself (i.e. not because there is a cognitive deficiency), but because it corresponds to a wrong reality.”⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ I want to point out that I do not believe that Jaeggi’s approach is incompatible with the hermeneutic approach I propose here; rather, I believe that – given the desiderata of her critical program – her account features some ambiguities (and shortcomings) that could be resolved if she indeed committed to a critical hermeneutics.

⁴⁴⁷ Jaeggi 2009: 68.

⁴⁴⁸ Jaeggi 2009: 68.

My point here is not primarily to assess the correctness of her account of false consciousness,⁴⁴⁹ but to point out an ambiguity in her conception of the relation of ideology and reality and scrutinize her explication in terms of the neglect for the idea of world-disclosure; third, the problems that creates for her account of ideology critique.

When Jaeggi talks about reality, her position oscillates between descriptions that tendentially endorse or are at least compatible with an idealist position (e.g. when she notes that “it is not at all understood that there is a true reality in the sense of a nonconstructed, not *conceptually constituted* reality waiting behind the false and distorting one.”⁴⁵⁰) and a realist position which is compatible with the hermeneutic approach that takes language as constitutive – not of reality – but of our understanding of reality (e.g. when she notices that “Ideologies are simultaneously true and false, insofar as they correspond at once adequately and inadequately to ‘reality’ (*whatever that might be* and however one might construe this relation of correspondence) [...]”⁴⁵¹ The latter option appears to be the favored one with regard to ideologies, which in her view “constitute our relation to the world and thus determine the horizons of our interpretation of the world, or the framework in which we understand both

⁴⁴⁹ See my discussion in chapter 2, I.1.

⁴⁵⁰ Jaeggi 2009: 83 (footnote 17), emphasis added. See also her claim (ibid 68) that ideological consciousness is necessarily false because it “corresponds to a *wrong reality*” (emphasis added), and ibid 83 (footnote 18): “Reality itself seems to be wrong [...]” From a hermeneutic standpoint, it is clear that reality itself is neither right nor wrong and that applying these predicates to reality itself would indeed constitute a category mistake; on that view, it is only our interpretations of reality that the predicates wrong and right meaningfully apply to.

⁴⁵¹ Jaeggi 2009: 68, emphasis added. See also ibid 72: “Ideologies are normative as ways of understanding the world. As worldviews, they determine the limits of possible actions and thereby – in a very profound sense – what one is to do. They stake out the field of possible actions, and this staking out, determining, and limiting of possibilities is itself a normative matter – a fact to which the critique of ideology draws attention. [...] After all, every way of understanding the world is (especially from the viewpoint of ideology critique) perspectival, ‘constructed,’ and establishing norms in the sense described above, since *there can be no (social) reality without a determining of the field of interpretation and possibility.*” (emphasis added)

ourselves and the social conditions, and also the way we operate within these conditions.”⁴⁵² If this is correct, then it would establish et another reason to fully embrace critical hermeneutics.

This brings us to my second point, namely an omission concerning the significance (and necessity) of alternative disclosures in the theory of ideology critique. To begin with, Jaeggi contends that ideological consciousness is false “since it contains a false interpretation and understanding of reality.”⁴⁵³ But even if we attribute a realist position to Jaeggi, we will have to ask what is the standard or truth-maker in light of which the ideological understanding of reality turns out to be false? Jaeggi explains that ideology critique “generates the standards needed to overcome a given reality out of the self-contradictions of the given norms and the given reality.”⁴⁵⁴ At the same time, the “contradictions that start it off are not simply given;” rather, immanent critique is “very much ‘a method of forging links,’ and the recognition and the existence of such links is a condition for recognizing those contradictions: they first become accessible through analysis.”⁴⁵⁵

Again, given Jaeggi’s claim that “there can be no (social) reality without a determining of the field of interpretation and possibility,”⁴⁵⁶ it is difficult to reconcile the admitted need for analysis through which the contradictions “first become accessible” – which requires a theory – with the previous statement according to which ideology critique generates its standards (through which contradictions become accessible) out of the given norms and (understanding of) reality. If these norms (and whatever else our ideological understanding of reality comprises) “constitute

⁴⁵² Jaeggi 2009: 64. Jaeggi also acknowledges that ideologies do not merely exists “within systems of ideas, but also in practices and forms of habitus.” As I tried to show in the last chapter, endorsing the hermeneutic alternative would present an option to vindicate this claim.

⁴⁵³ Jaeggi 2009: 68.

⁴⁵⁴ Jaeggi 2009: 73 (translation modified; the German version reads “[Ideologiekritik, MS] generiert nämlich aus den Selbstwidersprüchen der gegebenen Normen und der gegebenen Realität die Maßstäbe zu deren Überwindung.”)

⁴⁵⁵ Jaeggi 2009: 83.

⁴⁵⁶ Jaeggi 2009: 72.

our relation to the world and thus determine the horizons of our interpretation of the world”⁴⁵⁷ then their self-contradictions cannot be accessed from within if the adjective “constitutive” is to have any meaning at all. If, however, the self-contradictions can “become accessible” through a theoretically guided analysis then the norms cannot be considered constitutive but rather, and in keeping with the hermeneutical approach, as factually determining our relation to the world.⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, in stating that the contradictions are “not simply given” but “first become accessible” by virtue of analysis, the hermeneutic solution seems to suggest itself almost “naturally”: What is needed to make the contradictions accessible is a new disclosure.⁴⁵⁹ And we can actually see how new disclosures enter the analytic process in going back to the Marxian example of ideology critique Jaeggi discusses: “ideology critique *analyzes* in what sense the free and equal exchange in the mode of surplus value production (this is the task of Marx’s value theory) *systematically* produces inequality, or, in what sense ‘civic’ freedom systematically leads to a lack of freedom.”⁴⁶⁰ What is missing in her remark is that Marx’s value theory is in fact a new disclosure on the basis of which the relationship between capitalist and wage laborer can be understood as “exploitative” or “alienating”; thus, it is in light of this new disclosure that his analysis can make the contradictions of the ideals of freedom and equality accessible and reveal that they systematically produce unfreedom and inequality. From a hermeneutic standpoint, Jaeggi’s comment in the accompanying footnote to the effect that ideology critique “helps us see

⁴⁵⁷ Jaeggi 2009: 64.

⁴⁵⁸ Unless, however, one would retreat to a Heideggerian position of incommensurability, cf. chapter 1, II.5.

⁴⁵⁹ In this context, Jaeggi also addresses how the experience of agents can serve as a vehicle for the formation of critical consciousness: “the institutional reality of a society can be inherently contradictory, insofar as it embodies norms and demands that conflict with each other and cannot be realized without contradiction, or which, in their realization, turn against their original intentions. And the experience of agents is often so complex that a critical consciousness and practices of resistance can develop out of it” (Jaeggi/Celikates 2017: 109, my translation). Experiences – understood in the negative sense as the frustration of one’s expectations – can act as a “ferment” (to use Jaeggi’s term) of new disclosures that lead to a comparative standpoint (see my discussion of the hermeneutic-pragmatic conception of experience in chapter 1, II.).

⁴⁶⁰ Jaeggi 2009: 70.

what we ‘know’ about the world in a different light” and her suggestion that “Marx’s theory of value [is] inherently designed as a critique of ideology”⁴⁶¹ could thus be reconstructed as the need for alternative disclosures to ground a comparative standpoint through which a certain phenomenon “becomes accessible” anew and establishing a basis for critique.⁴⁶²

Finally, when the ambiguity in Jaeggi’s conception regarding the relation of ideology and reality and the omission of the idea of world-disclosure concur, it creates a severe problem for her account of ideology critique. The following statement makes us see this very clearly: “Ideologies are also simultaneously true and false,” she claims, “inasmuch as the norms they are attached to have an unrealized truth content.”⁴⁶³ The “unrealized truth content” mentioned by Jaeggi does not designate the contextual truth or validity of the ideological norm; rather, what the designated unrealized potential of the norm must refer to is the standard “to overcome a given reality,” for ideology critique, as we have seen, “generates the standards needed to overcome a given reality out of the self-contradictions of the given norms and the given reality.”⁴⁶⁴ But if this is correct, then Jaeggi’s assertion regarding the “unrealized truth content” of ideological norms is bankrupt insofar as she is claiming that the unrealized potential for truth (or: validity) is already contained within the ideological (and thus contextually invalid) norm. If this were true, then ideology critique would amount to a version of internal critique – the kind of critique that clarifies and (re-)affirms the normative foundations of a society, tradition, etc. but cannot transcend a given context. Such a conclusion, however, would definitely undermine Jaeggi’s

⁴⁶¹ Jaeggi 2009: 83.

⁴⁶² This also resonates with Jaeggi’s view (Jaeggi/Celikates 2017: 109-10) that “we are not yet dealing with ideologies when certain conditions are unjust and exploitative, but only when such conditions are not experienced as unjust or exploitative - or when they are intuitively perceived as such but not recognized as such, or despite being recognized are not adequately interpreted and articulated.” As I have argued, new disclosures are required to overcome such instances of hermeneutical injustice (see chapter 1, II.).

⁴⁶³ Jaeggi 2009: 69.

⁴⁶⁴ Jaeggi 2009: 73.

stated ambition to conceptualize ideology critique as a form of immanent critique.⁴⁶⁵ In light of the earlier commitments and noted omissions, however, the attempt to redeem the desideratum of a context-transcending immanent critique is destined to fail and that is because ideologies are not merely “attached to” certain norms. By contrast, norms disclose reality so that social phenomena etc. “become accessible” through these norms. Hence, the kind of critique that aims to realize the (full) truth content of the norms that belong to a certain ideology cannot transcend it, for it moves within the same interpretive space of possibility. In other words the critique remains within the same contextual bounds of disclosure as the ideology instead of “help[ing] us see what we ‘know’ about the world in a different light.”

The hermeneutic approach I want to propose presents a clear alternative to this dilemma that rejects the idea of an “unrealized truth content” serving as the basis for critique. Instead, it calls for counter-hegemonic disclosures by virtue of which alone the prospect of a context-transcending critique of ideology becomes possible. At the same time, as I will argue below, the hermeneutic alternative meets the criterion of immanence by presenting an account that combines the “immanent procedure with a context-transcending concept of rationality” (Honneth). Thus, in my view, adopting this strategy in fact presents a live option for Jaeggi that would resolve the inconsistencies inherent to her view and redeem its promises.

Yet despite some conspicuous hermeneutic leanings,⁴⁶⁶ Jaeggi’s distrust vis-à-vis exploring this alternative seems to be influenced, at least in part, by a specific understanding of

⁴⁶⁵ However, sometimes at least Jaeggi seems to be inconsistent in determining the aims of immanent ideology critique as we can see in her statement that “a critic of ideology does not criticize the ideals of freedom and equality themselves, but their deficient realization.” (2009: 69) which would amount to a form of internal critique according to her own taxonomy. Compare this to Jaeggi 2009: 76: “The inconsistent reality (a reality in which the norms can be realized only inconsistently) requires *a transformation of both reality and the norms*, rather than a simple adjustment of reality in accordance with the ideals (either to recapture or to realize a potential).”

⁴⁶⁶ See the examples mentioned above as well as Jaeggi 2018: 207-8; the latter passages will be discussed in detail below IV.2.

the hermeneutic tradition from a left-Hegelian position in which she situates her work. From that perspective, the main objection against the hermeneutic model of critique can be summed up as “the charge that [interpretation, MS] binds us irrevocably to the status quo – since we can only interpret what already exists – and so undercuts the very possibility of social criticism.”⁴⁶⁷ This formulation of the alleged hermeneutic dilemma stems from Michael Walzer. The worry he refers to in his statement is that hermeneutic approaches cannot create sufficient critical distance between the standpoint of the critic and the object of her criticism and thus remain too immanent to have any real critical bite.

Michael Walzer, who himself defends the model of critical interpretation as the foremost account of social criticism, plays quite a prominent role in the contemporary debate about immanent social criticism. In part, he owes his prominence to the fact that numerous members of the third generation of the Frankfurt School identify him as a kind of Ur-hermeneut and so he finds himself on the side of those who have to defend interpretive criticism against the charge of uber-immanence and conservatism. In this debate regarding the possibility, method, and conceptual contours of immanent social criticism in the tradition of Hegel, Marx, and the first-generation of Frankfurters, many contemporary Frankfurt School theorists, among them Axel Honneth and Rahel Jaeggi, juxtapose the hermeneutic account with the so-called left-Hegelian alternative favored by them.⁴⁶⁸ According to both programs, the normative standards for critique must be reconstructed from within social reality. But whereas the hermeneutic or “reconstructive” model (of which Walzer is understood to be the proponent par excellence) aims

⁴⁶⁷ Walzer 1993: 3.

⁴⁶⁸ See Honneth 2009. Jaeggi (2018: 190-1, 174-5, esp. endnote 5 on pages 355-6, and with a view to ideology critique Jaeggi 2009: 74-5) endorses this distinction and sides with the left-Hegelian program because of its context-transcending demands and transformative effects. See also Stahl 2021: 20-3.

at the “creative disclosure of existing cultural values or ideals,” and thus is understood as remaining locally bound, the left-Hegelian model is presented as a stronger form of social criticism as it aspires to connect an immanent procedure with a context-transcending conception of rationality to justify the immanent standards employed by the critic and to avoid the charge of moral relativism.⁴⁶⁹ Against this background, it is concluded that the “procedure of [immanent] criticism was to be left-Hegelian, not merely hermeneutic.”⁴⁷⁰

In the next section, my own proposal for ideology critique will begin to take shape as I respond to the more detailed objections against the hermeneutic model (represented by Walzer) from the perspective of a critical hermeneutics. To be clear, my aim here is not to defend Walzer’s position. The point is rather to highlight the differences between his traditional and my critical hermeneutic model of critique and to show how the latter remedies the shortcomings of the former and offers a persuasive new conception of ideology critique. Since my point is to argue that a critically (re-)conceived hermeneutical approach provides a conclusive model for ideology critique that cuts across the schematic divide, I neither want to affirm the juxtaposition between hermeneutics and the left-Hegelian program as such nor the alternative positions they assert within the spectrum of theories of immanent critique.⁴⁷¹ Instead, my aim in addressing the more fine-grained charges against traditional hermeneutics is to point out the problems inherent in both alternatives in preparation of my own conception, which will then be introduced and exemplified via the critique of two instances of colorblind ideology (IV.).

⁴⁶⁹ Honneth 2009: 46-51.

⁴⁷⁰ Honneth 2009: 49.

⁴⁷¹ Neither do I claim that these two models are in any way exhaustive of the possible positions within such a “spectrum” or family of immanent models of critique.

III. The “connected critic” and the spectre of Gadamer

To begin with, the main contention leveled against Walzer is that the “interpretive path” of criticism is predicated on the shared normative understandings of the members of a society,⁴⁷² a society that, as it turns out, is not just any given society but (a version of) the United States or at least a society that embodies “American values.”⁴⁷³ On his view, the “shared understandings of a people” not only factually “constitute a moral culture” by virtue of disclosing the world to the members of society and de facto guiding their normative practices; rather, these understandings represent “the morality we share” in a robust normative sense: To resolve any disagreements over moral interpretations, members of a society must “go back to the ‘text’ – the values, principles, codes, and conventions that constitute the moral world.”⁴⁷⁴ This Ur-text of a community is characterized as a “minimal code” that provides a “moral framework for any possible (moral) life” and is constitutive of the first-person plural.⁴⁷⁵

Given the sacrosanct nature of the minimal code, the implications of Walzer’s foundationalist hermeneutics for social criticism are quite clear. Since the social critic’s principles are taken from the same stock,⁴⁷⁶ for this is the only guarantee that the “connected critic” is truly “one of us,”⁴⁷⁷ critique can achieve a more consistent self-understanding but must stop short of any interrogation of the constitutive principles themselves. It cannot achieve the kind of context-transcendence required by ideology critique if we understand such critique as

⁴⁷² This criticism (however with different implications) is leveled against Walzer most clearly by Stahl 2021: 39-41; see also Dworkin 1983.

⁴⁷³ See Walzer 1993: 28.

⁴⁷⁴ Walzer 1993: 29-30.

⁴⁷⁵ Walzer 1993: 25.

⁴⁷⁶ Walzer 1993: 48 (“his principles are ones we share”).

⁴⁷⁷ Walzer 1993: 39.

aiming at scrutinizing the very meanings by which the fore-structure of understanding discloses the world.

These internal restrictions, grounded in the assumption of substantive factual agreement that supports both a shared understanding and the possibility of reaching consensus, put Walzer's tradition-affirming approach⁴⁷⁸ in the camp of traditional hermeneutics. Like Heidegger and Gadamer, Walzer thinks that the conditions that guarantee the objectivity of understanding are identical with those that guarantee the intersubjectivity of communication.⁴⁷⁹ For Heidegger and Gadamer, only the identity of meaning can guarantee the identity of reference required for any understanding and mutual agreement among speakers/participants. The identity of meaning, in turn, is secured by a shared world-disclosure or common tradition which, they insist, takes the form of a pre-existing substantive consensus, a common tradition or, in Walzer's case a "minimal code." The trouble with this view is that it invests the supporting factual consensus (our *factual* dependence on a tradition or, more generally, the context-dependence of our understanding of any meaning whatsoever) with normative authority and treats original meaning as true and binding. On this view, tradition thus rules with a cold hand; since original meaning dictates the truth this model defies any transcendent critique.

The conflation of world-disclosure (meaning) and validity, however, is not the only vice Walzer's account shares with Heidegger and Gadamer. Like these two traditional hermeneuts, Walzer also believes that ultimately, we cannot abandon our tradition and its understandings in

⁴⁷⁸ Walzer 1993: 40: "Social criticism must be understood as one of the more important by-products of a larger activity – let us call it the activity of cultural elaboration and affirmation." This aptly describes the task of hermeneutics (traditionally conceived) to produce an improved ethical/political self-understanding (cf. TM 379). Danielle Allen's *Our Declaration* (which – in best hermeneutic fashion – presents a reading of the *Declaration of Independence* in defense of equality against the dominant interpretation that highlights the value of freedom at the expense of equality) is an impressive example of how prolific this type of criticism can be.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. chapter 1, III.2.

the way that an outside observer would adopt an epistemically privileged and purportedly neutral position toward it, for this elevated perspective would collapse into a view from nowhere.⁴⁸⁰ In effect, the removed third-personal point of view of the “neutral” observer always remains subject to the critic’s own fore-understandings which situate her in a socio-historical condition whose shared meanings enable any understanding at all.⁴⁸¹ Walzer thus takes a position close to Gadamer’s claim about the universal status of hermeneutics insofar as they both hold that our interpretive access to the world is inescapable. But the hermeneutical claim to universality, as we have seen, has a fatal flaw: It suffers from an explanatory deficit insofar as the participants have no access to the kind of empirical, third-person knowledge provided by the natural and social sciences which renders impossible any critical reflection on the limitations of one’s world-disclosure caused by the effects of violence operative in the fore-structure of understanding (i.e. the stock of world-disclosing meanings) and thus prevents agents from learning from experience.

The shortcomings of Walzer’s position are therefore reminiscent of the flaws we identified in our discussion of Heidegger and Gadamer: First, the possibility of understanding (which is a precondition for mutual agreement as well as dissent) is predicated on a prior factual consensus which is treated as authoritative and, second, the hypostasizing universalization of hermeneutic understanding which leaves no room for third-personal knowledge. Together, these properties of a traditionally construed interpretive criticism prevent it from transcending the status quo, for they keep its critical force confined within the contextual limitations first established by original meaning.

⁴⁸⁰ See Walzer 1993: 6-9, 50.

⁴⁸¹ This, I take it, is what Adorno alludes to when he depicts the cultural critic as someone who is not happy with the culture “to which alone he owes his discontent” (Adorno 1990: 19).

Let us then compare this model of hermeneutical social criticism with the left-Hegelian program in terms of whether – unlike Walzer’s model of interpretation which effectively remains bound to a local, US American context – this alternative allows for the possibility of transcending the local context. The methodological cornerstones of the left-Hegelian program (regardless of its specific formulation) are its commitments to an “immanent procedure” that gains critical traction through a “context-transcending notion of rationality”⁴⁸²: The standards for critique are to be found within the reality of existing social practices and institutions; but these standards must not be applied willy-nilly, their application presupposes that the normative ideals they express can be affirmed as valid.⁴⁸³ For Walzer, the validity of the hermeneutically reconstructed standards would be guaranteed by their compatibility with a “minimal code” which also functions as the supporting consensus that makes understanding possible in the first place. By contrast, the members of the Frankfurt School first tried to solve the problem pertaining to the justification of its immanent standards with a “concept of social rationalization” that would judge the validity of any given ideal or principle in virtue of its ability to aid the realization of reason.⁴⁸⁴ Accordingly, any ideal anchored in the historical reality of a given society is deemed a justified standard for criticism once it can be shown that this ideal facilitates rational progress. By the late 1930s, however, the members of the first generation experienced a loss of the original meaning of the normatively reconstructed ideals they employed as standards for critique; with the rise of National Socialism their formerly irrefutable confidence in the “firm kernel of meaning” these ideals supposedly possessed had almost completely deteriorated. This prompted

⁴⁸² Honneth 2009: 51.

⁴⁸³ See Honneth 2009: 49-51. See also Jaeggi 2009: 74, who argues that ideology critique as immanent critique likewise “relies on not just actual but also justified norms.”

⁴⁸⁴ Honneth 2009: 49-53.

them to add a “genealogical proviso” to their program in order to test the ideals for whether or not “they still possess their *original meaning*.”⁴⁸⁵

As an initial step towards formulating a response to the juxtaposition of the left-Hegelian and the hermeneutic version of immanent critique, it is noteworthy that the objection against hermeneutic model to the effect that participants would first of all have to justify why they can claim validity for the ideals reconstructed within their socio-cultural reality equally applies to the left-Hegelian model; in this regard, the historical precursors mentioned by Honneth seem to fall short of their own aspirations. What Walzer’s reference to a “minimal code” of morality has in common with Hegel’s appeal to the ideals embodied in the ancient polis,⁴⁸⁶ Marx’s anthropological reconstruction of human nature,⁴⁸⁷ or the first generation of Frankfurters employing the (genealogically approved) idea of an “original meaning,” is that, ultimately, they all seem to invoke standards of dubious origin. The standards they invoke are dubious in the sense that the criteria by which they measure the validity of immanent ideals is either derived from some sort of “original meaning,”⁴⁸⁸ more or less without normative justification (Marx), or so far removed from the self-understanding of the participants (Hegel)⁴⁸⁹ that it is difficult to justify the practice of social criticism on the basis of the standards effectively employed for licensing the reconstructed ideals as sufficiently immanent. By all mean(ing)s, the “original

⁴⁸⁵ Honneth 2009: 53, emphasis added.

⁴⁸⁶ Benhabib 1986: 28-32. For a different interpretation that stresses the transcendent element in Hegel, see Buchwalter 1987: 299: “Correctly understood, Hegel’s theory is infused with the same transcendent dimension that informs Adorno’s account: Hegel measures the real not with its own concept but with a concept of rationality emphatically juxtaposed to the real.” For my purpose, nothing seems to depend on which of the two interpretations is correct. If the latter turns out to be correct it simply confirms my point about the need for context-transcendence.

⁴⁸⁷ Benhabib 1986: 54.

⁴⁸⁸ The problem, according to Honneth, is either the reference to the “original meaning” of the ideals or the conception of the “directed development of human rationality,” see 2009: 51 and *ibid* 1-18.

⁴⁸⁹ I believe this holds not only for the criticism of modern societies by the standards of the ancient polis; we could also ask, for instance, whether neoliberals today necessarily care too much about the original meaning of bourgeois freedom if the point of a neoliberal “revolution” is to correct the mistakes perceived in classical liberalism.

meaning” by which the (degeneration of the) ideals etc. is judged is itself treated as irrefutably valid and is insofar removed from criticism.⁴⁹⁰

Making the validity of the reconstructed ideals conditional upon another substantially defined standard for validity leads to one of two unattractive outcomes: one option is quite simply resignation in the face of a society in which ideals “worth” reconstructing can no longer be found because their meaning has become unrecognizable.⁴⁹¹ This option must strike us as particularly odd with regard to the practice of ideology critique which, as we have seen, presupposes that ideological understanding is contextually valid.⁴⁹² The other, and equally undesirable, option is that if reconstructed ideals only “count” provided that they pass a test of moral fitness or proximity with respect to an “original meaning” of those ideals then this leads, as we have seen in our discussion of Walzer’s account of social criticism, to the kind of hermeneutic closure that ultimately defeats the purpose of a context-transcending critique. To be sure, Honneth is not interested in rehabilitating any of the old models. But even if his aim is “to reconstruct the ideal form of this kind of criticism.”⁴⁹³ The problem remains that whatever standards the concept of context-transcending rationality of our choice employs, we must not invest them with the kind of authority that treats them as fixed and therefore infallible.

Following the discussion of the two models (and their common defect), I will introduce my own conception of ideology critique via an exemplifying critique of two specific instantiations of colorblind racist ideology (IV.). As the first manifestation of such a colorblind

⁴⁹⁰ At the very least, it is not clear what constitutes (and justifies) the normative standard by which the validity of the “original meaning” is to be judged.

⁴⁹¹ This is, however, what Adorno sometimes seems to think (at least at times), when he claims that immanent critique and ideology critique are no longer possible in current society, cf. Buchwalter 1987: 300.

⁴⁹² The kernel of validity of ideologies must be understood in light of the context-transcending concept of rationality, not with regard to an original meaning.

⁴⁹³ See Honneth 2009: 45, who is explicit about *reconstructing* this form of social criticism, which means he is taking an interpretive approach.

ideology, I scrutinize proclamations of “All lives matter” in response to “Black lives matter” and conclude that the former represent a form of ideological false diagnosis (IV.1.). The second instantiation of colorblind ideology I discuss, this time as a form of ideological false therapy, is the rejection of affirmative action on the basis that the latter is understood as “preferential treatment” (IV.2.). The systematic purpose of analyzing these two cases is to establish the necessity of new disclosures for the practice of ideology critique. When applied to Jaeggi’s conception of ideology critique, it eventually allows me to justify my claim that her specific version of the left-Hegelian alternative to hermeneutics, due to its theoretical commitments and aspirations, is ultimately self-defeating (IV.2.). Consequently, her position leads to the same impasse as both the Walzerian and Gadamerian accounts of critique which cannot escape the confines of a given tradition and transcend its interpretive context.

IV. Colorblindness as racist ideology and the idea of race-conscious ideology critique

As an ethical and political ideal, colorblindness promotes race-neutral egalitarianism. Whether it is with regard to how we treat others in our personal lives or how we design public policies, people of all colors should be treated without regard for their race. In that sense, colorblindness does not claim that we do not see race, but it is centered on the belief that (the visibility) of race should not matter in our social and political lives. Everyone deserves to be treated equally regardless of the color of their skin. To support their aspirations, proponents of the colorblind ideal often cite Martin Luther King Jr.’s yearning that one day we will all live in a nation where one “will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” The false

cooptation of Dr. King's statement⁴⁹⁴ shows that behind the allegedly transparent, anti-essentialist façade lies a hidden essentialism: The color of one's skin is deemed immaterial to how a person should be treated because under the skin we are all the same. "There is only one race, the human race." In this humanist spirit, colorblindness is committed to reducing racism in all its forms.⁴⁹⁵ As an ethico-political principle, colorblindness acknowledges that racism persists in the United States, including forms of (implicit) racial bias and institutional racism.⁴⁹⁶ On the doxastic level, the colorblind strategy for fighting racism is thus grounded in the essentialist belief about our basic human sameness which is sometimes paired with a cultural essentialism that grounds racism in nature of human beings to feel more drawn to those "of similar cultural heritage."⁴⁹⁷ But its steady reliance on essentialist assumptions of this kind is only one way in which the colorblind logic falters.

As the track record of colorblind policies shows and as people of color are painfully aware, colorblindness cements the status quo and protects racial privilege by virtue of its idealized-procedural universalism: it takes for granted that, for example, what it means for all lives to matter in all conceivable aspects can – in the name of impartiality – be determined by a small (privileged) group according to principles that are conceived of from a single dominant

⁴⁹⁴ See Reagan's proclamation in a radio address two days before the first national MLK-day: "We want a colorblind society, a society that, in the words of Dr. King, judges people 'not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.'" (<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-address-the-nation-martin-luther-king-jr-and-black-americans>); for a contemporary example of this practice, see Dershowitz 2021: 5, 17, 23, 31-3. On the appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words by proponents of colorblind ideology, see Sundstrom 2020: 130-6.

⁴⁹⁵ In line with my general notion of ideology, I am not concerned with colorblind racist bigots, who use colorblindness as a pretext for intentionally promoting racist goals. Such colorblind bigotry served as the standard for many racist policies in the post-civil rights era. In particular, with the rise of neoliberalism under Nixon and Reagan, policies would hide their outright racist aims under the verbal cover of a carefully crafted and neutrally coded colorblind rhetoric (the Republican Party's so-called Southern Strategy) appealing to "forced busing," "states' rights," "cutting taxes," "war on drugs" etc., see Herbert 2005. See also Gomer 2020: 102-125.

⁴⁹⁶ See, for instance, Coleman Hughes, *What would a Color Blind World look like?*: "The way we ground our anti-racism is in the belief that all human beings are the same under the skin." (https://youtu.be/_WTFFm_h4_A).

⁴⁹⁷ See Cohen 2003: 15-6.

standpoint: “Colorblind talk furthers racial power [...] by obscuring the operation of racial power, protecting it from challenge, and permitting ongoing racialization through racially coded methods.”⁴⁹⁸ Colorblindness maintains racial inequality by virtue of concealing the operation of a color-coded logic at the meta-level (“white-blindness”) through endorsing “colorblindness proper” at the object level. In other words, it hides its own whiteness behind the apparent transparency of the idealized-universalist standards it employs. José Medina elucidates how the colorblind interplay between object-level and meta-level exhibits a kind of double-blindness:

“*white-blindness*, that is, blindness with respect to their own racial identity; and *color-blindness proper*, that is, blindness with respect to those who have been colored or racialized as non-whites. Notably it is only the latter kind of blindness that is explicitly professed in the ideology of color-blindness, because whiteness itself is not even registered, whereas racialized colors are in fact registered but disavowed and brushed aside.”⁴⁹⁹

My primary focus here is colorblindness as ideology, which I understand as an embodied interpretive schema,⁵⁰⁰ and Medina’s notion of double-blindness explains just how colorblindness co-opts the disclosure of the ideological subject. A colorblind interpretive schema renders whiteness invisible as an embodied way of understanding and experiencing the world by presenting whiteness as if it in fact constituted the neutral, sober, scientific,⁵⁰¹ impartial, objective, unbiased, universal stance of reasonableness.⁵⁰² Colorblinded subjects are not aware

⁴⁹⁸ Kim 2003: 17.

⁴⁹⁹ Medina 2013: 209 (internal footnotes omitted), the quote continues: “White-blindness runs much deeper than color-blindness because, for the white subject, whiteness is typically not even conceptualized as a color, but rather, as the absence of color, signifying the absence of race, rather than a way of color-coding one more racialized identity. White-blindness and color-blindness are intimately connected, and they are both crucial components of white ignorance.” At times, however, the opposite could be true as well, when under the colorblind ideal white becomes a stand-in for universality, then whiteness (in social cognition) functions similarly to the “color” white, which comprises all of the spectral colors.

⁵⁰⁰ See chapter 2, I.1.

⁵⁰¹ As Adams/Salter (2019: 273) note, the whiteness of the lab coat, signifies the alleged “sanitized absence of meaning consistent with a colorblind construction of the research process” on the object-level intended to permit a perspective approximating the ominous ideal of a “view from nowhere;” likewise, on the meta-level, “one should understand the whiteness of the lab coat as meaningful color rather than culture-neutral absence of color.”

⁵⁰² Adams/Salter 2019: 276: “because White American racial sensibilities tend to constitute supposedly neutral standards of a ‘reasonable person,’ mainstream institutions tend to normalize and naturalize denial of racism.”

that they employ a white “racist optic” (Mills) that surreptitiously imposes a white interpretive grid on it. Taken together, the object-level and the meta-level constitute what Charles Mills has described and criticized as “white ignorance,” viz a cognitive⁵⁰³ and affective⁵⁰⁴ “interpretive prism whose conceptual deficiencies and biased refractions are not at all contingent but an artifact of white racist ideology.”⁵⁰⁵ As such, the ideology of colorblindness supports a dominant hermeneutic of whiteness (and its illusion of white racial superiority) by distorting the disclosure and understanding of reality.⁵⁰⁶

The color blinding of our understanding of reality also applies to how subjects affectively disclose and interpret the world. As one example of how colorblindness colonizes the emotional life of subjects, philosopher Paula Ioanide observes that students, who can be described as generally advantaged,⁵⁰⁷ develop a particular affective disassociation when they are confronted with the painful testimony of racial oppression. As Ioanide argues, “colorblind ideologies cultivate emotional economies that teach advantaged students to remain detached, dissociated, or indifferent to gendered racism.”⁵⁰⁸ She suggests that advantaged students’ affective dissociation

⁵⁰³ See Mills 2007: 23 “white ignorance is best thought of as a cognitive tendency—an inclination, a doxastic disposition.”

⁵⁰⁴ See Mills 2017: 108, where Mills argues to expand the notion of ideology beyond “formalized intellectual systems” (i.e. theories) in order to track how interpretive deficiencies bear on “affect, sensibility, ingrained patterns of response, racialized perceptions and operationalizations of putatively abstract concepts, and so forth.”

⁵⁰⁵ Mills 2017: 105.

⁵⁰⁶ See also Medina 2013: 212: “color-blindness can be understood as a socially cultivated meta-attitude through which a particular group tries to monitor and control what they see and are willing to acknowledge as relevant and significant. (...) Color-blindness, even when self-consciously cultivated, can qualify as *meta-ignorance* or *meta-blindness* when and because color-blind subjects do not fully know what they don’t know.”

⁵⁰⁷ Students are advantaged insofar as their “group identity automatically endows them with unearned advantages. [...] These advantages are correlated with racial, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity [and] are mitigated when one or more attributes of a person’s identity makes them vulnerable to systemic disadvantages,” see Ioanide 2019: 347-8 (note 1).

⁵⁰⁸ Ioanide 2019: 328. On the affective and conative effects of colorblindness, see also Norton et al (2006). See also Feagin/Ducey 2019: 88, who borrow the concept of “social alexithymia” from social psychology to explain how the white racial frame operates. Social alexithymia is described as “the inability of a great many whites to understand where African Americans and other Americans of color are coming from and what their racialized experiences are like. This social alexithymia involves a *significant lack of cross-racial empathy* and understanding.” (emphasis added).

and indifference in the face of testimony of racial injustice can be explained by reference to the liberal concept of free choice as well as the tendency of the colorblind ideal to present the persistence of racism as a function of individual prejudice, a lack of agents' anti-racist virtue rather than a structural issue. In this sense, colorblindness downplays the structural features of racism and reduces it to individual cognitive attitudes and beliefs of agents, in particular those who have not yet endorsed the non-racist ideal of colorblindness.⁵⁰⁹ When racism is relegated to the agential level, it is presented as something that is, by and large, up to the individual's own choice. Thus, when advantaged students, who subscribe to the colorblind ideal and thus do not identify as agents of racism, are exposed to the imagery and testimony of racial injustice, they tend to understand these injustices as caused by the choices of others who should be held responsible. What explains their apathy then is the fact that they tend to experience racial injustice as "'special interest' problems" that "have nothing to do with *their* political and personal choices."⁵¹⁰

From a systematic point of view, the case of students' emotional disconnect not only shows the affective dimension of a colorblind interpretive schema but also calls attention to another important feature of ideologies, namely their adaptivity.⁵¹¹ It would be a mistake to think of ideologies as contextually stable, stagnant, or conceptually fixed. For their own "survival," ideologies "must be capable of expanding their influence and adapting to new situations."⁵¹² To

⁵⁰⁹ See Bonilla-Silva 1997.

⁵¹⁰ Ioanide 2019: 328-9 (emphasis added), and 333 ff, where she discusses how "white ignorance" produces an affective resistance to learning. See also Mueller 2017: 229. On neoliberalism and the "production of indifference" in a different context, see Mbembe 2017: 3.

⁵¹¹ For further non-discursive examples of the workings of the colorblind interpretive schema, see the discussion of white students' reactions to different portrayals of Black History Month in Adams/Salter 2019: 279-80, as well as the in-depth analyses of how Hollywood movies such as *Dirty Harry*, the *Rocky* series, *Glory*, or *Dangerous Minds* perpetuate colorblind ideology in Gomer 2020.

⁵¹² Bonilla-Silva 2021: 215, where Bonilla-Silva also shows how colorblind racism is adapting to the "new normal" in pandemic times (ibid 215-29).

this end, they must evolve and develop adaptive strategies – sometimes they interact with neighboring ideologies forming ideological hybrids or “recruiting” some of their conceptual tools. This is certainly true in the case of colorblind ideology. In addition to propagating a race-neutral, formal universalism, its underlying methodological individualism and the concurrent emphasis on personal choice and autonomy (at the expense of structural explanations and criticism) are typically complemented by various appeals to both neo-liberal and conservative concepts of “personal responsibility,” “merit,” or “hard work.”⁵¹³ Having this wide array of conceptual resources at its disposal, supplies colorblind ideology with a high degree of flexibility to contextually adapt its interpretive grid and cope with new challenges in order to successfully reinforce the status quo of white ignorance and white racial privilege.

Sociologist Jennifer C. Mueller examined the reproductive ingenuity of the colorblind interpretive schema at work in everyday interactions. In her analysis Mueller argues that white undergraduate students demonstrate an evident tendency to develop innovative strategies to “bypass and mystify racial learning” and to creatively defend the colorblind “ideologies that buttress racial domination and white supremacy.”⁵¹⁴ For the study, college students were asked to collect data on intergenerational wealth accumulation and transfer within their families and critically analyze how and to what extent their families have benefitted from racial inequality in that process. Prior to collecting family data, the students explored various institutions and social mechanisms supporting the reproduction of racial inequality and vital to the persistence of the racial wealth gap in the US such as slavery, the Homestead Act, the GI bill, social welfare, loans,

⁵¹³ On the nexus of colorblind racism and (neo-)liberalism, see, for instance, the excellent study by Justin Gomer on Hollywood’s complicity in undermining civil rights on the basis of colorblind ideology. Gomer argues that “neoliberalism relies on the colorblind language of the free market to reinforce white supremacy,” and insofar “colorblindness functions as the racial ideology of neoliberalism (2020: 62-4, 83-92). See also Omi/Winant 2014: 211-21.

⁵¹⁴ Mueller 2017: 219.

inheritance, etc. Analyzing more than 100 essays, Mueller finds that, noticeably, white students not only adopt but also creatively adjust a colorblind interpretive frame to either assuage or deny the influence of racial inequality on their families' wealth and capital acquisition in light of counterevidence. Mueller identifies four distinct "white epistemic maneuvers" students employ in the analyses of their family histories to relativize or reject the effects of racism; again, this is after students acquired knowledge of racially biased institutional settings and socio-cultural practices through engagement with the course material. For our purpose, two of these adaptive strategies, which Mueller refers to as "willfully reasoning colorblindness" and "mystifying practical solutions," stand out. The former can be identified as a case of ideological false diagnosis, where students "introduced alternate factors to facilitate misanalysing, ignoring, and/or rejecting the racial dynamics" at play. Colorblind alternative explanations replacing racial privilege include appeals to immigration status or language barriers but also highlight the concepts of individual "free choice," "work ethic," and "merit." For instance, when "Felicia" contemplated the influence of racial privilege on her family's wealth, she concludes:

"I don't feel that the color of my skin or of my ancestors necessarily made it easier on them than other immigrant families. My grandfather came to the U.S. not knowing a word of English and owning only the clothes on his back. *Primarily through hard work and our own merit* my family has been able to accumulate a little wealth and ... pass some of that on to the next generation."⁵¹⁵

The strategy of "mystifying practical solutions," on the other hand, constitutes a case of ideological false therapy. Here, students explicitly recognized instances of racial injustice but "generated doubt and mystery surrounding related, practical solutions" to these problems. For instance, another student acknowledged that "it was easy for me to state all the privileges I have

⁵¹⁵ Mueller 2017: 227, emphasis added; see also her discussion of another sample essay utilizing "choice" (ibid 227-8).

been given throughout my life based on race,” however, she confessed that this “leaves me with a daunting question: how can I help the ‘larger issue of systemic racial inequality?’ Is it my responsibility to change this? Should I feel guilty about what I have? Will I be the only person of my race fighting for a never ending cause?”⁵¹⁶

It is noteworthy, that the extraordinary adaptivity featured in these examples not only testifies to the versatility of colorblind ideological understanding in reaction to changed circumstances and new challenges; but the notable creative adaptive strategies also serve as further proof that ideologies cannot be limited to the doxastic domain of preconceived beliefs, but must be located “deeper,” at the level of world-disclosure. In response to the deep hermeneutical structure of ideological disclosure, ideology critique must follow suit. In the remainder of this chapter, using two examples of colorblind ideology, I will show exactly how my hermeneutic approach to ideology critique works and explain the role of counter-hegemonic disclosures in this process. I begin with an analysis of “All lives matter” as a form of ideological false diagnosis.

IV.1. “All lives matter” as false diagnosis

In what follows, I defend the claim that uttering the slogan “All lives matter” in response to or as a criticism of “Black lives matter” instantiates colorblind racist ideology⁵¹⁷ in the form of false diagnosis. There is continuing political and academic controversy over what “Black lives matter” means.⁵¹⁸ It should go without saying, that my aim here is not to settle this debate tout court.

⁵¹⁶ Mueller 2017: 231-2.

⁵¹⁷ For the claim that “All lives matter” instantiates a colorblind ideology, see, for instance, Burke 2019: 106-7. On colorblind racism as ideology, see Bonilla-Silva 2021; Lopez 2006: 157.

⁵¹⁸ Hogan 2021: 15-24 gives an overview of the academic debate.

However, I will argue that the slogan “Black lives matter” should be understood as a race-conscious, counter-hegemonic disclosure which facilitates the critique of colorblind racist ideology.

Not without emanating a sense of hermeneutic superiority, it is sometimes argued that what “Black lives matter” really means, is that “Black lives matter, too.” And from this “inclusionary” interpretation of the slogan, it seems, it is just a small step to accepting the universal truth that “All lives matter.” To get an impression of the conciliatory logic behind this proposal, let us take a look at what a reader of the Washington Post had to say in response to an article condemning the vandalizing of signs displaying the slogan “Black lives matter” by cutting out the word “Black.” In his letter to the editor, the ostensibly Kantian-inspired reader professes:

“Despite superficial biological differences, all lives do matter. How can artificially inserting any color — in this case ‘black’ — add to a thing that is priceless to begin with? *The ‘All Lives Matter’ slogan is simple truth, a wholly inclusive statement.* In this light, *‘Black Lives Matter’ functions as subtle racism* (implying that non-black lives somehow matter less),” and he continues in acknowledgment of the fact that “[t]oday’s racism is an ugly undercurrent. However, the only way to overcome it is to look beyond it by following President John F. Kennedy’s lead: ‘Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal.’”⁵¹⁹

In this short statement, we can readily discern two lines of reasoning that constitute two complementary colorblind stratagems. One affirms the “simple truth” of the “wholly inclusive statement” that “All lives matter” and the other discredits the “subtle racism” of saying “Black lives matter.” In the first line of reasoning, skin color is discounted as a merely superficial biological difference: The simple truth of “All lives matter” is grounded in our shared human condition as manifested in our mortality, the concern for our children’s future, and the fact that

⁵¹⁹ Letter to the editor of the Washington Post (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-semantic-debate-over-our-lives/2015/08/10/35d89c60-3e11-11e5-a312-1a6452ac77d2_story.html).

we all share the same planet and its resources. This condition establishes the “most basic common link” between us. In light of this fateful alliance of need, one cannot help but think of the equally problematic slogan “We’re all in this together.” The contrast between the semblance of skin color and the essence of our shared humanity features the colorblind trope that the color of one’s skin is immaterial to how a person should be treated. Once we look past the accidental properties of our existence, we can see that we are essentially all the same. As fellow humans, we all have lives that are “priceless to begin with.” Once this common ground is established and we can agree that there really is only one race, the human race, “black lives” appear as a subset of the “wholly inclusive” “all lives.” But if that is true, the second line of reasoning – intimating the familiar colorblind challenge of “reverse racism” – continues, then there is no need for either a potentially racist slogan such as “Black lives matter” or any preferential treatment of black lives.⁵²⁰ In this light, “All lives matter” is not only less offensive but also expresses solidarity with the cause of the BLM-movement on the basis of a shared humanity. That black lives matter is something that concerns us all in the sense that we all have lives that (should) matter. But the correct way to affirm that common ground is to say that all lives matter.

Contrary to this position, I will argue that in yielding to this logic and adopting “All lives matter” in lieu of “Black lives matter,” supporters of the cause that defines and motivates the BLM-movement (or the Movement for Black Lives, M4BL) are already conceding too much because they are falling for one of ideology’s oldest tricks. To see why, compare the inclusionary interpretation to how the BLM-movement self-identifies:

“We work vigorously for freedom and justice for Black people and, *by extension*, all people. [...] We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need

⁵²⁰ What the reader most likely refers to, is the so-called exclusionary reading of “Black lives matter” that interprets the slogan to mean that “Only black lives matter” or that “Black lives matter more (than non-Black lives).” Against the plausibility of the exclusionary interpretation from a linguistic standpoint, see Degen et al 2020.

not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others.”⁵²¹

It should be noted that adding “by extension” to the statement actively and openly rejects the logic of deduction *a maiore ad minus*. The addition “by extension” inverts the directional movement of reason and conveys that it is only through an understanding of what it means for black lives to matter that we begin to understand what it means for all lives to matter. In unapologetically demanding justice for black people and contending that the fight for justice for black people is a fight for justice for all only by extension, BLM supporters oppose the criticism of “reverse racism” and the co-optation of their movement by proponents of “All lives matter.” Their resistance is based on rejecting the underlying assumption that “black lives” are a subset of the “wholly inclusive” set of “all lives.” In other words, what they reject is the failed inclusivity of the dominant universal standard for what it takes for all lives to matter. Hence, demanding racial justice for black lives which, by extension, is intended to bring (more) justice for all lives, amounts to nothing short of a criticism of the dominant norms of inclusivity concerning the protection of life and livelihood, for the very reason that these norms do not register and take into account the experiences of black lives and have diverse effects on black lives in their application.⁵²² Recognizing the critical excess in their demands is important because it shows what kind of criticism is at stake. “Black lives matter” does not advocate for the type of internal critique (Jaeggi) that appeals to closing the gap between existing practical standards and their

⁵²¹ See <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/> (emphasis added). See also the LA chapter website (<https://www.blmla.org/guiding-principles>).

⁵²² See also Atkins 2018. The call for “Black Power” “meant undermining the ideological barriers that stood in the way of political engagement,” (ibid 6) and the ubiquitous misunderstandings of that claim represented “a failure to understand how power might be claimed by blacks in ways other than whites had claimed it [...] If integration meant the inclusion into white society (on white society’s terms), that wouldn’t do” (ibid 8). Hence, “Like ‘Black Power,’ ‘Black lives matter’ poses a challenge to a racialized system of value,” ibid 9.

deficient realization. Going beyond the reach of such a purely immanent critique (Adorno) and its contextual limitations, “Black lives matter” demands transcending the existing standard and reimagining what it means for lives to matter in light of the experience of black lives and how they do not matter. This type of criticism, however, is nothing other than what we have identified earlier as a context-transcending critique that aims to challenge the very standards that determine what it takes for Black lives, and by extension, for all lives to matter.⁵²³

The previous analysis is beginning to shed some light on the ideological character of the claim “All lives matter” and why adopting it would constitute a false compromise that would corrupt the political movement. But in order to understand a speech act, we have to look not only at semantic questions, for example, what it means for lives, black lives, to “matter.” Apart from the propositional component of the speech act we have to further consider its illocutionary component that identifies the mode of understanding. I want to argue that when supporters of BLM utter “Black lives matter” they are making a normative claim (“Black lives should matter”)⁵²⁴ because they believe that the descriptive claim (“Black lives matter”) is false.⁵²⁵ From

⁵²³ This claim is further supported by the radical proposals of the BLM-movement (see my discussion *supra*). See also the aspirations of the affiliated M4BL to “forge a new covenant”: “It is our hope that by working together to create and amplify a shared agenda, we can continue to move towards a world in which the full humanity and dignity of all people is recognized. (...) We recognize that building toward this world requires us to make demands of a state which has consistently created conditions of violence, deprivation, and exclusion for Black people, and to enter into a new covenant with each other. (...) We have come together now because *we believe it is time to forge a new covenant. We are dreamers and doers. This document articulates our vision of a fundamentally different world.*” See <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/the-preamble/> (emphasis added). See also the introduction in Hogan et al 2021: 4.

⁵²⁴ See, for instance, Gooding-Williams 2017: 34 (“‘Black Lives Matter’ is not simply a statement of fact, it is also an exhortation.”).

⁵²⁵ This interpretation is compatible with another, relational interpretation (Hogan 2021: 29-33) that holds that the slogan should be understood as addressing two different audiences: with regard to the in-group (“most Black Americans and those non-Black Americans who oppose anti-Black racism”), “Black lives matter” expresses a self-affirmation “that *we* (Black people) are enough,” whereas with regard to the out-group (“those who endorse or are indifferent to anti-Black racism”), it expresses more of an aspirational claim. The meaning of the slogan then changes with the context in which it is uttered/the intended audience. For an out-group audience (which is the one I have in mind), “Black lives matter” makes an aspirational claim that Black lives should matter (more) because they currently do not matter (enough). For an in-group audience, the emphasis might be on the self-affirmation, which, however, does not preclude the normative demand that Black lives should matter more in actuality.

a linguistic perspective, this can be restated in terms of what is said (at-issue content) and what is presupposed or what is implicated by what is said (non-at-issue content).⁵²⁶ What is said is that black lives should matter, what is presupposed or implicated is that historically black lives have not mattered or have mattered less than other lives (especially white lives). In performing her speech act, the speaker is making a demand for justice for black people in the future because of the historical and ongoing injustice that conditions the precariousness of black lives in the present.⁵²⁷ In other words, the meaning of “Black lives matter” is that black lives should matter because, as a matter of fact, they have not mattered in the past and do not matter at the moment. In sum, then, the speaker is making a normative claim (rightness-claim) in virtue of what is said while at the same time presupposing a descriptive claim (truth-claim) about the historical and continuing injustices against black people. With this in mind, we get a fuller picture of the damage that conceding to the logic of “All lives matter” would cause.

⁵²⁶ On the difference between presupposition and implicature (as different forms of non-at-issue content), see Potts 2015; see also Stanley 2015: 134 ff. for how this can be used in the linguistic analysis of ideological and propagandistic speech. One intuition is that the deontic should presuppose that something is not in fact so. A presupposition, by and large, is information that the speaker assumes in order for the utterance to be meaningful in the context in which it is uttered. “Black lives (should/ought to) matter” certainly presupposes that there exist black lives (1); on the broad definition it could also presuppose that black lives do not (yet) matter (2). Typically, one uses the negation test to diagnose a presupposition. If the proposition can be negated (or embedded in a question) and the presupposition(s) persist then the utterance is said to presuppose them. For negation, “Black lives should not matter” preserves (1) but does not seem to preserve (2). Similarly, when embedded in a question “Do black lives matter?” preserves (1) but seems to be indifferent between presupposing (2) and presupposing the opposite of (2). The other option would be to conceive of the truth-claim that black lives do not (yet) matter as conversationally implicated.

⁵²⁷ On the temporality of the claim see Chris Lebron (2016): “I must then take into account the history of racial dominance in this country — the centuries of slavery; the decades of Jim Crow; the continuation of systemic racial inequality in wealth, jobs, education and public services. [...] I take all of these basic observations together and my considered position is that the claim that black lives don’t matter in America corresponds to the facts.” Lebron argues that the denial of the claim that Black lives matter shows how the experience of the speaker who denies it “leaves race in the past and renders the present as something unrecognizable to me [as someone who believes that Black lives do not matter, MS]) but comforting to you [as someone who thinks they do, MS].” “And the reason we weren’t speaking about the same thing is that we were not looking in the same direction; thus, our basis for correspondence is mismatched. [...] The direction I was looking toward was the internal life of a black person in America. [...] You were looking in the direction of your own innocence.”

This does not mean that “All lives matter” or similar universal proclamations are wrong in other contexts; their contextually limited kernel of truth or validity is precisely what we have identified as a defining property of ideological understanding.⁵²⁸ In the context under consideration, however, the statement “All lives matter” is false because black lives do not matter (equally, enough, etc.). Insofar, it is not true that all lives matter. Hence, “All lives matter” suppresses the presupposed truth-claim of the slogan and thereby conceals past and present racial injustices. The slogan thus illustrates two further core characteristics of colorblind ideology: First, it’s propensity to prioritize the future at the expense of the past,⁵²⁹ and second, its reliance on abstraction and decontextualization.⁵³⁰ Reflecting on the ideological force of “All lives matter,” Judith Butler seems to agree when cautioning that “if we jump too quickly to the universal formulation, ‘all lives matter,’ then we miss the fact that black people have not yet been included in the idea of ‘all lives.’”⁵³¹ There is no doubt, she points out, that the universal formulation masks our current social reality in which black lives are not included in the protection of all lives, a proposition that, as I have argued, lies at the basis of the truth-claim presupposed by “Black lives matter.” In this sense, the universal slogan actively ignores the underlying truth-claim that presently black lives do not matter. In doing so, it obscures the unique precariousness of black lives and thus perpetuates their marginalization. The universal formulation passes over the descriptive content in silence as if it didn’t exist as part of the meaning of “Black lives matter.”

⁵²⁸ See chapter 2, II.1.

⁵²⁹ Anderson 2017: 143.

⁵³⁰ Crenshaw et al 2019: 14. On the problematic of idealization (as an undue abstraction from the actual workings of institutions and practices) in ideal theory construction, see Mills 2005.

⁵³¹ Butler 2015.

Moreover, “All lives matter,” when used as riposte to the slogan that “Black lives matter,” is false insofar as it misinterprets the character of the critique inherent in the statement as the kind of critique that seeks redress by closing the gap between the status quo in which a normative ideal is not fully realized and a (future) state in which it is. In contrast, as I have argued, the sought after redress does not aim at making social reality correspond to the existing norms of (racial) justice but transcend these norms. Thus, in addition to obscuring the descriptive claim about the social reality of black lives, “All lives matter” conceals an important aspect of the demands by silencing the movement’s claim for transcending the former’s pseudo-universal standard of justice. The calls to defund the police and to abolish the prison industrial complex show that BLM demands nothing short of a systemic change to what it means for black lives (and, by extension, all lives) to matter which involves going beyond the existing standard for (Black) lives to matter and reconceptualizing the norms and institutions that fail Black lives. In this context, it is also important to note that BLM-demands are explicitly geared toward dismantling and ending white supremacy. For instance, when BLM calls to defund the police, it is because of a belief that one “cannot reform an institution built upon white supremacy,” and “born out of slave patrols.”⁵³² Thus, what is propagated by BLM is “a new, radical approach to public safety and community investment” such as the BREATHE Act which “paints a vision of a world where Black lives matter through investments in housing, education, health, and environmental justice.”⁵³³

The ideas of ending white supremacy, proliferating systematic change, and “creating space for Black imagination and innovation” to re-imagine “a world where Black lives are no

⁵³² See <https://blacklivesmatter.com/blm-demands/>.

⁵³³ Ibid.

longer systematically targeted for demise,” reverberate in the movement’s demands for immediate improvements for Black folk and long-term goals for social transformation toward “a world where white supremacy and historically anti-Black systems no longer exist. A world where Black people have the necessary resources to thrive and push the boundaries on truly living. A world where Black Lives Matter.”⁵³⁴ The BLM demands make it clear that as long as current institutions and practices (police, prison system, housing, and education), which, at the object-level, adhere to a colorblind logic, operate in accordance with a logic of whiteness at the meta-level, mere internal critique that seeks the inclusion in the existing standards is futile for systematically improving the conditions for black lives. Against this background, proclamations of “All lives matter” silence the movement’s demands for systemic change and frustrate the vital attempts and collective conceptual labor to reimagine the institutions, practices, and norms for a future in which black lives matter. “All lives matter” thus misconstrues the context-transcending critique of the BLM movement, which aims to call into question and reimagine what it means for all lives to matter (through reimagining what it means for black lives to matter), as a type of internal critique that merely seeks to include black lives under the dominant standards.

As a result, offering pseudo-reconciliatory slogans to replace BLM and thereby mischaracterizing the speech act wrongs protesters advocating “Black lives matter” in their capacity as knowers. Following Miranda Fricker’s conception of hermeneutical injustice, Luvell Anderson suggests that “All lives matter,” when uttered to oppose “Black lives matter,” constitutes “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization.”⁵³⁵ And this

⁵³⁴ See the BLM project “Imagining abolition” (<https://blacklivesmatter.com/imagining-abolition-episode-2-shutting-down-jails-and-building-up-movements/>).

⁵³⁵ Fricker 2007: 158.

hermeneutical injustice, he contends, is triggered by a colorblind, post-racial ideology.⁵³⁶ In line with the previous pragmatic analysis of the speech act “Black lives matter,” Anderson argues that “All lives matter” has the effect of obscuring “what the speaker intends to be the import of her speech [and] a loss in the ability of certain speakers to both produce certain utterances and be interpreted correctly.”⁵³⁷ The reactive slogan “All lives matter” and the colorblind logic it employs not only silences the truth-claim about the effects of past and ongoing racial injustices presupposed by “Black lives matter;” by fundamentally obscuring the context-transcending character of its critique, it also actively opposes the development of a race-conscious vocabulary required to, first, disclose alternative interpretations in order to make sense of the experience of racial injustice, and, second, debunk the hidden whiteness of a hermeneutics of colorblind universalism. In this regard, the ideological work that “All lives matter” does is to conceal the critical aim of the BLM-slogan (its critique of the underlying norm of inclusion of colorblind universalism). It undermines this line of criticism to protect its own logic by cancelling out the context-transcendent component that aims at reconceptualizing what it means for lives to matter in a way that is more inclusive than the existing standard. The hermeneutic closure of a colorblind interpretive schema will tend to render racial injustices obscure under the guise of pseudo-universal concepts that subsume racial specificities under general categories for understanding injustice that either conceal or legitimize the racially diverse effects of the officially race-neutral position. But such a practice of stamping out racial categories only contributes to the whitewashing of the dominant colorblind hermeneutic as it perpetuates white ignorance and privilege and therefore impedes efforts toward racial justice. The operation of a

⁵³⁶ See Anderson 2017: 141-6.

⁵³⁷ Anderson 2017: 143.

colorblind interpretive schema thus has the effect of rendering significant areas of experience of people of color obscure or meaningless because their attempts to make sense of certain phenomena and conceptualize them as forms of racial injustice (e.g., “racial profiling”) remain unsuccessful. This is one important way in which colorblind ideology – as in the case of “All lives matter” – perpetuates hermeneutic injustice through false diagnosis.

In view of its entanglement in a colorblind interpretive schema, the slogan “All lives matter” loses its humanist innocence.⁵³⁸ As such, it superimposes a hermeneutic closure that is related to a dominant hermeneutic of whiteness, “an interpretive prism whose conceptual deficiencies and biased refractions are not at all contingent but an artifact of white racist ideology.”⁵³⁹ In other words, what our analysis has shown is how the ideology of colorblindness operates at the level of world-disclosure by inhibiting concerted efforts to establish alternative disclosures and the “conceptual labor” needed for critiquing the dominant interpretive schema. As I have mentioned before, establishing alternative disclosures is a key strategy for confronting ideological understanding. Regarding race-conscious disclosures, Kimberlé Crenshaw puts this very succinctly when she states that

“[r]ace consciousness is central not only to the domination of blacks but also to whites’ acceptance of the legitimacy of hierarchy and their identity with elite interests. Exposing the centrality of race consciousness is crucial to identifying and delegitimizing beliefs that present hierarchy as inevitable and fair.”⁵⁴⁰

Against this background, we begin to understand the significance of a race-conscious interpretive schema and its counter-disclosures in their ambition to disrupt familiar ways of understanding

⁵³⁸ “‘The habit of ignoring race is understood [by white people] to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture,’ but behind that ‘generosity’ often lurks a very self-serving desire. Far from being merely innocent, ignorance can operate as a shield that protects a person from realizing her complicity in an oppressive situation.” Sullivan 2006: 127-8, in part citing Toni Morrison (internal footnote omitted).

⁵³⁹ Mills 2017: 105.

⁵⁴⁰ Crenshaw 1995: 112.

the world by opening new avenues for understanding. As Linda Alcoff remarks with regard to “racial profiling,” the development of race-conscious concepts, must be understood as attempts to “make such [colorblind, M.S.] perceptual practices manifest and thus open to critique,” for “the profiler does not understand him or herself to be using judgment at all but simply perceiving danger.”⁵⁴¹

Alternative disclosures project new possibilities for understanding social phenomena as they give rise to a comparative standpoint which allows subjects to make new sense of their situation.⁵⁴² By virtue of the “conceptual labor” involved in establishing the comparative standpoint, their experiential interpretation can, for instance, move from an initially inarticulate understanding of a wrongdoing to a racialized wrongdoing in order to improve their hermeneutic situation in terms of what is happening to them, its cause, and what follows from it.⁵⁴³ In this sense, new disclosures enable subjects to make sense of new experiences which would not be meaningful to them from the perspective of the old interpretive schema and which can now be contrasted with the previous interpretations. In the case of racial profiling then, the alternative disclosure and the comparative standpoint achieved through it allows the subject to come to terms with her experience of being wronged and challenge the colorblind interpretation of the situation as a legitimate perception of danger with an alternative that points out that the former interpretation obscures the fact that the abstract assessment of “danger” – despite its race-neutral appearance – is actually fraught with racial stereotypes and biases.

⁵⁴¹ Alcoff 2006: 197.

⁵⁴² Identity of reference, however, is a necessary condition for establishing a comparative standpoint. From the perspective of the new interpretive schema, the referent is accessible in more than one particular way, i.e., under more than one description, see Alcoff (2006: 56) who agrees that “on the hermeneutic account of rationality [...] change [happens] through the ability to imagine life under the *terms of more than one set*.” (emphasis added)

⁵⁴³ Cf. chapter 1, II.5.

In the context of exposing colorblindness, counter-hegemonic disclosures can take the form of race-conscious concepts (e.g., “racial profiling”) or political slogans such as “Black lives matter.” Recall that the normative demand of “Black lives matter” goes beyond an internal critique according to which the scope of “all lives” must be extended to encompass truly all lives, including black lives. Instead, what the slogan calls for is a new understanding of what it means for lives, all lives, to matter. This new understanding must transcend the dominant colorblind ideal of inclusion because the colorblind interpretation of this ideal has failed black lives.⁵⁴⁴ In light of the systemic failure of the current standard to protect all lives, a better understanding of what it means for black lives to matter is deemed necessary to arrive at a more inclusive and more just interpretation of what it means for all lives to matter. One could say that this approach entails a race-conscious change of direction from the particular to the new universal (“by extension”). In somewhat Hegelian parlance, we could say that the demand for “Black lives” to matter functions as the concrete universality that aims to determine the deficiency of the dominant universal standard (“all lives”) and debunk its allegedly abstract, colorblind universality as a de facto concrete, predominantly white universality of mattering and insofar as it perpetuates systemic injustices against people of color (including forms of hermeneutic injustice). It is in this sense that “Black lives matter” functions as a counter-hegemonic disclosure as part of a race-conscious interpretive schema.

The systematic implication of the comparative standpoint for the purpose of critique, is that one can *rationaly* chose between a priori statements belonging to different interpretive

⁵⁴⁴ Thus, we could say that “Black lives matter” accomplishes the task of countering colorblindness, which, according to Crenshaw et al (2019: 14) is “not merely to see race again, but to reenvision how disciplinary tools, conventions, and knowledge-producing practices that erase the social dynamics that produce race can be critically engaged and selectively repurposed toward emancipatory ends.”

schemas. In other words, one can rationally and intersubjectively justify one's choice about which statement to endorse vis-a-vis another person. The critique of ideology at the level of world-disclosure proceeds on the basis of the color-conscious disclosures. These counter-hegemonic disclosures have the status of "contextually a priori" statements.⁵⁴⁵ Far from the transcendental rank of constituting universal conditions of the possibility of experience, they are characterized by their mere contextual necessity, their being "*quasi-necessary*" (Putnam), relative to the color-conscious interpretive schema.

If we apply this idea to the colorblind interpretive schema, we understand why ideology critique demands a context-transcending critique. The colorblind schema likewise operates on the basis of a priori statements which themselves cannot be disproven using simple observation or empirical knowledge obtained from within. Analogous to how under the dominant patriarchal schema ("flirting," "personal choice," and the like) many agents did not experience the mistreatment of women as a wrong, agents under the dominant colorblind schema do not experience racial injustice as such. By this, I do not mean that agents cannot observe certain effects of racial injustice (e.g., discriminatory police tactics or disproportionately high incarceration rates of people of color) under the colorblind schema. However, what is needed is that agents are enabled to understand these effects as the unjust treatment of people of color. It is this understanding of the observable effects as a form of structural, racial injustice that is rooted in the hidden whiteness of the colorblind concepts which becomes available to them only through the development of counter-hegemonic concepts such as "racial profiling" or describing the system of mass incarceration as the "New Jim Crow."⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁵ On the contextual a priori, see chapter 1, III.1.

⁵⁴⁶ See Alexander 2020.

Essentially, this is why ideology critique, if it intends to challenge the world-disclosing power of ideologies, requires a context-transcending standard to invalidate ideological understanding. At this level, ideology cannot be confronted with its own truth, as Adorno would have it. The disclosure of its own colorblind truths and the plausibility and credibility of the interpretive possibilities it establishes (by obscuring its own limitations and blocking attempts to shed light on its blind spots) is precisely the problem. Since no possible observations are known to disconfirm its a priori statements without drawing on external resources, it is impossible to determine how to invalidate them from within. Hence, what is needed to invalidate its untruths is a new, color-conscious interpretive schema that challenges the conceptual framework and normative assumptions by making it possible to access new experiences and establish substantive validity claims in light of which the colorblind schema and the experiences it made accessible (which remain accessible under the new schema as a consequence of rejecting their incommensurability thanks to the contextual notion of the a priori) can be shown to be invalid.

As the type of critique that tackles the world-disclosing power of ideology, ideology critique aims to invalidate the dominant interpretive schema by exposing the contextual limitations of its validity and by showing how it perpetuates forms of injustice through those epistemic deficiencies. Counter-hegemonic disclosures are part and parcel of this critique. To be successful, they must transform concepts and statements previously regarded as a priori truths (relative to the dominant schema) into a posteriori falsehoods (relative to the new schema). In the case of colorblind ideology race-conscious disclosures (and the conceptual labor they entail) must put social agents in the position to experience a certain phenomenon as a form of racial injustice by making available an understanding of the phenomenon that would have remained obscured under the dominant schema. Under a colorblind regime of justice, the specificities of

racial injustice do not present meaningful interpretive possibilities. Race-conscious disclosures such as “Black lives matter” dismantle how white ignorance and privilege pervades the understanding of what it takes for “all” lives to matter and systematically harms black lives in ways that cannot be accounted for under the descriptions of the dominant interpretive schema, for the colorblind lens renders racial injustices unintelligible, implausible, indefensible, or invisible. On the contrary, such race-conscious counter-disclosures show how responses like “All lives matter” perpetuate this exclusive colorblind logic and harm people of color, for instance, by rendering it impossible for them to understand their situation as harmful and unjust (hermeneutic injustice).

Whether or not alternative, race-conscious disclosures succeed as critique depends on their ability to enable an intelligibility of experiences that turn the a priori truths of the colorblind schema into experienceable forms of injustice which can be defended as such in practical (moral) discourses in which all those possibly affected by the workings of the interpretive schema can rationally accept (on the basis of the understanding the new disclosures afford) that its a priori truths cannot be generalized without causing systemic injustices.⁵⁴⁷ Thus, in the case of “All lives matter,” race-conscious disclosures must show the limitations of colorblind universality, i.e., they must make it meaningful and experienceable that the allegedly neutral but de facto white universality and its hermeneutic closure perpetuates systemic racial injustices which invalidates the colorblind logic in the context of “Black lives matter.”

In what follows, I will illustrate my account of ideology critique with regard to the colorblind case against affirmative action as an example of false therapy.

⁵⁴⁷ Again, the standard for truth and justice here is not that of the dominant (potentially ideological) schema; the latter cannot be confronted with its own truth, for such a critique because its own limitations are precisely what is at issue.

IV.2. Rejecting affirmative action as “preferential treatment” as false therapy

In the US, affirmative action has been under siege since the signing of President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10925 in 1961, which required government contractors to “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin.” The opponents’ argumentative and political strategies to end affirmative action programs or curtail their impact have changed over the past six decades,⁵⁴⁸ but the early 1970’s and the rise of neoliberal politics saw the consolidation of a specifically colorblind agenda whose attempts to decry and eradicate such programs left them in ill repute to the present day.⁵⁴⁹ Some of the hallmarks of neoliberal-colorblind strategies are their meritocratic and methodological individualism (which prioritizes the significance of individual effort and desert as well as action over structural relations of power and domination), their juridical individualism which gives salience to the protection of individual rights (and the recognition of individual, retrospective responsibilities) at the expense of group rights (and collective, prospective responsibilities), and their abstract, colorblind universalism regarding the principle of equal treatment.⁵⁵⁰ The latter, in particular, would solidify in the reputation of affirmative action as “preferential treatment” of members of marginalized groups – especially Black people of color⁵⁵¹ – which, in turn, imposes an unfair burden on members of

⁵⁴⁸ For a more comprehensive treatment of the counter-arguments against and arguments for affirmative action from a moral point of view, see Lippert-Rasmussen 2020.

⁵⁴⁹ For example, see the debate over the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Fisher v University of Texas* (“Fisher I”) in Jayakumar et al (2015).

⁵⁵⁰ There are more, of course, such as the preference of “race-neutral” market forces and free choice v race-conscious government intervention and state paternalism, or the unwarranted assumption that present society is post-racial.

⁵⁵¹ My discussion will focus on the colorblind rejection of race-based affirmative action. Race-based affirmative action, however, is by no means co-extensive with affirmative action measures at large. In effect, the colorblind targeting of race-based affirmative action (including its utilization of negative racial stereotypes about, say, the work ethic etc. of Black people) testifies to its anti-Blackness, regardless of the fact that white women have benefitted

more privileged groups, mainly white males by their mere accident of birth (“reverse discrimination” or “reverse racism”).⁵⁵²

In this section, I will criticize the rejection of race-based affirmative action on the basis that framing it as “preferential treatment” perpetuates a colorblind ideology in the form of false therapy. To carry out my ideology critique, I will first determine how “preferential treatment” relates to colorblind ideology through the underlying notions of meritocracy and equality. To show the epistemic deficit of colorblindness and dismantle its meta-level whiteness and injustice, my argument relies on a counter-hegemonic disclosure regarding the so-called equal opportunity race. This alternative disclosure, I argue, makes it possible to escape the spell of “preferential treatment” and its underlying colorblind logic in showing how its epistemic deficits perpetuate racial injustices.⁵⁵³

most from such programs (see Crenshaw 2006: 129). In this context, intersectional approaches highlight intra-racial diversity as well as the complex interaction of multiple systems of oppression in individuals (e.g., race, gender, class, and ability). The concept of intersectionality can also be used as a counter-hegemonic disclosure against colorblind rejections of affirmative action, see the analysis in Vue et al 2017: 890-5.

⁵⁵² Historically, white males have been identified as the main “targets” of “reverse racial discrimination,” but see the most recent constitutional challenge which, at least in part, argues that Harvard’s and the University of North Carolina’s race-conscious admissions practices discriminate against Asians (<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2022/3/8/scotus-affirmative-action-justices-opinions/>). There, one non-white racial group is played off against another non-white racial group to the benefit of whites; on this issue, see Alcoff 2006: 262-3.

⁵⁵³ There are many more counter-hegemonic disclosures that can be used to debunk colorblind ideology in the context of affirmative action. Among those not discussed in detail are the following: Against the colorblind strands of juridic and methodological individualism, Kwame Anthony Appiah introduces two concepts of “group wrongs” (“probabilistic harms” and “identitarian harms”) to argue that “there are continuing harms that blacks suffer *as blacks* and you can only remedy them if you grant black people entitlements *as blacks*” (Appiah 2011: 277; on his notion of group rights as a counter-disclosure vis-à-vis the dominant liberal notion of individual rights to accommodate his notions of group wrongs, see below). Utilizing race-conscious disclosures such as “race (still) matters” against those who support colorblind class-based but not race-based affirmative action, Khiara M. Bridges argues that “that the reason why proponents of class-based affirmative action are sanguine about these infirmities when they are present in class-based programs, but loathe them when they are present in race-based programs, is because their opposition to race-based affirmative action is not due to these infirmities. Rather, it is due to their disdain of the work that race-based affirmative action performs. That is, race-based programs function to assert, loudly, that *race still matters* and does so in powerful ways.” (Bridges 2016: 56, emphasis added) Bridges also connects the demands for class-based affirmative action to the myth of black progress. Michelle Alexander further argues that the myth of “black progress” as well as instances of “black exceptionalism” are used by colorblind ideology to obscure the fact that it creates a “new caste system” (Alexander 2020: 306-9). Furthermore, numerous concepts such as the well-known “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson) or “racial isolation” have been devised to

As early as the beginning of the 1970s, tales of affirmative action toppling justice and robbing the hard-working white suburbanites of the America they knew and treasured loomed large. Among members of the white working and middle class, affirmative action was widely perceived as giving hand-outs and preferential treatment to those who do not deserve it, betraying the ideals that willful determination and individual work ethics are key to overcoming adversities. Such sentiments crystallize in the 1976 motion picture *Rocky* that tells the story of Rocky Balboa and his heroic fight to win back a country whose political ideals had been sold out by giving unfair advantages to undeserving minorities, especially Blacks.⁵⁵⁴ Rocky represents the humble, working-class hero. His character is inspired by Chuck Wepner, a white amateur boxer who had lost to Muhammad Ali in a fight the year before the picture was released. Ali is also the model on whom Rocky's black opponent, the reigning champion Apollo Creed, is based. The visuals of the fight between these unequal opponents are saturated with colorblind aesthetics even before the first round begins. Creed enters the arena on a vessel dressed as George Washington, giving the iconic painting of *Washington Crossing the Delaware* an anti-colorblind twist insinuating that it is now African Americans who are in charge of steering the nation through rocky shoals and controlling its fate. It is Creed who is dressed in the colors of the American flag and its symbols. Rocky is relegated to his non-American heritage as the "Italian Stallion;" his red and white boxing trunks lack the color blue representing justice. In his analysis, Justin Gomer notes that the "affirmative action metaphor pervades the entire film":

"Rocky loses his gym locker to a less experienced black fighter over whom he holds six years seniority. Moreover, although most of the second act dramatizes Rocky's intense training

disclose the different kinds of identity-related harms incurred by people of color for which affirmative action can serve as a remedy, see Elgart et al 2015: 42-62. See also Vue et al 2017 on the successful employment of the concept of "intersectionality" against colorblind ideology.

⁵⁵⁴ Gomer 2020: 74-83.

regimen, not once does the audience see Creed spar, work a speed bag, throw a punch, or lift a single dumbbell before fight night. Furthermore, the bout between the down-and-out, bumbling working-class white brute and the wealthy, handsome, and ‘articulate’ black man pulls no punches in piling on the affirmative action metaphors. The unjust split-decision result was as obvious to the spectators in the Philadelphia Spectrum as it was to those in theaters around the country [...]. Rocky clearly wins the fight by dominating the later rounds. In at least two instances, the bell saves a nearly defeated Creed from a knockout punch. Rocky, on the other hand, never needs the bell to protect him. Instead, he relies on his own resiliency, picking himself up off the mat each time Creed knocks him down. As the credits roll, the audience is left with the triumphant tale of an industrious working-class white male who defeats the arrogant undeserving but over-privileged black champion in a test of grit, endurance, and brute strength.”⁵⁵⁵

Rocky losing his locker to a less experienced black boxer is synonymous with the trope that qualified workers, especially white men, lose their jobs or job opportunities to less qualified people of color, in particular black men, because of affirmative action. The fact that Creed has to be saved by the bell and only wins due to the formality of a split-decision, which symbolize a tilted legal system working in favor of African Americans, adds to the impression that Creed could not have made it on his own. Without the help of the law, a law deemed unjust as we know from the absence of the color blue on Rocky’s trunks, Creed wouldn’t stand a chance. But the law is on his side, which grants him an unfair advantage over Rocky, whose dream of a surprise victory has been crushed. Rocky cannot trust the law to protect him and so the audience is left with the impression that if the fight had been fair, the underdog should have won on the sweat of his cut eyebrow. Instead, they witness the undeserved triumph of the black champion. As Gomer explains, while the script might be colorblind, the film’s aesthetics are heavily color-coded to visualize the notion of preferential treatment:

“Creed’s actions enrage the ‘true patriots’ in the arena and in theaters – the left-behind white men, the ‘Italian Stallions’ who want nothing more than, as Balboa puts it, their ‘shot’ at the American dream their country has stripped from them by granting ‘preferential treatment’ to African Americans in school assignments, college admissions, and hiring. [...] Most importantly,

⁵⁵⁵ Gomer 2020: 81.

the backlash politics of the film operate entirely within Hollywood's colorblind aesthetics. [...] the film does not contain a single race-conscious line of dialogue. In other words, the script is colorblind. The film's juxtaposition of Rocky and Apollo – of hero versus villain, deserving versus undeserving, hardworking versus lazy, authentic versus disingenuous – comes without explicit reference to race.”⁵⁵⁶

The understanding of race-based affirmative action as undeserved “preferential treatment” is wide-spread and deep-seated in the social imaginary. According to the logic of racial preference, affirmative action is perceived as giving African Americans an undue advantage over others – undue because the distribution of benefits is taken to be a function of the mere accident of their birth.⁵⁵⁷ Such practice, however, violates not only the constitutional principle of colorblindness (in particular the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment)⁵⁵⁸ but even more so of the moral principle of equality and as consequence must be rejected. It is said that from a moral standpoint, “[r]ace preference violates the principle of human equality,” because it is “wrong, always and everywhere, to give special advantages to any group simply on the basis of physical characteristics that have no relevance to the award given or the burden imposed.”⁵⁵⁹ Racial preference, the argument continues, is over-inclusive with regard to otherwise privileged members of generally disadvantaged groups and under-inclusive with regard to disadvantaged whites.⁵⁶⁰ Under the additional assumption that equal treatment is a zero-sum game, “naked race preference”⁵⁶¹ thus amounts to “reverse discrimination” against others, because “whatever is given to some by race is necessarily taken from others by race.”⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁶ Gomer 2020: 79-80.

⁵⁵⁷ Dershowitz 2021: 26.

⁵⁵⁸ Against the colorblind interpretation of “equal protection” in the 14th amendment to the US constitution, see Newman/Gass 2004 and African American Policy Forum 2022.

⁵⁵⁹ Cohen 2002: 25.

⁵⁶⁰ Cohen 2002: 27-31. See also Dershowitz 2021: 12, 16 (“double preference”).

⁵⁶¹ Cohen 2002: 30.

⁵⁶² Cohen 2002: 34; Dershowitz 2021: 26.

The colorblind logic of preferential treatment has created a persistent disclosure of inequality that is tied to affirmative action in the social imaginary. It comes in the guise of the equal opportunity race or “track metaphor,” which illustrates how “preferential treatment” functions as an interpretation of the norm of equality in the context of affirmative action. In a race, the best athlete should win. To determine who is the best runner, all competitors must start from the same position. With affirmative action, however, the starting blocks for some of the runners are placed closer to the finish line thus giving them a head start. What is interesting, is that this version of the track metaphor is misleading for both opponents and proponents of affirmative action. Neither of them can help seeing that placing some runners ahead of the rest gives the former an advantage. They obviously differ with regard to whether the inequality created by affirmative action can be justified but they essentially agree that it is affirmative action that creates the situation of inequality known as “preferential treatment.”⁵⁶³ They also seem to agree that the reason some runners need to be given an advantage is because these runners are somehow “damaged”,⁵⁶⁴ i.e. they are unable to make it on their own – just like Apollo Creed, who would not have succeeded had it not been for the rules of engagement being rigged in his favor. In this sense, both supporters and opponents of affirmative action perpetuate the dominant story about preferential treatment insofar as the track metaphor presents affirmative action not as a remedy to pre-existing inequality but as artificially creating unequal conditions which only appear to be required because some of the competitors are not up to the task. What

⁵⁶³ Harris/Narayan 2019: 251. One such supporter of affirmative action who views it as the kind of preferential treatment that imposes a certain cost on white male applicants is Ronald Dworkin, see the authors’ discussion *ibid* 258-9. Lippert-Rasmussen (2020: 173, 257) also falls into that category.

⁵⁶⁴ Crenshaw 2006: 131-2.

this shows, is that one cannot escape the powerful disclosure of “preferential treatment” in this colorblind rendition of the track metaphor.

In light of this predicament, Kimberlé Crenshaw urges that “[if] affirmative action is to be rescued, the distorted conceptual box which it has been forced to occupy in law, politics, and culture must be revealed, contested and discarded.”⁵⁶⁵ But the example of “preferential treatment” shows that the “distorted conceptual box,” which holds affirmative action captive, cannot be opened from within. In other words, the contestation of “preferential treatment” requires a race-conscious counter-disclosure from without: The discourse about affirmative action must reconnect

“it to its equality-based moorings, by building an effective counter-narrative to the prevailing backstories that so utterly distort the causes and consequences of racial inequality today. Most fundamentally, affirmative action needs to be rescued from the distortions produced by colorblindness, which must be exposed.”⁵⁶⁶

To this end, Crenshaw and the African American Policy Forum have developed an “alternative frame” for staging the equal opportunity race. The counter-narrative focuses not on “damaged runners” but on the “damaged lanes” which lie ahead for some of them:

“Rethinking affirmative action so as to account for the *unequal conditions of the lanes* on the track – the debris that runners must avoid, the craters over which they must climb, the crevices that they must jump and the detours that they must maneuver – *suggests that affirmative action is not about providing preferences* at all. Rather it is about removing and neutralizing the obstacles and conditions that compromise the fair running of the race. Structural inequality, exclusionary institutional practices, trans-generational disadvantages and even unconscious biases are just a few of the conditions that crowd the lanes of would-be recipients of affirmative programs.”⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ Crenshaw 2006: 131.

⁵⁶⁶ Crenshaw 2006: 132.

⁵⁶⁷ Crenshaw 2006: 132, emphasis added. See also African American Policy Forum 2022, which includes an illustration of the alternative version of the track metaphor. For an early rendition, see Young 1964.

Reframing the race metaphor by centering on the damaged lanes instead of the damaged runners flips the meaning of the initial setting and shows that affirmative action is about *leveling* the playing field and creating equal opportunity for every runner in the race by removing barriers that would otherwise exclude or slow down some of them. The interpretive shift from “damaged runners” to “damaged lanes” also shifts our perspective from an agent-focused to a structural framing of the issue. In highlighting the undeserved rewards of those who benefit from affirmative action and bemoaning the thwarted merit of those who find themselves on the “wrong” side of the law, the individualistic lens of “preferential treatment” obscures the workings of racism and sexism as structural phenomena. By contrast, changing interpretive registers from agents and their abilities, work ethic, choices, and individual efforts to the condition of the lanes of the track leaves the runners intact and allows adversities to materialize as *structural* defects located in the social reality they face. In other words, the alternative frame discloses the structural nature of the adversities with which members of marginalized groups are confronted in lieu of a colorblind narrative caught up in individualistic interpretations drawing on stereotypes about merit, prejudice, and personal traits of unqualified or undeserving beneficiaries. In positing this frame as a meaningful alternative, we readily understand that it is not in fact affirmative action that promotes inequality between competitors by imposing regulations that benefit some at the expense of others and as such rigging the race. Rather, affirmative action is presented as a remedy to already existing structural inequalities and aims at creating equal opportunity.

Correspondingly, in their seminal article on the matter Luke Charles Harris and Uma Narayan argue that affirmative action policies “should be understood as attempts to equalize opportunity for groups of people who confront ongoing forms of institutional discrimination and

lack of equal opportunity;”⁵⁶⁸ affirmative programs do not “‘bestow preferences’ on their beneficiaries. Rather, they attempt to undo the effects of institutional practices and criteria that, however unintentionally, amount in effect to ‘preferential treatment’ of whites.”⁵⁶⁹ In addition to stressing the structural nature of the phenomenon, their criticism also foregrounds how the colorblind logic of preferential treatment hides its own whiteness at the meta-level and how this whiteness operates through the allegedly colorblind criteria, procedures, and norms and their application at the object level which amounts to granting de facto preferential treatment to whites:

“Those who believe that affirmative action constitutes ‘preferential treatment’ assume (a) that the criteria and procedures generally used for admissions and hiring are neutral indicators of ‘merit,’ unaffected by factors such as class, race, or gender, and (b) that such criteria are fairly and impartially applied to all individuals at each of the stages of the selection process.”⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁸ Harris/Narayan 2019: 247, 251-2. It should be noted that their analysis is not restricted to race-based affirmative action, rather they put forward a general argument in favor of affirmative action on behalf of members of marginalized groups. On the critical issue of group rights and whether a member of a group can seek remedies in the form of affirmative action merely by virtue of their membership, see Appiah 2011. Appiah distinguishes between two kinds of group rights, collective rights, which are exercised collectively (e.g. self-government which we can exercise only through collective action), and membership rights, which are “individual rights that people have in virtue of their membership in groups” (e.g. voting rights). Typically, in the context of affirmative action, the liberal/individualistic position objects to the latter category. If we, however, accept that (moral) membership rights exist (and the individual right to democratic participation testifies to that, see *ibid* 270) then this category of group rights can accommodate remedial affirmative action. What justifies the remedy is that a member of a group has been wronged/disadvantaged qua membership in a group that – as a group – has been wronged/disadvantaged. To this end, Appiah introduces the notions of “probabilistic harm” (“you can wrong somebody by raising the probability that they would suffer some direct harm in certain counterfactual circumstances,” *ibid* 272, fn. 8) and “identitarian harm.” As a result of anti-Black prejudice, stereotypes, and implicit bias (in addition to their minority status), Appiah argues that a Black person, on average, “enters most public contexts with a serious risk of paying higher psychic and material costs than otherwise identical white people.” (*ibid* 276) If a racial group is burdened with pervasive stereotypes about what members of that group are like or how they should behave then a member of that group will more likely than not bear the burden of this “identitarian harm” (whether or not that person fits the stereotype). And Black people of color in the US, Appiah concludes, all (continuously!) bear the burden of their identities being harmed in this way: “In short there are harms that black people suffer *as blacks* and you can only remedy them if you grant black people entitlements *as blacks*.” (*ibid* 277) However, throughout his innovative reasoning (and despite the new disclosures of group rights and group wrongs/harms) Appiah still adheres to the idea of preference (see *ibid* 276, 279), which shows just how central and powerful this idea is and how its dismantling via a counter-disclosure is imperative.

⁵⁶⁹ Harris/Narayan 2019: 252.

⁵⁷⁰ Harris/Narayan 2019: 252. This neglect for the structural nature of the phenomenon and its manifestation in the normative criteria and procedures is also why Harris and Narayan reject arguments in favor of affirmative action based on compensation. Inadvertently, they argue, the argument from compensation (and the concept of individual responsibility it borrows from tort law) confirms the colorblind logic of preferential treatment and the claim that affirmative action constitutes reverse discrimination by pointing to the absence of an identifiable culprit. It is unfair

Once more, we discover another dimension to the critical agenda of affirmative action, namely its hermeneutical pursuit of a more perfect understanding of equality, one that, in the words of Harris and Narayan, “ensure[s] the right to treatment as an equal for the members of marginalized groups, in a social context where a variety of social structures and institutional practices conspire to deny their interests equal consideration and respect.”⁵⁷¹

These efforts include but ultimately go beyond dismantling modes of silencing or testimonial injustices in the application of the recruitment criteria or procedures for college admissions or job hiring, for instance, on the basis of ubiquitous racial stereotypes and implicit biases about people of color. The critical surplus lies in exposing that, despite colorblind pretensions at the object-level, whiteness is indeed operative in the supposedly “neutral” procedures and normative criteria that govern these practices in order to establish a better understanding of equal opportunity and treatment than the formal-juridical ideal of equality has to offer, an ideal that systemically fails members of marginalized groups and thus does not live up to its own ideal of colorblindness. Given the scope and depth of the critical ambitions propelling affirmative action we understand the aim of equalizing opportunity not only as granting candidates access to existing institutions but also as aiming toward transforming these institutions and practices (e.g. by introducing new coursework and establishing new departments at universities⁵⁷²), which implies, in a more holistic manner, empowering members of

to punish someone for a wrong they did not commit. However, so the argument goes, this is exactly what affirmative action does, it condemns another candidate to pay the price for racist “acts” for which they are not responsible. This rationale suggests that the problem of racism and sexism “is one of ‘damaged individuals’ rather than a problem due to structures, practices, and institutional criteria within out institutions” and thus “fails to question the view that affirmative action involves ‘preferential treatment.’” (ibid 257)

⁵⁷¹ Harris/Narayan 2019: 258.

⁵⁷² For more, see Crenshaw 2006: 126.

marginalized groups within those institutions to restructure the procedures and reframe the normative criteria in light of racial equity. We must therefore understand the critical ambitions of affirmative action as a context-transcending critique. The aim is not to make the criteria (and their application) more perfectly colorblind in line with an individualistic, formal, and abstract ideal of equal treatment – as suggested by internal critique – but to transcend this interpretation of the principle of equality and the many normative criteria that complement it.⁵⁷³

To take stock, the counter-hegemonic disclosure reframes the race for equality as a matter of damaged lanes. As ideology critique, it invalidates the colorblind understanding of affirmative action as “preferential treatment” by disclosing the adversities faced by runners as structural in nature and rooted in their social reality (not themselves) which rejects the individualism that undergirds the colorblind understanding as much as it, at the meta-level, dismantles the whiteness inherent in the understanding of affirmative action as “preferential treatment” of people of color – which contradicts the colorblind ideal⁵⁷⁴ and obscures that the status quo amounts to de facto preferential treatment of whites. The counter-disclosure thus shows how the epistemic flaw of the dominant understanding of affirmative action as “preferential treatment” perpetuates the racial injustices with which the lanes of the track are sabotaged in denying Blacks equal opportunity, prolonging racial identitarian harms, and stifling efforts to achieve a better understanding of the situation of members of marginalized groups as a stepping stone to

⁵⁷³ One place to look for such an alternative interpretation of the principle of equality is the context of human rights. International human rights obligations entail duties to respect, protect, and fulfill (see <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/udhr/foundation-of-international-human-rights-law>; recognized in para. 15 of the CESCR’s General Comment No. 12 on the Right to Adequate Food, Document E/C.12/1999/5; see also Shue 1996. Respecting human rights means that duty-bearers must not interfere with or curtail the enjoyment of human rights. They are further required to protect individuals and groups against rights abuses from third parties. The *duty to fulfill*, in turn, means that they must take positive actions to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights. A human rights-inspired understanding of equality would comprise affirmative action under the duty to fulfill – which is suggested by the taxonomy of “positive action” (see McCrudden 2011).

⁵⁷⁴ See Crenshaw 2006: 128.

criticizing as well as transforming the status quo (hermeneutical injustice). That some of these racial injustices themselves need alternative race-conscious disclosures is evidence that ideology critique requires all meanings necessary.

In light of this analysis, I want to turn back to Jaeggi's description of the procedure for immanent critique to make good on my claim that – unless she endorses the hermeneutical position – her account does not (and in fact can) fare better than the model of internal critique she criticizes as non-sufficient for the task of ideology critique. Recall that in the final step of the procedure, analysis meets critique⁵⁷⁵:

“The interdependence of analysis and criticism also means that here connections become visible which, together with the perception of reality, also transform the possible reactions to it. In this respect, *immanent criticism also involves a moment of disclosure* that renders aspects of this reality visible in new ways.”⁵⁷⁶

And, as if Jaeggi were to apply this insight to her discussion in *Rethinking Ideology* of how “free and equal exchange in the mode of surplus value production (...) *systematically* produces inequality,”⁵⁷⁷ she then links the moment of disclosure to the need for “good theory”: “To put it very simply, with a ‘good eye’ we might be able to see when people are suffering, but we need a theory to decipher this suffering as something caused by exploitation or alienation in Marx’s sense.”⁵⁷⁸ At this juncture, Jaeggi recognizes (or so it seems) the validity of the point I made earlier, namely that it is by virtue of Marx value theory (as a “moment of disclosure”!) that the wage laborer and the capitalist enter a legal relationship that should be characterized as “exploitative” and/or “alienating” rather than a fair contractual agreement between free and equal

⁵⁷⁵ *Supra* II.

⁵⁷⁶ Jaeggi 2018: 208, emphasis added.

⁵⁷⁷ Jaeggi 2009: 70.

⁵⁷⁸ Jaeggi 2018: 207; see also Jaeggi 2009: 64.

parties. In addition to acknowledging the value theory of labor as a moment of disclosure, the accompanying endnote sheds some light on Jaeggi (potentially) entertaining an even stronger (implicit) commitment to the hermeneutic position she otherwise clearly rejects:

“We can go even further. Not only are exploitation and alienation not obvious, but our perception of violations and adverse conditions – whether they concern others or ourselves – is shaped and *made possible by the terms and concepts that make something accessible to us as injurious or bad*. [...] Thus, interpretations always play a role here. And in this respect renouncing theory merely means relying on one’s customary everyday interpretations.”⁵⁷⁹

From a hermeneutic perspective, Jaeggi is certainly right about the fundamental importance of interpretation, the role that our everyday understanding (Heidegger’s *das Man*) plays in this regard, the significance of the world-disclosing function of language for accessing phenomena (the “perception” of human suffering *as* suffering), and its significance for establishing links between these newly disclosed phenomena which appear “visible in new ways” and the new conceptual scheme which specifies the suffering and identifies it as, say, a form of sexual harassment, exploitation, or alienation.⁵⁸⁰

Given Jaeggi’s otherwise unequivocal rejection of the hermeneutic model for ideology critique, it is less than clear that her remarks about the moment of disclosure required by ideology critique result in a subtle (albeit reluctant) concession to the hermeneutic position.⁵⁸¹ However, whether this ends up being the case or not, the systematic point is this: Via the examples of race-conscious counter-disclosures, the above analysis of colorblind ideology has

⁵⁷⁹ Jaeggi 2018: 361.

⁵⁸⁰ This also resonates with Jaeggi’s view (Jaeggi/Celikates 2017: 109-10) that “we are not yet dealing with ideologies when certain conditions are unjust and exploitative, but only when such conditions are not experienced as unjust or exploitative - or when they are intuitively perceived as such but not recognized as such, or despite being recognized are not adequately interpreted and articulated.” As I have argued, new disclosures are required to overcome such instances of hermeneutical injustice (see my discussion in chapter 1).

⁵⁸¹ Unlike Honneth 2000, who follows James Bohman and understands the disclosive moment of critique merely as a rhetorical feature, Jaeggi seems to grasp the cognitive significance of world-disclosure but does not pursue it any further. Against the view that disclosure can be reduced to the rhetorical use of language, see Kompridis 2006: 111.

demonstrated that a truly context-transcending critique of ideology which aims to criticize not only a given practice in light of existing norms but also the norms governing the practice requires alternative disclosures as a necessary condition for understanding the “world in a different light.” These counter-disclosures support a comparative standpoint whence a phenomenon “becomes accessible” anew: Recognizing suffering *as* suffering and establishing connections between suffering and its cause typically requires a better conceptual understanding of the phenomenon (its interpersonal dimension, that is, the fact that it is not self-inflicted or a “natural” cause/condition but socially “made,” its structural nature, scope, and normative implications, so that we know what follows from it). Through “conceptual labor” counter-disclosures thus establish the basis for a critique that is able to invalidate the ideological interpretive schema by virtue of identifying its epistemic flaws and showing how they perpetuate injustices. To that end, we can neither solely rely on the “good eye” of the participant nor the observer’s attempt to ferret out the “self-contradictions of the given norms and the given reality,” since neither reality nor the (self-)contradictions are simply given⁵⁸² but always already accessed through the concepts and norms of an interpretive schema, so that analysis can render them accessible only by virtue of new disclosures that make sense of suffering *as* suffering (an injustice), explains it as the consequence of a flawed interpretive schema, and thus makes it intelligible and experienceable.

The hermeneutic position thus is not only able to explain why Jaeggi is correct in demanding that ideology critique must transcend the given interpretive context, it also furnishes the solution in the form of the requirement for counter-disclosures as a necessary meanings to invalidate an ideological interpretive schema. As long as Jaeggi (and other opponents of the

⁵⁸² Cf. Jaeggi 2009: 73-4.

hermeneutical model of critique)⁵⁸³ do not accept the basic presuppositions of the hermeneutic position and the ensuing necessity for counter-disclosures, their versions of ideology critique (despite their affirmations to the contrary) will remain caught up in the practice of a self-clarifying and self-affirming internal critique which cannot transcend a given context, for it moves within the same interpretive space of possibility as the ideological schema it seeks to criticize instead of “help[ing] us see what we ‘know’ about the world in a different light.”

In the next section, I will present Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality as an alternative to the models discussed above and argue that it fits the criteria for the immanent critique of ideology by combining an immanent procedure with a context-transcending concept of rationality. I argue that, in virtue of its formal and counterfactual properties, which defy the reliance on pre-existing supporting agreement or “original meaning,” it does not prejudge the relation of language and reality and supports the theory of ideology critique I have sketched without breaking dialogical symmetry and drifting into paternalism. In conclusion, I will address and rebut the two systematic challenges to the theory of communicative rationality relevant to my proposal, namely the charge that the theory cannot successfully deal with the possible effects of domination and power operative within communicative action and discourse (V.1.) and the objection that its focus on communicative understanding excludes non-discursive practices and social relations (V.2.).

⁵⁸³ See, for instance, Honneth 2000; Celikates 2006; Stahl 2021: 33-74.

V. Communicative rationality and the immanent critique of ideology

As we have seen, Habermas's theory of communicative rationality is centered on the speaker's communicative competence which describes her pre-reflective or intuitive ability to participate in conversations with other speakers and come to a mutual understanding with them about something in the world.⁵⁸⁴ The formal nature of the unavoidable presuppositions for reaching mutual understanding yield a procedural conception of communicative rationality operative in communicative action and argumentative practices that complements the formal ("reflective") notion of world(s). In contrast to the left-Hegelian and traditional hermeneutic models cited earlier, the communicative rationality retrieved from the intuitive communicative competence of speakers of natural languages in the form of the irreducible preconditions of speech and, by extension, argumentation, does not rely on any kind of normative foundationalism or fidelity to "original meaning." Communicative rationality is not grounded in any ultimate foundation – whether it be the transcendental subject of knowledge or a meta-subject of history; it is embodied in the formal structure of everyday speech aimed at reaching mutual understanding and, for that reason, does not depend on a pre-existing and shared supporting agreement or tradition whose validity cannot be questioned.

Moreover, communicative rationality is anchored in the everyday practice of reaching mutual understanding. The formal rules of argumentation are neither imported from an external source nor are they imposed on participants in discourse from the outside; rather, they represent a standard that is embodied in everyday communicative practices which means that the standard is

⁵⁸⁴ See chapter 1, III.2.

available (if only intuitively or implicitly) to all participants by way of their communicative competence who, in addition, can evaluate the validity of the standard itself.

Up to now, we have seen that as a candidate for immanent critique communicative rationality meets the criterion of immanence. Its procedural rules are anchored in the social practice of reaching mutual understanding with someone about something in the world. But establishing the immanence of the procedure of communicative rationality as it is embodied in speech is only half the story. We have yet to show that communicative rationality also employs a standard that enables participants in discourse to transcend their interpretive context without breaking dialogical symmetry.

In a realist manner, discursive reflection presupposes that participants distinguish between the interpretandum and their interpretations of it; in other words, they must distinguish between what one says or claims in one's interpretations as being independent of what one's interpretations are interpretations of. Such a formal notion of world does not prejudge the relation of language and reality – as opposed to traditional hermeneutics where this relation is predetermined in favor of language and a priori knowledge. This unnecessary theoretical stricture results in a version of linguistic idealism that forces it to explain the “illusions” of ideological understanding in terms of failed or “empty” reference, reference without a referent, a sign that does not denote anything real.⁵⁸⁵ If, by contrast, we rely on a formal notion of world, we are in a position to say that by virtue of its world-disclosing power, ideological understanding, far from failing to pick out something in the real world, actually refers to referents under epistemically flawed descriptions. And this is where the real power of ideology lies: It

⁵⁸⁵ Contrary to Stanley 2015: 204-7, and Zizek 1994: 17.

insidiously structures our understanding of reality rather than preventing us from referring to what is real.

Insofar as the participants' validity claims are about an objective or social reality that is not identical with their interpretations of it, the validity of their interpretations also depends on whether or not those non-epistemic conditions obtain. The referential use of linguistic expressions complements the realist presupposition of a single world that make mutual understanding and critique possible because it is on the basis of such a non-epistemic theory of reference that participants are able to recognize conflicting interpretations as different ways of describing the same entity or phenomenon. Once participants in discourse understand their own interpretations and the interpretations of others referentially, that is, once they understand that those interpretations are just so many possible ways of referring to the same interpretandum and (in line with the realist presupposition of a formal world) accept that the validity of their claims depends on non-epistemic conditions, their validity claims necessarily transcend their interpretive context.

The "reflective attitude to the interpretandum" is the point of view of the critic of ideology as "virtual participant," who "must in principle orient [herself] to the *same* validity claims to which those immediately involved also orient themselves."⁵⁸⁶ Since adopting such a reflective attitude toward the interpretandum in discourse, which establishes the possibility for critique, is part of the communicative competence of all speakers, it does not break dialogical symmetry.⁵⁸⁷ As a *virtual* participant in the communicative practice, the critic of ideology is neither a disembodied observer nor can she claim privileged access to truth or justice vis-à-vis

⁵⁸⁶ TCA I, 130, 112-3.

⁵⁸⁷ TCA I, 130, emphasis added.

the participants. Her virtual participation merely entails that she is unconstrained by the specific restrictions of action (and indifferent towards the extra-communicative goals of the participants) in a given context. However, she remains equally situated within the communicative context⁵⁸⁸ as makes use of the same formal structures of intelligibility and therefore does not break dialogical symmetry:

“The same structures that make it possible to reach an understanding also provide for the possibility of a reflective self-control of this process. It is this *potential for critique built into communicative action itself* that the social scientist, by entering into the contexts of everyday action as a virtual participant, can systematically exploit and bring into play outside these contexts and against their particularity.”⁵⁸⁹

We thus arrive at a conception of rationality that meets the standard of combining an “immanent procedure with a context-transcending concept of rationality” which lends itself to a theory of ideology critique. Communicative rationality meets the criterion of immanence because it is embodied in the communicative competence of speakers and the procedural rules of the social practice of communicative action as the type of everyday communication that aims at reaching mutual understanding. It meets the criterion of context-transcendence because the formal-realist presupposition of a single world and the complementary theory of direct reference no longer prejudice the relation of language and reality in favor of the former. Since agreement and mutual understanding do not depend on a pre-existing consensus, the theory of communicative rationality “no longer prejudices the contents of a particular view of the world” and can therefore transcend the given context of communication.

With this we have established that the theory of communicative rationality supports a theory of immanent critique suitable for the critique of ideology. However, as is well known,

⁵⁸⁸ TCA I, 130, 112-3.

⁵⁸⁹ TCA I, 120-1, emphasis added.

Habermas's theory of communicative rationality is not uncontested by any means. Thus, in conclusion, I want to address two systematic objections levelled against the model of communicative rationality; two objections which, if they turned out to be true, would also apply to my proposal. The first objection concerns the question of whether the theory of communicative action can effectively deal with power-structures operative in language and speech itself, while the second objection expresses doubts about the scope and generality of the proposed model insofar as it seems to leave aside non-discursive practices.

V.1. Rebutting the power objection

Some critics of Habermas object that the reconstruction of communicative rationality is susceptible to ignoring the possible effects of domination and power operative within communicative action and discourse.⁵⁹⁰ Martin Saar, who is one of the critics, cuts right to the heart of the matter when he contends that Habermas's "analytical framework seems to exclude an understanding of deep-lying distortions that pervade entire vocabularies and perspectives and inscribe heteronomy into subjectivity itself."⁵⁹¹ In a somewhat different context, the expressed worry is also captured by Amy Allen, who attributes the theory's shortcoming to Habermas's reliance on a deflated Weberian conception of social power which more or less completely

⁵⁹⁰ This criticism was first formulated by Nancy Fraser (1985: 109) in the context of and as a challenge to Habermas's introduction of the notion of the lifeworld and the impression that the "image of communicatively integrated spheres of action suggests the independence of the lifeworld from practices of domination and processes of power. [...] As a result of this suggestion, the social lifeworld already assumes at the conceptual level the character of a power-free sphere of communication [...]" (Honneth 1991: 299-300); see also Coole 1996: 240. Against this charge Habermas (1991: 258) contends that the "action domains of the lifeworld which are primarily integrated socially are [...] neither free of power nor of strategic action."

⁵⁹¹ Saar 2018: 563. The passage continues: "[...] Habermas's theory can hardly explain such operations, which would fall under a wide definition of the term ideology."

neglects, say, the modes and effects of disciplinary power and how these shape subjectivity and communicative agency:

“By defining social power as a measure of the actor’s ability to assert his will and interests against the oppositions of others, however, Habermas leaves the will and interests of social actors unproblematized. In other words, this definition of social power tacitly presupposes that the actor’s will and interests are genuine, that is, that they are not *themselves* a function of unjust social power relations. Hence it leaves unproblematized the role that social power plays in constituting rational, deliberating, communicative subjects.”⁵⁹²

On the face of it, these charges could potentially deal a lethal blow to our ambitions to defend the theory of communicative rationality as a model for ideology critique. As I have argued in the previous chapter, we must conceptualize ideology as an embodied interpretive schema which (already) operates at the level of pre-theoretical world-disclosure. Radicalizing ideology in that way, however, implies the need for an equally radical model of critique, one whose range and depth is capable of dismantling the “deep-lying distortions that pervade entire vocabularies and perspectives” and is able to effectively challenge the disclosure that prejudices agents’ understanding of the world and themselves. In view of this challenge, it should be noted that, even prior to the elaboration of his theory of communicative rationality, Habermas was in fact keenly aware of this problem. When refuting Gadamer’s proposal of a universal hermeneutics, Habermas readily admits to the (social) power’s pernicious effects on language, which it exerts by distorting meaning and producing a “false consensus” among participants in communicative practices:

“[T]he dogmatism of the context of tradition is subject not only to the objectivity of language in general but also to the repressivity of forces which deform the intersubjectivity of agreement as such and which systematically distort everyday communication. It is for this reason that *every consensus*, as the outcome of an understanding of meaning, *is, in principle, suspect of having been enforced through pseudo-communication* [...] A critically enlightened hermeneutic that

⁵⁹² Allen 2012: 360-1; see also Allen 2007: 647-8. See also the discussion of world-disclosure and the dominance of *das Man* in chapter 1, I.2.

differentiates between insight and delusion incorporates the meta-hermeneutic awareness of the conditions for the possibility of systematically distorted communication.”⁵⁹³

Habermas’s sensitivity for the distorting effects of power on language and, by extension, action oriented at reaching mutual understanding and discourse fuels his mistrust against the Gadamerian notion of a background consensus by highlighting the possibility that, in principle, every consensus is of dubious origin which is exactly why we cannot take the validity of an established understanding belonging to a cultural tradition for granted.

In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, this idea resurfaces in the form of the concept of structural violence, which presents a limiting case of violence insofar as, due to its structural character, it does not materialize in the same manner as forms of manifest violence in that it transpires above the heads or behind the backs of agents who are not aware of it.⁵⁹⁴ As such, Habermas explains that

“[structural violence] takes hold of the forms of intersubjectivity of possible understanding. Structural violence is exercised by way of systemic restrictions on communication; distortion is anchored in the formal conditions of communicative action in such a way that the interrelation of the objective, social, and subjective worlds gets prejudged for participants in a typical fashion.”⁵⁹⁵

Structural violence is inscribed into language and distorts or obstructs communicative processes by virtue of erecting inconspicuous yet effective barriers to communicative action: “In systematically restricted communications those involved form convictions *subjectively* free from

⁵⁹³ Habermas 1990b: 267, emphasis added. It is thus the task of a critical hermeneutics to “seek out remaining natural-historical traces of distorted communication which are still contained even within fundamental agreements and recognized legitimations.” (ibid 270)

⁵⁹⁴ Habermas 1977: 21.

⁵⁹⁵ TCA II, 187.

constraint, convictions which are, however, illusory. They thereby communicatively generate a power which, as soon as it is institutionalized can also be used against them.”⁵⁹⁶

One way in which forms of structural violence hijack communicative processes is through stereotypes or implicit biases which prejudge speaker’s interpretations and can corrupt entire communicative contexts. To exemplify this idea, take, for instance, the notion of testimonial injustice. According to Miranda Fricker’s notion, testimonial injustice “occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word.”⁵⁹⁷ On the structural level, this devaluation of a speaker’s credibility has been discussed in various contexts, one of which is that of female rape victims. In many cases, a woman giving testimony as a victim of rape is judged against a normalizing standard that prescribes appropriate or “chaste” sexual behavior for women. In this sense, racist “controlling images,”⁵⁹⁸ which depict Black women as promiscuous and more likely to deviate from social norms of sexual propriety, deflate their credibility when giving testimony.⁵⁹⁹ From the perspective of communicative rationality and formal pragmatics, the case of testimonial injustice caused by pervasive cultural stereotypes can be characterized as a form of structural violence that manipulates the illocutionary force of a speech act. The structural prejudice casts doubt on the speaker’s sincerity and tampers with the uptake of the utterance insofar as it makes it less likely (or even impossible) that the hearer

⁵⁹⁶ Habermas 1977: 22, emphasis added.

⁵⁹⁷ Fricker 2007: 1. The figure of the “Black man” as posing as a threat, not because he actually brandishes a weapon but because he is black and as such is perceived as dangerous etc., which then licenses the use of violence in the name of self-defense on the part of the police is an example of how (non-discursive yet linguistically mediated) implicit bias can manifest a form of structural violence in the above sense, see my discussion of Yancy in chapter 2, I.2.

⁵⁹⁸ Hill Collins 2000: 71.

⁵⁹⁹ Crenshaw 1991: 1269-70.

(ideologically acting “in good faith”) accepts the speaker’s subjective validity claim which leads him to doubt the truth of her testimony⁶⁰⁰ as a form of epistemic violence.⁶⁰¹

Moreover, via the concept of structural violence, the theory of communicative rationality is capable of handling forms of silencing that stem from hermeneutical marginalization, which describes the situation of subjects who are excluded from or unfairly disadvantaged in the production of social meanings. It assumes that more powerful social actors have an undue advantage in shaping social understanding and consolidating dominant interpretations. The interactional power imbalance, which may escape the awareness of the agents, renders the production of meaning “structurally prejudiced, for it will tend to issue interpretations of [the marginalized, MS] group’s social experiences that are biased because insufficiently influenced by the subject group.”⁶⁰² Such communicative distortion affects the propositional content that makes up the locutionary component of a speech act which issues in a “false consensus” that may effectuate forms of hermeneutical injustice. From the perspective of a member of the dominant group, *p* is underdetermined as it does not account for the “peculiarity and the inalienable otherness of the second person”⁶⁰³ and their experiences. From the perspective of members of a marginalized group, however, *p* is radically overdetermined for it leaves no room for articulating their experiences from their own social location. As a result of the whiteness

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. TCA I, 278.

⁶⁰¹ For the concept of “epistemic violence,” see Dotson 2011: 238. Dotson describes epistemic violence with regard to testimony as the “refusal, intentional or unintentional, of an audience to communicatively reciprocate a linguistic exchange owing to pernicious ignorance. Pernicious ignorance should be understood to refer to any reliable ignorance that, in a given context, harms another person (or set of persons). Reliable ignorance is ignorance that is consistent or follows from a predictable epistemic gap in cognitive resources.” Where I disagree with Dotson is her claim that reliable ignorance is caused by epistemic *gaps*. Rather than “filled” with gaps, we must imagine the interpretive space (at least in the case of ideology) as being over-saturated by dominant meanings that discredit, obscure, etc. alternative meanings and foreclose counter-hegemonic interpretations.

⁶⁰² Fricker 2007: 155. See BFN 422-3, where Habermas briefly discusses this issue in the juridic context (“*overgeneralized classifications*” that benefit merely a group of already privileged).

⁶⁰³ Habermas 1990c: 112.

inscribed at the meta-level, the allegedly colorblind universal affirmation “All lives matter” in fact excludes the lives of people of color and represents such a false consensus. The aphony of members of marginalized groups and the assimilation required from them by prejudiced social meanings (of what it means for all lives to matter) that prevent them from making proper sense of their situation indicate an instance of “pseudo-communication” (Habermas) evoked by the effects of hermeneutical marginalization which obstructs their equal (deliberative) participation in the process of meaning production.

But viewed in this light, Saar’s charge that Habermas’s “analytical framework seems to exclude an understanding of deep-lying distortions that pervade entire vocabularies and perspectives and inscribe heteronomy into subjectivity itself,” as well as Allen’s congenial contention that the theory of communicative rationality “leaves unproblematic the role that social power plays in constituting rational, deliberating, communicative subjects” appear to be unwarranted. On the contrary, nothing in the theory of communicative rationality prevents it, in principle, from making explicit and criticizing the existence and dominance of “systematically distorted communication”⁶⁰⁴ due to illicit power differentials in everyday speech, including the

⁶⁰⁴ Habermas first obtained the concept of systematically distorted communication from a communicative reformulation of Freudian psychoanalysis as a kind of communication that surreptitiously violates the universal “validity basis of speech” which consists in the irreducible structures that regulate the use of linguistic expressions in speech acts (see Habermas 2001: 154-5). However, despite Habermas’s discussion of examples regarding the validity claims to sincerity, normative rightness (and intelligibility) (ibid: “Curiously, there is not violation of truth that is symptomatic of systematically distorted communication.”), it is ultimately the idea of deception, tied to the latent suspension of the sincerity claim (see his characterization – Habermas 1973: 17 – of false consensus as “deceptive” consensus: “Competent orators know that every consensus attained can in fact be *deceptive* [trügen kann].”), which dominates the early conception of systemically distorted communication. This seems to be confirmed when we look at how Habermas describes the function of ideology critique in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*: Ideology critique “disputes the truth of a suspicious theory by exposing its *untruthfulness*.” (Habermas 1987a: 116) Consequently, “Critique becomes ideology critique when it attempts to show [...] that behind the back of the theory there lies hidden an inadmissible *mixture of power and validity*, and that it still owes its reputation to this.” (ibid). For the attempt to advance Habermas’s theory of systematically distorted communication into a comprehensive theory of ideology critique, see Bohman 1986. From a systematic standpoint, however, Bohman’s approach falls short of the stated ambitions regarding the critique of ideology. Similar to Habermas (who initially espoused a consensus theory of truth, which he retracted only with respect to claims about the objective world, see Habermas 2003), the validity of linguistic expressions (in practical discourses) according to

very meanings that “pervade entire vocabularies and perspectives” and shape agents’ understanding of the world and themselves. It should be noted that the theory not only captures repressive forms of power but is also capable of accommodating productive forms of power, which not only constrain or erase but also produce meaning, knowledge, and embodied subjectivity.⁶⁰⁵ Productive forms of power place an emphasis on positively regulating conduct by telling subjects what to do and making subjects internalize these behavioral norms – effectively producing those subjects which are willing and capable of reproducing this power on their own accord. Techniques of subjectivization include normalization (e.g. instilling gendered forms of what is considered normal sexual behavior: “flirting” vs. “chastity”) and (racialized) hierarchization (e.g. the controlling images of Black men as menacing, predatory, etc.). The theory of communicative rationality is capable of diagnosing and criticizing how these interactional power relations negatively shape the outlook and self-understanding of speakers and undermine communicative processes in ways that escape them (“*subjectively* free from constraint”⁶⁰⁶) and result in false consensus. The continued employment of prejudiced vocabularies maintains the distortion of communication on the basis of false consensus and re-asserts the initial illegitimacy of systematically distorted interpretative schemata which corrupt the ways in which individuals make sense of the world and themselves and thus perpetuate structural violence.⁶⁰⁷

Bohman depends exclusively on epistemic conditions; since he does not acknowledge the methodological premise of the priority of the right over the good (Lafont 2008: 104-5), his theory does not allow for the kind of critique that can transcend the given interpretive context or cultural tradition.

⁶⁰⁵ For Foucault’s perspective on the relation of communication, power, and subjectivity, see Foucault 1982: 786-7.

⁶⁰⁶ Habermas 1977: 22.

⁶⁰⁷ See, for instance, Butler 2015 on the perception of Black men as posing a threat in the context of the debate on “Black lives matter”: “[E]very time a grand jury or a police review board accepts this form of reasoning, they ratify the idea that blacks are a population against which society must be defended, and that the police defend themselves and (white) society, when they preemptively shoot unarmed black men in public space.” Every such act constitutes a link “in the chains of performative iterations through which this subjection is maintained and reproduced” (Medina 2008: 103).

As we have seen, this has some major consequences for the critique of ideology: Since power is potentially inscribed in the very concepts and meanings with which participants access reality and on the basis of which they seek to establish mutual understanding and test the validity claims of others, validity itself can neither depend on an “original meaning” nor can it solely depend on the knowledge and understanding of the participants involved in discursive practices. Otherwise, any illicit power-relation once-inscribed in the meaning of a particular disclosure would indeed be perpetuated in the validity claims of participants and false consensus and would likewise limit their options to successfully challenge them in discourse. Contradicting them, as Habermas concedes in passing, requires new disclosures in light of which some of its a priori statements or even the entire interpretive schema can be shown to be invalid⁶⁰⁸:

“In extreme cases, we run up against the limits of our comprehension, and interpretations that labor in vain on resilient problems begin to falter. They only get moving again when, in light of a *new* vocabulary, the familiar facts show themselves in a different light, so that well-worn problems can be posed in a completely new and more promising way.”⁶⁰⁹

V.2. *Rebutting the “limited scope” objection*

The second objection holds that the theory of communicative rationality presents too limited an account to act as the basis of a general theory of immanent critique. Its focus on communicative understanding excludes practices and social relations that aren’t exclusively established through communicative agreement from the type of practices that can be criticized under this model.⁶¹⁰

As an example, Titus Stahl mentions “intimate relationships where emotional rapport could serve

⁶⁰⁸ See my discussion *supra* IV.

⁶⁰⁹ Habermas 1992: 106. Overall, however, Habermas does not draw the necessary systematic conclusions from this for the theory of communicative rationality, see the detailed analysis in Kompridis 2006: 117-25.

⁶¹⁰ See Stahl 2013a: 15.

to institute norms [...] of appropriate mutuality, trust or care,” and which “do not solely rely on communicative agreement as a condition for their existence.”⁶¹¹

In light of this criticism, communicative rationality, while effective with regard to communicatively instituted practices, is overall too limited in scope to cover the entire spectrum of relevant social practices. If this claim were correct, it would prove fatal to my approach to conceptualize immanent ideology critique based on communicative rationality. I argued that as an embodied interpretive schema, ideology guides our cognitive, affective, and conative interpretations of the world. In view of the scope of phenomena covered by the concept of ideology, which clearly entails non-discursive practices, the proposed method of critique would not match its target. The worry then is that there are social practices and relations whose non-discursive form *ab ovo* disqualifies them as possible candidates for the discursive testing of their rationality because the discursive form of rationality operative in argumentative practices cannot access the non-discursive rationality inherent in them.

In response to this objection, it is important to emphasize that, similar to embodied interpretations and implicit cognitive attitudes, it is not their discursive form that qualifies social relations and practices for discursive examination but their responsiveness to reason. Our emotional reactions to moral injury give a powerful example of the embodied, non-discursive responsiveness to reason that is required for communicative rationality to gain critical traction. Our emotional responses are linguistically mediated interpretations of the social world.⁶¹² Feelings of resentment or anger toward another person, for example, not only pass judgment on the culprit but track generalizable normative expectations, i.e., they allude to norms or behavioral

⁶¹¹ Stahl 2013b: 543.

⁶¹² Cf. chapter 1, II.4. and chapter 2, I.2.

expectations in light of which the perpetrator lacks reasons that either justify the action as such or exculpate her for circumstantial reasons (acting under duress or acting incompetently).⁶¹³ That emotional responses can be responsive to reasons can be seen when the wronged party accepts an explanation or apology offered by the wrongdoer and, as a result, no longer feels quite so angry or resentful toward them. The understanding and acceptance of the reasons offered as a justification – based on the belief in their sincerity – can repair the social relation and assuage the feeling of indignation.⁶¹⁴

Analogously, we need not discount non-discursive practices or social relations, which rely in part on non-discursively formed normative expectations, as excluded from discursive examination in argumentative practices. As symbolic expressions of affection, appreciation, and intimacy, the nonverbal cues (gestures, posture, body language, eye contact, etc.) that help to build and maintain emotional rapport (in addition to communicative action) interpret the social world (while at the same time being the subject of interpretation in the performative attitude of a participant) and track the fulfillment of (shared) normative expectations. As such, they are generally responsive to reason and thus criticizable in terms of the claim to validity they embody with respect to the normative expectations the partners have vis-à-vis each other.⁶¹⁵ Issues with the validity of their expectations can be addressed and the rapport itself can be made the object

⁶¹³ See Habermas's discussion in 1990: 45-50.

⁶¹⁴ In the case of implicit attitudes and biases, the responsiveness to reasons is typically less direct. Truly unlearning one's insensitivities, blind spots, and other implicit biases or stereotypes will itself require more than arguments, explanations, and discursive disruptions (e.g. change in one's social environments and continuous exposure). But the fact that unlearning must make use of more than our cognitive ways of interpreting the world does not imply that reasons and new interpretive disclosures do not play an important role in that process (on this, see Taylor 1985: 69-72, and my discussion at the end of chapter 1, II.4.). After all, infants less than six months of age (pre-linguistic stage) do not show implicit biases (see the studies in developmental psychology on implicit racial bias in children by Xiao et al 2017a; Xiao et al 2017b). If language acquisition is a pre-requisite for implicit biases, this indicates not only that the latter are linguistically mediated but also that they can be ameliorated through discursive means.

⁶¹⁵ See, for instance, Yancy's analysis of the elevator effect (chapter 2, I.2.), which makes it very clear that even unconscious embodied behavior can be criticized as ideologically fraught.

of reflection and critique, for instance, if one partner asks for clarification of the content of the rapport, if there is disagreement over whether or not an expectation has been violated, or if one wants to deviate from it. Hence, such non-discursive social practices are not in principle “out of bounds” for a model of critique based on communicative rationality.

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