

Marx and language.

How to criticize language while using it ?

The aim of this intervention is to contribute to a marxist theory of language. Such an endeavor can sound counter-intuitive, for language does not seem to be a privileged object of marxian investigations. Yet, three reasons justify my endeavor which concern respectively the object of Marx's theory, the form of his theoretical practice and the political objectives of his social critique, justify my endeavor.

1) Marx's main object is society: more precisely, society as inseparable from individuals' activities. Now, language is both a very important social activity and the mediation of all social activities. It therefore seems legitimate to complement the marxian framework with a reflection on the nature and function of language in society. 2) The concept of ideology is decisive both for the critical content of Marx's social theory and for the form of his critical discourse or of his philosophical practice. Yet, the link between language and ideology has received little attention, even though in its material and sensuous aspects, ideology can be identified with a certain regime of circulation of discourses, words and expressions. 3) The ability to speak is one of the main human capacities that, according to Marx, is alienated by capitalism. It therefore seems necessary to analyze how, exactly, language is alienated in capitalist societies, in order to imagine what an emancipatory use of language could be.

In order to articulate these three aspects of the relation between language and society in Marx's theory, I will analyze the tensions between what Marx says about language and the way he uses (or criticizes) it. On the one hand, he sometimes seems to reduce language to a mere passive reflection of material reality. But on the other hand, he always pays great attention to words and their abstraction, to the specificity of the language of political economy and to the particularity of the young Hegelians' modes of expression which are carefully analyzed in *The German Ideology*. My claim is that these tensions are actually productive and reveal the originality of Marx's conception of language. Indeed, I will argue that, theorized within a marxian framework, language appears not only as an ideological form, which expresses and conceals social alienation, but also as a field of social struggle, which functions as a means of political subjectivation.