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# Imaginary and Ideology: Illusions in Everyday Representations and Complex Thought

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## Abstract

The discussion of the illusions in a society where these predominate in the human mind is fundamental and refers to the question of their social roots, that is, the process of social constitution of illusions. The objective here, however, is only to observe the relationship between two fundamental forms of illusions, the imaginary and the ideology, to realize the process of transforming from one into another and so to advance the understanding of this ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary society. So we analyze the illusory forms of everyday representations and ideology in order to observe their relationships. The complexification of the simple (imaginary passage to ideology) and the simplification of the complex (ideology passage to imaginary).

## Keywords

Imaginary, Ideology, Everyday Representations, Complex Thought, Illusions

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## 1. Introduction

The history of human consciousness is marked by a set of changes that can only be understood if inserted into the history of human societies. Consciousness can be understood as in Marx's thought, as "real" or "illusory". Our focus here will be what Marx called "illusionary representations" of reality, which obviously makes us refer to the "real representations", because the discussion of one generates the need, inevitably, to approach the other. The discussion of the illusions in a society where these predominate in the human mind is fundamental and refers to the question of their social roots, that is, the process of social constitution of illusions. The objective here, however, is only to observe the relationship between two fundamental forms of illusions, the imaginary and the ideology, to realize the process of transforming from one into another and so to advance the understanding of this ubiquitous phenomenon in contemporary society.

The history of human consciousness is, at heart, a story of illusions. The illusions have always existed, but in different ways and for different reasons. The word illusion has several meanings, such as "improbable hopes", but here we use as distortion of reality, false consciousness, wrong, of reality. Thus, consciousness can be illusory or real, which means it can express the reality as it is or distort it.

The history of illusions begins with the ancient myths and reaches the present day in the form of science, philosophy, etc. The myth as a way of explaining the world proves illusory, as well as the myth of the explanations also can and most often are illusory (VIANA, 2011). However, the roots of the general illusions are varied, although the basic determination, in the case of our society, is social. In simple societies, what we have are relationships of humans with the environment marked by dependence and a culture still too marked by forms of reflection whose movement of return to itself of the thinker is performed non-consciously, with another unreflective projection. With the emergence of class society and the separation of manual and intellectual work,

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the original thinkers, philosophers, advanced towards thinking this return to himself consciously. When Protagoras launches the maximum "man is the measure of all things" (PLATO, 1977), he marks a revolution in human thought.

In slave society, however, if there is an advance in human consciousness, it suffers other limitations that did not exist before. The training of skilled workers in their intellectual work, due to the exploitation of slave labor, allows to extend the reflections on the world and expand human consciousness, including due to the larger domination of humans over nature with the development of new productive forces, but creates a new obstacle: the division of society into classes and derived or subordinated subdivisions to it generates different lifestyles, interests, values, feelings, also different. If the simple societies had a single, homogeneous culture, if everyone believed the same myth, in the class society the social division promotes different forms of consciousness.

The illusory representations will have as main determination not to depend on nature but on the social division of labor which expresses the existence of different and antagonistic social classes and all that derives from it. Even the division between manual and intellectual work brings out the figure of the ideologue i.e, specialist in intellectual work that produces an illusory system of thought, which Marx called ideology. Thus comes into being not only the illusory representations spontaneously produced by individuals of various classes from their position in the social division of labor, interests, values, feelings, etc., but also a new kind of illusionary representation, systematic and whose producers are the intellectual workers. It is in this historical context that ideology is born (MARX and ENGELS, 1992).

The development process of human history was, from that moment, marked by the production and reproduction of illusions, whether in one way or another, simple or complex form. The complex form is the realm of ideology, experts in intellectual work that generate real systems of thought, in the form of philosophy, theology, science, etc. and the simple way is what later this complex thought called "common sense," "popular culture," "popular knowledge", "everyday knowledge", "social representations", among other names. And about these forms of consciousness were produced interpretations and explanations, most often, illusory. In this case, are produced illusions about other illusions? A true illusory world begins to reign supreme in the class society and capitalist society. Undoubtedly, as well as the newborn philosophy provided some advances in terms of human consciousness, later developments also, in many cases, allowed other advances, but which, however, has not yet managed to overcome the primacy of illusion in human thought. And beyond the inversion of reality performed systematically by ideology and the everyday illusionary

representations, there is also a world of illusions that conducts a mediation of the interpretation of those illusions.

## 2. The Concept of Ideology

After this historical context, it is important to clarify the concepts of ideology and everyday illusionary representations, or imagined, to move forward in the discussion on the relationship between these two forms of consciousness. The word ideology has several meanings, being polysemic. It can be understood as "science of ideas", such as defined Antoine Destutt de Tracy (CHAUÍ, 1992); as "worldview" (Gramsci, 1989); among other meanings. These are ideological conceptions of ideology. And ideology is understood as the concept elaborated by Marx and misunderstood (and often interpreted ideologically) by their interpreters.

Ideology, in the conception of Marx, is a systematic false consciousness, wishful thinking system. The systematic nature of ideology is its imaginary distinctive feature, i.e, the everyday illusory representations. Marx identifies the birth of ideology with the division between manual and intellectual work, with the emergence of the figure of the ideologist and the autonomy of the world of ideas on the part of thinkers, experts in cultural production. The criticism that Marx directs to ideologues is the same as to the idealistic philosophers, Neohegelian, which produced real systems from the work of Hegel and against him. Marx did not address the illusion of slaves, servants, workers, warriors, bureaucrats, etc. The concept of ideology, therefore, refers to its producers, the ideologues and these are the knowledge workers (scientists, philosophers, theologians).

If ideology is a wishful thinking system, it is not the only form of manifestation of illusions. Because of the social division of labor and all that derives from it, and the process of exploitation and domination that is such a division, there is a constant process of producing illusions. Both individuals of the exploited classes and individuals of the ruling classes produce illusions, but not in a systematic way. It is up to ideologues or, as in rare cases, some individuals of these classes can, despite its position in the social division of labor, have time to create systems of thought, producing a systematic false consciousness. In Marx, this opposition exists from his criticism of philosophical ideologies in *The German Ideology* (MARX and ENGELS, 1992) until his scientific critique of ideologies, political economy, in *The Capital* (MARX, 1988). Marx said that "everyday concepts" agents of the production process were systematized and made into science by political economists. Let us return to this later.

The concept of ideology refers, therefore, to the wishful thinking system. In this sense, the works of Aristotle, Plato,

Hegel, Durkheim, Weber, Locke, Baumann, Giddens, among thousands of others, are ideological products. The ideology, however, being a thought system has not only an illusory content, i.e., reverses the reality, but also has a form. It is a system of thought and its systematic nature give it its formal characteristics. Ideologies are a totality, a set of ideas that are structured systematically, constituting constructs, misconceptions (VIANA, 2007), which are interrelated with several other, thus producing a construct system (VIANA, 2012; VIANA, 2007). Ideologies produce a set of constructs organized systematically. We will not be able to point out here the various features of ideology, but the key is to understand that it is a form of illusory reality of consciousness and its distinction from other forms of illusory consciousness is its systematic character, forming an organized set of constructs.

### 3. Everyday Representations and Imaginary

Ideology comes with class societies. It is in this context that many systems of thought arise (which are gaining more systematic in the course of the historical process and the accumulation of ideologies, and Platonism and Aristotelianism are some of its first manifestations, already with a certain degree of systematization, especially in the case of Aristotle). The myth is a conception of relatively organized and coherent reality, but that is not yet established as a system. Ideology is production of ideologues, experts in intellectual work. And those who are not ideologues? They develop their awareness of the reality and do so in different ways, with different contents. If ideology takes the form of science, philosophy, theology, other forms of consciousness are what we call everyday representations, what others call "common sense", "everyday knowledge", "social representations", etc.

The common-sense idea is the product of ideology, or more specifically, of science (VIANA, 2008). The constitution of the new dominant form of ideology, science, from the rise of the bourgeoisie and its conquest of the state apparatus with the bourgeois revolutions in comparison with the widespread ideas in society in the form of utopian socialism, anarchism, Marxism, produces need to separate both forms of thought and the disqualification of popular culture, influenced by such conceptions. The reason is very simple: what come spontaneously are everyday representations ("common sense") and it is only when there emerges a form of complex thinking is that the distinction becomes possible. The earliest predecessor of the opposition between complex thinking and everyday representations is found in Plato (1974), which held the distinction between doxa and logos, opinion and reason,

or, more precisely, the world of opinions, those who mistake the shadows of reality with herself, and those who see the lights that came out of the shadow world and reached the world of lights, the philosophers.

The Platonic opposition between doxa and logos and subsequently between science and common sense, expresses the self-delusion of the ideologues whose fundamental element in its distinction is opposing the true and the false. The philosophy or science would be the true knowledge, doxa or common sense, the false knowledge. With the historical and social change, interpretations of common sense change, some ideologues treat it as a true knowledge (VIANA, 2008). However, what interests us here is the fact that everyday representations precede the complex thinking, the complex representations of reality. But, when they come, they seek to distinguish from everyday representations. No doubt, both forms of representation exist, however, what differentiates one from the other is not the true character of one and the false character of another. Ideologies are, in essence, false. Everyday representations, however, can be true or false, or as Marx says, "real or illusionary" (MARX and ENGELS, 1992). However, asserting that all ideologies are false does not mean that all complex representations are false. Ideology is a complex thought, but beyond ideology there is a theory (VIANA, 2007; VIANA, 2012). The theory, as opposed to ideology, is an expression of reality, correct awareness of reality, to use the expression of the young Lukacs (1989). This design theory as an expression of reality as opposed to ideology as false consciousness has its origins in Hegel (GOMBIM, 1972) and is manifested in Marx and later in Korsch (1977), without, however, promoting a more structured elaboration on this.

Marx did not elaborate any theory of various forms of in depth representations. But it is clear in *The German Ideology* and *The Capital*, that he conceived the existence of a complex thought, ideology and theory, and no complex forms of thinking. The complex thought can be true (theory or to express it another term, which varies in Marx) or false (ideology), as well as representations may be "true" or "illusionary" (MARX and ENGELS, 1992). In *The Capital* he says that the ideology of political economists actually means, the systematization of daily representations (he uses the expression "everyday concepts") of the production process agents (capitalists, managers, workers). However,

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, when performing the critique of ideologies, produces a complex thought about reality and this provided some names, such as "scientific socialism" (used rarely and only to counter utopian socialism), "science" (using the word in Hegelian sense and not in the usual sense and dominant, or what we use here) and "theory". In some moments Marx explains that science is an ideology. This phrase, for example, hints at the ideological character of science and the opposition between it and the theory, "as economists are the scientific representatives of the bourgeois class, the Socialists and Communists are the theoreticians of the proletarian class" (MARX, 1989, p. 118).

Marx devoted more in-depth analysis of ideologies, against which there is the theory, i.e, Marxism, and the concrete reality and not deepened their reflections on everyday representations.

Everyday representations can be defined as the set of ideas or conceptions that people produce in their daily lives, reproducing its structure: simplicity, regularity and naturalness (VIANA, 2008). Here we are interested in their appearance that distinguishes it from the complex thought: simplicity. Everyday representations are produced by those who are not experts in intellectual work and these also when it comes to issues outside of their specialized training or the whole of their thought before becoming specialized knowledge workers. They provide simple explanations of reality. They lack complexity, consistency and systematization (or articulation, in the case of theory) of complex thinking. Its concrete content, however, contrary to what some ideological conceptions claim can be true or false not just fake or just true (VIANA, 2008). Obviously its real content has limits because it lacks structure and deepening. The real everyday representations are rarer, they are usually linked to the rise of struggles of the exploited classes and often mingle with other ways of thinking. They can not have the structure, coordination, depth and complexity theory.

However, our fundamental interests are not everyday representations in general, but the imaginary, false everyday representations, illusory. Thus, the imaginary concept expresses the everyday illusory representations, that is, carries with it all the features of everyday representations and its distinctive element of its illusory nature and therefore approaches the ideology. The imaginary shares with ideology its illusory content, although it is distinguished by its simplicity compared to the complexity of ideological thought. Your false content is more easily perceived and criticized than in the case of ideologies. The imaginary and ideology are illusory forms of consciousness, naturalize what is historical and social, reverse reality. However, what we have here are similarities and differences between imaginary and ideology. It is important to analyze the concrete relations between both forms of illusory consciousness, because in actual reality they coexist and influence each other. From now on we analyze this relationship, which can occur in two main forms, namely: the imaginary passage to ideology and the reverse, the transition from ideology to the imagination. Let's address the two forms, but we will focus on the latter, since this is the least commonly treated.

#### **4. From the Simple to Complex: The Ideological Production**

The production of ideology has as its starting point in the

concrete social relations and illusory everyday representations produced in society and the values, feelings, interests, existing in the social classes. The imagery is therefore one of the sources of ideologies. Marx expressed this when he said that economists systematize everyday conceptions of the agents of the production process, giving it the scientific, systematic character. The transformation of the imaginary ideology requires those who will carry out such a process, the ideologues and the process of systematization of everyday representations.

This is more understandable to remember a particular phenomenon and its interpretations. If individuals observe the appearance of the sun and its disappearance on the horizon then can create the illusory representation that it moves. If it is systematized, it becomes ideology. Aristotle was the first to take this step and Claudius Ptolemy deepened and gave ideological shape to this conception. If already in ancient Greece existed those who disagreed, as Aristarchus of Samos, the dominant view was that populated the imaginary and later the dominant ideologies, until Galileo and Bruno, when they were refuted in a more structured way and paved the way for overcoming. However, these two positions did not emerge only from passage of everyday representations for complex thinking, but also the interests, values, social processes existing in its time.

The production process of ideology, however, emerges from an inspiration that is earlier, and therefore the imagery is one of its determinations. Undoubtedly, at a time dominated by ideologies, the formation of new ideologies is made from the development, redesign, mix of existing ones, but in the case of the ideologue as an individual, he first graduated from the world of everyday representations, imagination which is dominant to even suit, convince, choose, given previous ideology to produce their own<sup>2</sup>. The production of ideologies, therefore, is marked by a progressive process of imaginary passage, simplistic illusions, for the complex thinking of the ideological world, systematized delusions.

#### **5. From the Complex to Simple: The Production of Ideologemes**

The maintenance process of the imagery is distinct. Undoubtedly, everyday representations, real or illusory, precede the complex thinking, both in human history as well as in the history of individuals. No one is born a philosopher, scientist or theologian. However, at some point in human

<sup>2</sup> Of course here we emphasize what Marx called "active ideologists", producers of ideologies, not the "ideologues liabilities", consumers and breeders (MARX and ENGELS, 1992), although it also applies to these when they "choose" between existing ideologies.



history, ideology emerges and this influence everyday representations, more or less intense, covering a larger or smaller number of people, depending on season and society. The point is that with the capitalist society, this process acquires specific contours, for various reasons, such as the emergence of science as the dominant form of dominant ideology (surpassing the supremacy of philosophy and theology that undergo a process of marginalization and subordination to the dominant form) and its expansion into specialized areas and set of social activities, popularization of rationalization and bureaucratisation of society as a whole. It is in this context that we address the issue of crossing of the more complex illusions, ideology, to the simplistic illusions.

Marx did not address this process and few have paid attention to it. No doubt this will occur with greater incidence in a certain historical moment, which is in a certain level of development of capitalist society. This process has several determinations. Undoubtedly, the very consolidation of science is a precondition for this. Its thematic areas, i.e., the themes and phenomena that spans are also fundamental. Among the sciences, the more influence the population is human, especially psychology, which presents an explanation of individual behavior in an individualistic society. To a lesser extent, other human sciences, such as geography, sociology, political science, etc., influence the everyday representations in capitalist society. This begins in the 19th century, especially with a certain influence from psychology, sociology, and other forms of complex thinking, like Marxism, philosophy, etc. Among the natural sciences, biology, especially the Darwinian ideology ends up having a greater impact on society, both because of the thematic areas and by its political character was opposed to religious thought and also by its influence in the humanities springs.

This influence increased after the Second World War, especially with the growth of the publishing industry, universities, oligopolistic media in general. In this context, it is the first more systematic reflection on this phenomenon, with the study of Serge Moscovici (1977) on "the social representations of psychoanalysis". The choice of psychoanalysis was not free, because their presence in oligopolistic media and its popularity was evident. However, Moscovici analysis presents some interesting elements, but as a whole is insufficient. Anyway, it was a first step to elaborate on the relationship between ideology and imagery towards the assimilation of complex thought by everyday representations.

A feature of this process is the simplification that this assimilation promotes. This simplification does not intend to just simplify it because that usually also deforms the complex thinking. Just as the idea of Darwin was deformed in order to believe that he said that men descended from monkeys, also

the ideas of Freud and psychoanalysis (who also is undifferentiated in everyday representations, which, in most cases, are unaware of the diverse and sometimes antagonistic psychoanalytic concepts) are simplified and distorted<sup>3</sup>.

The process of assimilation of the imaginary ideologies is generally carried out in the form of production ideologemes. The word "ideologeme" has been used in different ways by Bakhtin (1990) and Kristeva (1978), despite some similarities, it is not our interest here to discuss them. We understand ideologeme in a different way, with a new meaning. A ideologeme is a fragment of an ideology, is a construct (misconception) isolated, is a broader part or a simplifying synthesis of a particular ideological conception or even the reduction of ideology to a buzzword or key idea.

In other words, a ideologeme is a formal mutation of an ideology to promote simplification and reduction, transforming a piece of it on message or main element of a speech, text, message, etc. This fragment is not an ideology at all, because if so, it would have to reproduce the set of ideas that constitute it and it would be complex, which not only requires understanding of it (and this domain is rare in non-specialists), as also space and conditions for their reproduction.

In a comic book, a film, a newspaper column, a poetry, to name a few examples, it is hardly possible to reproduce an ideology without performing the process of simplification that generates the ideologeme. If even the "passive ideologues" (mere players) have difficulty to summarize in popular science works or classes ideologies without causing a strong simplification and most of the time deformation, so it is more difficult and common in the case of those working with everyday representations.

Thus, in a film it is possible to pass the elitist conception of art, reproducing a particular ideology, but as ideologeme. Understanding this process is easier with a concrete example of ideologeme demonstration in cinema, our next step.

## 6. "Kill Theory": The Ideologeme Which Kills

The movie "*Kill Theory*" (Chris Moore, USA, 2009) has as its starting point a ideologeme (or a "theory", as placed in the title of the film). The importance of ideologeme in that movie makes it an excellent case to analyze the filmic reproduction ideologemes as well as for other types of fiction. Generally,

<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, this process also occurs with Marxism, i.e., with the theory. The appropriation of Marxism by everyday representations is a process of simplification and deformation, which is reinforced by ideological production which has interest in doing this for so refute it more easily. However, this relationship will be addressed at another time, dedicated to the treatment of theorems of production and distortion of Marxism by its simplification.

ideologemes are embedded in the fictional universe and are not easily discernible, well as the values, feelings, unconscious, etc. Therefore the film "Kill Theory" assumes great importance when taking as a starting point and motivation of a psychopath an ideologeme. Obviously, it is only the conscious motivation of the psychopath, as are his psychic problems that are in the act of origin, being the ideologeme just a rationalization, in the Freudian sense, and self-justification.

Which ideologeme is exposed in the film? The movie begins with the story of the killer. He, in his conversations with the psychologist, catching a debate about what led to the arrest. He climbed a mountain with friends and, at one point, had to decide between saving his life by cutting the rope that bound him to the other, which would make them fall and die, or continue and be supportive, and probably die along with them. After performing this act and being arrested, he claims that everyone does it. Upon his release, the psychologist asks if he still believes this and the answer is no.

The scene changes radically, moving the focus to young people who went to a summer house to celebrate the fact that they finished graduation. However, soon appears the killer, which seeks to place them in the same situation he had to prove his thesis (ideologeme) that all human beings fight for survival and, following his instincts, can kill up to friends. The house is fully insulated and there was no communication and it required that they kill each other and the survivor left at 6:00 A.M., will live, but if at that time there is still more one person living, he'll kill everyone. The film's plot revolves around it, showing the escape attempts, conflicts, etc.

The ideologeme in question is a common fragment of various ideologies that point to biological determinism, but is based on the Darwinian ideology and theory of the struggle for survival and the survival of the fittest<sup>4</sup>. The competition and intra species struggle is naturalized and enhanced by this ideology and its vulgarization and popularization, in which certain ideologemes can be identified in phrases such as "struggle for life", "survival of the fittest", etc.

At first, the ideologeme seems to be confirmed as the group of good friends – who in the early evening were partying and the son of the owner of the house who said he loved all end up conflicting, and some seek to save themselves independently of the others until – in the end begin to enter in the killer's game and try to kill friends to escape death. But at its end, the film ends up being marked by an act of solidarity, which refutes the ideologeme. In this sense, the film is not an ideologeme because it performs a rebuttal to the ideologeme. And it shows that ideologemes, like ideologies, is a mobilizer,

produces action and interferes with reality<sup>5</sup>.

## 7. Final Considerations

Capitalist society is lavish in producing illusions. Capitalism is a society of illusions. Of course, the rationalization and the alleged belief in advances in science and technology, among other things, produce an illusion of overcoming illusions. The illusion of illusions is the most problematic of illusions. Obviously, the intellectual effort, research, reflection, are important for such improvement, but not enough, if not from a perspective which has the need, value, purpose, overcoming the illusions and, especially, if the social relations that are the illusions of society base is overcome. That is why Marx said that "the requirement to overcome the illusions about its condition is the demand to overcome a condition that requires illusions" (MARX, 1968).

We approach the two main forms of illusion in contemporary society, the imaginary and ideology, as well as the transformation of one into another. In previous work we have already placed a discussion of this issue (VIANA, 2008), but we feel the need to return to the subject to clarify some aspects that were not developed or perceived at that time, such as the existence of ideologemes, and this was the main focus of our analysis. To further clarify the meaning of the concept of ideologeme, we start from an example of a film that expressed a certain ideologeme. In the case we chose a film that expressed one ideologeme without, however, affirming it. This shows one of the possibilities of ideologemes manifestation in artistic production, because it can be the position expressed by those who produce a certain artistic work or can be presented to be refuted. The most common, however, is that the ideologemes are the views of the producers of culture and artistic works, as it is in accordance with the dominant everyday representations, the dominant ideas.

Finally, this text opens up a space for a discussion that should be deepened and that only launches an initial reflection that should have insights and developments, aimed at increasing the understanding of imagination, ideologies and ideologemes.

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<sup>4</sup> About Darwinism, check Viana (2009).

<sup>5</sup> On another occasion we present a further analysis on mobilizing character of ideology (VIANA, 2010), which also applies to the ideologeme and through it, it becomes even more mobilizing.

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