

# The Crossroads of Literature and Social Praxis (An Introduction)

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When researching ideology, it is unimaginable to disregard the theoretical framework within which the praxis of ideology is to be analyzed. Since the early 1970s, when Louis Althusser and his followers started focusing on this problem, ideology has been defined as inevitable consciousness and as an imaginary relation to the world. It could be interpreted as a mechanism providing “evidentness of meaning,” that is to say, an individual identifies with only one suggested meaning, which becomes an evident truth on how the world is to be understood. The meaning of an utterance with which individuals identify depends on what Michel Pêcheux calls inter-discourse, and the signification of utterances therefore comes into being according to the position their speakers assume in relation to ideological formations. Ideology can thus be interpreted as constitutive to a subject’s identification, and vice versa, the subject can be regarded as constitutive to ideology, since ideology is in itself acting through the subject. However, we have to be careful in determining the relation between ideology and the imaginary. It is true that the imaginary – understood as a relation between the image and its signification – is limited by a kind of social institution. Cornelius Castoriadis, for example, argues that the imaginary mostly manifests as an institutionalizing set of representations common to a society. Ideology can be understood as an order of such sets. While the imaginary is open to any possible link between the signifier (the image) and the signified, ideology, on the contrary, attempts to close this gap and to establish a fixed meaning. Since the suppression and elimination of differences and ambivalences is often seen as the fundamental characteristic of the discourses of modernity (for example, in the theories of Anthony Giddens and Peter Wagner), Claude Lefort rightly observes that ideology can be defined as an order of the so-called social imaginary specific to the discourse of modernity.

Most contributions in this thematic section avoid theoretical conceptualizations of ideology since we believe that this topic has to a great extent been exhausted. The two exceptions are notably the first and the last paper, i.e. contributions by Ana Beguš and Špela Virant. Ana Beguš links the concepts of genre, technology and remediation in order to extend the traditional analysis of ideological narratives in a text to the

technological interface as an epistemological frame. Epistemology is also one of the frameworks in Špela Virant's contribution, which begins with a theoretical analysis of the relations between ideology, epistemology, and their reflections in literature, and then uses selected excerpts from Native American literature and criticism to examine the praxis.

Most of the contributions thus focus on case studies which reveal the mechanisms of literary and social representations both in a more general context, e.g. in cases of national ideology, and within specific social contexts. Marcello Potocco tackles the problematic status of Canadian national ideology in relation to the United States, which first became evident in the nineteenth century and then during the second wave of nationalism in the 1960s. Most contributions, however, are devoted to the period after the World War II, especially in the so-called socialist countries, though they are not exclusively limited to the period of socialism. Tomaž Toporišič's paper serves as a double bridge – between the West and the East as well as the past and the present. Although Toporišič, who analyses novels by *Winfried Georg Sebald and the work of the Bosnian-Croatian theatre director Oliver Frljić*, primarily examines how literature and art come to be included in the process of signification and representation, he also uses Frljić's example to analyse the post-Yugoslav consequences of socialism. Toporišič's contribution is complemented by Maja Murnik's paper, which examines the ideological and/or critical potential of contemporary Slovenian theatrical praxis, including texts by the Slovenian playwright Simona Semenič. Simona Semenič's work is also analyzed by Gašper Troha, who compares her play *nineteeneightyone* with Dušan Jovanović's play *Military Secret* produced in 1983. Troha emphasises the socio-critical stance of both authors towards the idea of socialism in order to show the many possible approaches to and understandings of its Yugoslav version. Another researcher focusing on socialism is Varja Balžalorsky, whose contribution works at the intersection of feminist and social (socialist) discourses to discuss the reception of the poetry book *Shadow in the Heart* by Ada Škerl.

Roland Orcsik shifts the focus from Slovenia to a broader literary context by analysing the so-called ludism in the literary journal *Ūj Symposion*, published by the poets of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina. Orcsik sheds light on the similarities and differences between the neo-avantgarde in Slovenia, Croatia and Vojvodina, extending the analytical focus to countries of the Warsaw Pact. In this context, Irma Ratiani and Maka Elkabidze present the political situation and the changes in the Georgian literary system after World War

II (Ratiani), and the complex relation between the Soviet orthodox position in the Georgian literary system and its reception of emigrant literature, more precisely the work of literary researcher Viktor Nozadze (Elbakidze). The two contributions on Romanian literature use a comparative perspective. Andrei Terian argues that in the period between 1960/65 and 1980 Romania and other Central and Eastern European countries (including Yugoslavia) share a common literary paradigm he calls “socialist modernism,” and proposes a comparison of its characteristics with those of late modernism in Western European countries. Ștefan Baghiu, on the other hand, analyses “Western” genre fiction translated in Romania during the period of socialist realism in order to discuss the social purpose and functions of socialist realist literature.

While this has not been the intended focus of this thematic section, the majority of contributions obviously deal with the ideological praxis in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the period of socialism. However, the section offers a variety of connections between diverse Central and Eastern European countries, between East and West, and between the praxis and theory of ideology. Thus it adds to the mosaic of research on ideology in literature and literary systems. At least this was the intention of the editors of this thematic section.