

Journeys through the Ideological Unconscious

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*Marx, Althusser
and Juan Carlos Rodríguez*

By

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For Konrad

CONTENTS

Preface.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Part 1	
Chapter 1	8
What we Talk about when we Talk about Marxism	
Chapter 2	37
Towards a Notion of the Ideological Unconscious	
Chapter 3	60
More Thoughts on the Libidinal and Ideological Unconscious	
Chapter 4	97
Making the Break: Science and Ideology during the Transition	
Part II	
Chapter 5	136
Machiavelli, Althusser, and the Autonomy of Politics	
Chapter 6	169
Ideologies of Slavery in the Spanish American Empire	
Chapter 7	194
A Servant of the Lord: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz	
Chapter 8	222
In the Tracks of the Sublime: From Surplus Knowledge to Surplus Value	

Conclusion 253

Bibliography..... 259

PREFACE

Rodríguez chose to treat the muted reception that greeted his *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* (1974) as a 'boon'. 'I mean this in the sense that, firstly, it has hardly been possible to say anything serious "against" my book; and, secondly, that it has been possible, during the silent course of the years, to utilize its formulations fruitfully and with positive results' (2002, 33). He does not elaborate, but the logic of his situation is obvious enough. Writing in the wake of the Civil War, the price of Spain's belated entry into 'modernity', and against the backdrop of a 'transition' from dictatorship to liberal democracy, the latter poised to embark upon a precipitous embrace of 'postmodernity', Rodríguez found himself located at a point of cultural convergence, generative of multifarious contradictions. These, it transpired, would constitute an ideal vantage point from which to theorize the existence of an 'ideological unconscious', to which a more homogenous metropolitan culture was largely blind.

The logic that explains Rodríguez's insights also explains the silence with which these were received. The ideological unconscious, as theorized in *Teoría e historia*, was simply *not visible*, could not be *thought*, from the standpoint of an Anglophone academy, whose dominant empiricism and pragmatism were resistant to 'philosophy' or 'theory' and whose practitioners were as suspicious of 'ideology' as they were of 'the unconscious'. From the outset, then, *Teoría e historia* was destined to be 'a dog that didn't bark'. Seeing such a fate as a boon or blessing might have been stretching a point. But there can be no objection to Rodríguez's second claim, regarding the fertility of the research programme that ensued: *La norma literaria* (1984) extended Rodríguez's range into the 18th, 19th and early twentieth centuries; *La literatura del pobre* (1994) and *El hombre que compró su propio libro* (2003), lent further substance to his earlier insights, while other works addressed such modern writers as Mallarmé (1994), Brecht (1998) and Althusser (2003), aspects of the cinema (2005) and popular culture (2003, 2015) and theoretical issues surrounding Marxism (2013). The result is a body of

scholarship comparable to that of Terry Eagleton, say, or of Fred Jameson, and arguably superior to either. Its neglect by the international academy, however predictable, can only be described as nothing short of scandalous.

There were, of course, limitations, as was to be expected of any scholar, although many of these can be traced to Rodríguez's professional location beyond the frontiers of liberal-democratic society, hence to his being deprived of some of the material advantages that come with membership of this society. Rodríguez would reflect, anecdotally, that Althusser's wife, Hélène, was one of the few people truly to appreciate the difficulties of his lot, compared to that of his fellow students at the Rue d'Ulm. We are talking not simply about the repressions to be expected from a dictatorial society but about a lack of practical, material support, in the form of travel grants, research libraries, publishing outlets, and editorial assistance of a professional kind, such as are taken for granted by scholars in privileged, First-World institutions. It would be ungracious, however, and wholly unjust, to allow such imperfections to eclipse recognition of the intellectual qualities of the collective oeuvre. When it came to breaking through the accumulated layers of Catholic orthodoxy, to dismantling some of the most cherished convictions of bourgeois ideology, to analyzing an ideological unconscious every bit as tenacious as its libidinal equivalent, Rodríguez's intelligence rarely failed him, his valour never, notwithstanding the personal and professional costs involved.

I confess to having felt quite envious of Rodríguez when I first came across *Teoría e historia* in the early 1980s. Here, I realized, was an author with the courage of his convictions, who had broken with bourgeois ideology very early on in his career and had charted a clearly defined course through the academy. The concept of a scientific break, it is true, was by no means unknown to me, at least in the form of a *gestalt switch*, as analyzed by Thomas Kuhn. Moreover, I had even experienced a break of my own, following an encounter with Freud, as mediated through such texts as Norman Brown's *Life against Death* and Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death*, and while the inner recesses of the Freudian psyche were certainly very different from the matrix effect of a social formation, the libidinal unconscious undoubtedly had enough in common with its ideological counterpart to make me receptive to the ideas of Rodríguez. That said, the contrasts between our respective situations were enormous:

steeped as he was in the tradition of Continental rationalism, and battle-hardened through his struggle with a fascist dictatorship, Juan Carlos had been able to cut straight through to Marxism; I, on the other hand, despite my working-class exposure to a socialist tradition, was held fast by British empiricism, a blandly reformist Labourism, and a deeply conservative British Hispanism, into whose disciplinary backwater I had happened, in all innocence, to swim. Rodríguez was in a position simply to take the Althusserian problematic for granted, whereas for me it proved to be a completely unknown quantity that, however compelling at first blush, would need to be carefully thought through. The chapters contained within the present volume are, in large measure, a record of the process involved.

Acknowledgements are gratefully made to the editors of the following journals, where earlier versions of some of these essays first appeared: *Hispanic Research Journal* for 'From Feudalism to Capitalism: Ideologies of Slavery in the Spanish American Empire', 4 (2) (2003); *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* for 'Racism and Commodity Character Structure: The Case of Sab', 10 (1) (2004) and 'Further Thoughts on the History of the Unconscious: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz', 19 (2) (2013); *Mediations* for 'What We Talk About When We Talks About Marxism: Juan Carlos Rodríguez, Althusser, and the Ideological Unconscious' 29 (1) (2015); and *Historical Materialism* for 'Towards a Notion of the Ideological Unconscious: Marx, Althusser, Juan Carlos Rodríguez', (2018).

Thanks are due to my son, Konrad, with whom I discussed my text during long walks over the hills of Derbyshire during periods of Covid lockdown; to my wife, Susan, for her editorial input; and to former students and colleagues, for their support over the decades. I confess to being the most stubborn of authors in the face of criticism, and must, therefore, assume full responsibility for any errors and shortcomings that remain.

INTRODUCTION

This work sets out to explore in depth the theories of Juan Carlos Rodríguez, a former student of Althusser, whose research programme spanned more than five decades from the early 1960s to his death in 2017. Taken in combination with my earlier *Juan Carlos Rodríguez and his Contemporaries*, it is hoped that it will serve to extend the influence of the Spaniard's ideas among an Anglophile public still relatively unfamiliar with them. In essence, the author of *Theory and History of Ideological Production* took as his base line Althusser's fundamental principle that ideology lacks the internal resources with which to escape from itself; that, in brief, *'there is no dialectic of consciousness'*. Rodríguez's own contributions to the discussion consisted, firstly, of his insistence upon the *radical historicity* of culture ('Literature has not always existed') and, secondly, of his concept of an *ideological unconscious*, operative at the level of the social formation. Both were broadly formulated along the following lines: *substantialism*, the dominant ideology of feudalism, knew only the opposition between lord and serf; the subject, per se, only appeared with *animism*, the first form of bourgeois ideology, in the 15th and 16th centuries; this bourgeois ideology would subsequently undergo various transformations, through Galilean mechanicism, Cartesian rationalism and, eventually, classic empiricism and its offshoots. My aim, in the following chapters, will be to explore these themes in greater detail.

Chapter I will consist of a review of one of Rodríguez's last works, *De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de marxismo* (2013), through which to present an overall picture of Rodríguez's take on Marxist theory in general. The text opens with an assessment of the history and current situation of Marxism, mediated through several 'intermissions' on the work, respectively, of Nicos Poulantzas and Roy Bhaskar; followed by the introduction from *Theory and History*, which spells out the theoretical basis of his work; this, in turn, by analyses of the *Manifiesto*, Althusser, Brecht and Foucault. The key throughout is Rodríguez's emphasis upon

capitalism as a system of *exploitation*, also the extent to which the system operates through the mechanism of the ideological unconscious.

Chapter 2 converges more directly upon Rodríguez's theorization of the ideological unconscious. In the context of the recent economic crisis, it is argued, scholars have once again felt compelled to revisit the work of Althusser. Regretfully, however, they have done so only to repeat earlier criticism and to demonstrate their continuing inability to come to terms with the crucial Althusserian notion of ideological *unconsciousness*, which they insist on viewing through the prism of the libidinal (Lacanian) unconscious. Perforce, the latter concept, and its associated categories, has then proceeded insidiously to corrode Marxism's indigenous categories from within. In this chapter, we will be concerned to trace the history of the ideological unconscious from its beginnings in Marx, through Althusser, to its explicit reformulation, in the work of Rodríguez, as an ideological unconscious, understood as the matrix effect of the social formation.

Chapter 3 interweaves the diverse threads constitutive, respectively, of the ideological and libidinal versions of the unconscious, both at the levels of theory and of historical analysis. Theoretically, to surrender the concept of the unconscious to psychoanalysis is, in effect, to block the possibility of developing its ideological equivalent. By equating the unconscious with an abyss that precedes formation of the subject, Althusser invites the likes of Žižek to resurrect the notion of a sublime subject, about which nothing can be known. Rodríguez will subvert this sublimatory process on the grounds that the libidinal unconscious is always already encompassed and pervaded by its ideological equivalent. We will proceed to lend substance to his argument through the consideration of texts of the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

Chapter 4 addresses three instances of the 'break' between theory and ideology: firstly, that which, allegedly, characterized the work of Marx, separating thereby the theoretician of 'species being' from the theoretician of surplus value; secondly, that enacted by Althusser with respect to Hegel, and subsequently theorized by him; and, thirdly, that embraced by Rodríguez and applied to the break between feudalism and capitalism. The Spaniard specifically has in mind the break from feudal 'science' to modern science, in evidence in the opposition between 'impetus' and 'inertia'. To lend further substance to the discussion, we

will analyze the thirteenth-century text, *Las siete partidas*, by Alfonso el Sabio; the work of the early Spanish humanist, Luis Vives; the *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (1575) by Juan Huarte de San Juan, and *La vida es sueño* (1636), by the dramatist Calderón de la Barca.

Chapter 5 takes as its point of departure the critique of the subject-oriented paradigm of British Marxism mounted by Nicos Poulantzas in the 1960s, from a structuralist, Althusserian standpoint. Rodríguez took up Poulantzas' thematic and reformulated it along the lines of an ideological unconscious. We will proceed to elaborate the details of his argument with reference to two Spanish texts: firstly, the famous 'coplas' or verses of Jorge Manrique (1440?-79), through which to capture the dynamics of substantialism, and, secondly, Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina* (1499, 1502) or *The Spanish Bawd*, as it is commonly known in English, through which to explore the animist understanding of 'Fortune', within the parameters of an increasingly secular world. Both texts, in conjunction with a consideration of the Revolt of the Comuneros (1520-21), will set the scene for an in-depth study of the figure of Machiavelli.

Chapter 6 puts Rodríguez's problematic to work in the analysis of ideologies of slavery in the Spanish American Empire. It targets at the outset two contrasting positions on racism: one that claims racism to be deeply embedded in European culture, the other that it arises only belatedly, in modern social formations. Both positions are insufficiently attentive to the historicity of the relevant categories, notably that of 'slavery'. The latter is always an ideological, historically localized notion, which is secreted by prevailing relations of production that are themselves subject to change, in accordance with the general functioning of a social formation. It is always vitally important to weigh the prevailing concept of 'slavery' against the notion of 'freedom' contemporary with it. Under feudalism, servile notions, embedded in the dominant ideology of substantialism, set precise limits upon 'freedom', which consisted largely in the 'freedom to serve one's lord'. This substantialist position was challenged in the 16th century by animism, the ideology of an emergent bourgeoisie, that opposed slavery on the grounds of the innate, inalienable freedom of the 'beautiful soul' or proto-subject. We will conclude with an analysis of the 19th-century Cuban novel, *Sab*, through which to trace the emergence of a singularly vicious epidermal racism, coincidental with the promotion of the classic bourgeois notion of the 'freedom of the individual'.

Chapter 7 similarly puts Rodríguez's concept to the test of its object, this time with respect to the situation of women and, specifically, that of Juan Inés de la Cruz, the Mexican nun. Crucially, it measures the distance of earlier notions of the 'servant of the Lord' and the 'beautiful soul' from those of feminist critics who unthinkingly take as their starting point the key bourgeois concept of the 'free subject' (including the free female subject). Sor Juana's writing is to be located historically within a confluence of 16th- and 17th-century ideologies that transcend the level of individuality. These ideologies serve, in the case of Sor Juana, as a basis from which to develop the Althusserian concept of an ideological unconscious. Taken in combination with its libidinal counterpart, this ideological unconscious serves in turn to theorize how, in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, modes of production enlist gender to prosecute their exploitative practices.

Chapter 8 explores the causally mediated connection between the concept of the sublime and the extraction of surplus value. In its embryonic form, the sublime first emerges as the product of the impact of a resurgent substantialism, otherwise known as the 'Baroque', upon the embryonic forms of an emergent bourgeois ideology. Jean Joseph Goux's theorizes this *ascendent* sublime through the prism of its 'homologous' relation to the various social levels. The 'Romantic' reaction to industrialization gives rise to the petty-bourgeois concept of a *descendent* sublime, as the precondition of artistic creativity. The work of Anton Ehrenzweig furnishes a theorization of the libidinal mechanisms involved. We will conclude with a consideration of the relation between the sublime and science or 'theory'. Our approach throughout is sustained through the close analysis of selected literary texts.

I would at the outset discourage any attempt to read the above chapters as exercises in the 'history of Spanish literature', an important consideration, given their proximity to 'lit crit'. Within the Anglophone tradition, practitioners have tended to be dismissive of 'theory' as so much idle speculation or, at most, something to be enlisted in a subsidiary role. My position will be radically different insofar as explicitly focused upon theory. I am hopeful that Althusserians, at least, will understand the importance of such distinctions, mindful as they are of the need to produce knowledge as opposed to the mere classification of data, even as they accept the need for additional specificity, at a more historically determinate level; also, that they will be tolerant of a

dialectical *modus operandi* that advances by juxtaposing sections of close readings to others of a more theoretical bent. British and North American Hispanists, it is to be anticipated, will be rather less well disposed to such a tactic, accustomed as they are to *apply* theory that has been developed elsewhere and to think in terms of 'illustrations' and 'examples', as opposed to the transformation of concepts (Read 2003).

For their part, some social and political scientists may feel uncomfortable *in principle* with my recourse to literature, as an evidential basis on which to ground sociological discussion. Such a basis, it might well be felt, is so contaminated by aesthetics as to place literary theory at a polar extreme to the 'hard' sciences and so disqualify its claim to scientific status. To such unease, the immediate response must be that such recourse comes with the subject matter – Rodríguez confesses at the outset to being concerned with 'the first bourgeois literatures' – and necessarily determines the focus of the present text. More productively, the scientists in question might consider the advantages to be gained from a literary bias. These stem from the capacity of the literary text to exteriorize or objectify the relevant ideological mechanisms in transferential terms, by raising them, as it were, to the *second power*. Just as the libidinal unconscious can become conscious only through projection into the external world, we would argue, so does the ideological unconscious only become conscious by being *enacted*, among other ways, through literature.

A final point: I have chosen to work through English translations of the relevant Spanish texts. Exceptions are made in the case of poetry and drama where the translation is included in brackets under the original; also in chapter 4, in which the ideological complexities of translation are the point at issue. This decision was taken reluctantly: clearly, had space permitted, I would have preferred to retain the Spanish, alongside the English, throughout. That, certainly, would have appealed to those scholars 'housed' within 'Hispanic studies', who may feel somewhat outraged to see their classic texts so 'traded'. And truth to say, a total dependence upon translations raises theoretical issues that are far from trivial. That said, literary linguisticism itself comes at a price, which, in the case of Hispanism, has been that of intellectual isolation and a parasitic relation to more 'advanced' disciplines. The present text, it should by now be clear, aims to transcend the boundaries of Hispanic studies and, indeed, of literary studies in general, to engage the attention of

theoreticians at an inter-disciplinary level. To achieve such a goal, the widespread use of translation seemed a relatively small price to pay. Unless otherwise stated, the translations throughout are my own and are intended to be as literal as possible.

PART I

CHAPTER 1

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT MARXISM

A whole superstructure of different and specifically formed feelings, illusions, modes of thought and views of life arises on the basis of the different forms of property, of the social conditions of existence. The whole class creates and forms these out of its material foundations and corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives these feelings, etc. through tradition and upbringing, may well imagine they form the real determinants and the starting-point of his activity. (Karl Marx)

Older British Hispanists will recall, at a time when Spain was still living under the Franco regime, those slightly bizarre conversations in university common rooms during which they were interrogated, only half-jokingly, by their colleagues in English and French, as to why Spain 'had no philosophers to talk of and no novelists apart from Cervantes'. Such cultural insensitivity was not something that these same Hispanists were intellectually equipped to offset, nurtured as they were on a strange ideological brew of British empiricism and medieval Scholasticism. Rodríguez, it followed, as a theoretician of Marxism, became the victim of a double occlusion, at the hands, firstly, of a British academy dismissive of things Spanish and, secondly, of a British Hispanism indifferent, when not openly antagonistic, to Marxism. Unsurprisingly, translations into English of *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica: las primeras literaturas burguesas* and *La norma literaria* would be turned down by university presses – precisely what kind of audience could there be for works on a non-existent Spanish literature, and Marxist works to boot? – and by Left-wing presses – was not the 'fall' of Althusserianism a proven fact? *De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de marxismo* (2013), to be reviewed here, effectively circumvents such obstacle to its reception through its discussion of such major writers as Brecht, Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Roy Bhaskar, and Michel Foucault, in addition to addressing the key issue

of the 'break' between the early and late Marx. What was there not to be of interest to any reasonably alert intellectual? More usefully, in the present context, *De qué hablamos* constitutes a perfect vantage point from which to view the career trajectory of Rodríguez. We propose to adopt a somewhat oblique approach to it, through its critical 'interlude' directed against Roy Bhaskar and his school of Critical Realism.

Subjects in history

The first thing to strike one about the Bhaskerian interlude (Rodríguez 2013, 46-50) is the petulance, even brutality of the language used to characterize a philosophical school that, at least by its own reckoning, boasts a close affinity with Marxism and socialism. Critical Realism amounts to a 'mickey-take', also to 'one more caricature of Marxism' (48-49). The second is its partiality: Rodríguez analyzes only one section of a single work of Bhaskar's, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979), which compares Utilitarianism, Weber, and Durkheim with Marx, and, even then, limits his discussion to the ontological status of the individual/society dichotomy upon which the comparison allegedly rests. 'To insert Marxism there is to sink it, to not understand anything', Rodríguez writes (49). Why? For the simple reason that, as Marx explains in the *Grundrisse*, contrary to what is implied by the theory of the social contract and, Rodríguez would add, Bhaskar's Critical Realism, individuals are historical constructs of a determinate set of social relations, which are always relations of exploitation ('something that never occurs to Bhaskar') (49). The Althusserian is emphatic: the dichotomy between individual and society 'is completely diluted in Marx' (49). To think from a Marxist standpoint, his argument runs, is to reject any notion that the individual exists *prior to* its social configuration, under pain of remaining captive, *at the level of the ideological unconscious*, to bourgeois categories that are mistakenly taken for ontological realities. In a footnote, Rodríguez will further claim that Bhaskar's discussion of the contrast to be drawn between ideology and scientific truth constitutes a series of commonplaces of the kind to be found in 'any manual of "rationalist positivism"' (48n27).

Now, in one fundamental respect at least Rodríguez's exposition of Bhaskar's work is quite inaccurate. For, contrary to what is implied throughout, the Critical Realist consistently argues that, far from

preceding society, the individual must follow it. Thus: '[I]f society is always already made, then any concrete human praxis, or, if you like, act of objectivation can only modify it; and the totality of such acts sustain or change it' (Bhaskar 1989, 34). And it is hard to understand how the Spaniard, who is normally an attentive reader, missed an order of priorities that is consistently hammered home. Thus: '... society pre-exists the individual' and 'all activity presupposes the prior existence of social forms' (34). Spontaneous acts have as their necessary condition the pre-existence of a social form by means of which they are generated. Confirmation is found in the fact that – and here Bhaskar is surely echoing the opening pages of Marx's *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973a, 84) – speech requires (social) language. To conclude, there is a dialectical nuance that Rodríguez is simply not grasping: 'Society is both the ever-present *condition* (material cause) and the continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency. And praxis is both work, that is, conscious *production*, and (normally unconscious) *reproduction* of the conditions of production, that is society' (1989, 34-35).

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the Spaniard's reading of Critical Realism on this account. True, his preoccupation with the pre-existence of the individual is misleading, at least as far as Bhaskar is concerned, but he has every right to be concerned, from his own standpoint, about the philosopher's insistence on the 'ontological gulf' that separates 'people' from 'society'. For what that gulf blocks is any understanding of the ideological unconscious, as theorized by Rodríguez. To remind ourselves: 'I want to distinguish sharply', Bhaskar writes, 'between the genesis of human actions, lying in the reasons, intentions and plans of people, on the one hand, and the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of social activities on the other; and hence between the domains of the psychological and the social sciences' (35). Bhaskar, we have seen, certainly accepts that the unconscious is operative in the reproduction of conditions of production. But the ontological hiatus upon which he otherwise insists cuts psychology off from the social, thereby confirming our suspicions that the unconscious he has in mind is of the Freudian, libidinal variety. Nor is the situation solved by reference to the *mediation* of trans-individual mechanisms through (discrete) individualities. To think within such categorial parameters, as the Spaniard correctly intuits, is to remain captive to the dominant bourgeois ideological unconscious,

which perforce departs from the opposition between structure and agency.

Marxism's point of departure, by way of contrast, is the social formation, articulated on the basis of a mode of production, the latter characterized (according to Althusserianism) by its distinctive economic, political and ideological instances, each assigned its function by the historical matrix of the structure as a whole. The articulation of these instances, internalized by social individualities, be they masters, slaves, lords, serfs, subjects, etc., defines all possible practices and gives them a determinate class-based character. The ideological unconscious, understood within this problematic, may be defined as the matrix effect of the social formation, secreted 'originally' through the relations of production but 'subsequently' legitimated and (consciously?) formalized through the State Ideological Apparatus. Its *modus operandi* is that of a *humus* or *magma* that always already pervades a social formation, in the light of which Rodríguez was surely right to anticipate that the attempt by Critical Realism to locate Marxism within the individual / society framework could only lead, sooner rather than later, to a celebration of the 'freedom of the individual' and to the marginalization of the key Marxist concept of exploitation. There is nothing to suggest that the Spaniard has familiarized himself with Bhaskar's subsequent work, but presumably its turn toward a new age spiritualism would hardly have come to him as a surprise.¹

Rodríguez's own position, it should be said, is not without its problems. For if, as he insists, individuals are always already pre-determined by an ideological unconscious, it remains a key question, of considerable practical, political interest, as to how these same individuals can possibly come to understand, never mind resist, the forces that oppress them. Rodríguez, to be sure, is careful to qualify the reach of ideological determination: 'Of course, this does not mean that one cannot break with one's own ideological unconscious, by becoming conscious of one's situation and of the real structure in which one is inscribed (conscious at least to a certain extent)' (2013, 50). But that says little to those critics who have legitimately pointed, firstly, to the absence from Althusser 'of any reference to the history of strategic thinking on the Marxist Left – from the Second International to the Bolshevik tradition' (Elliott 1987,

¹ For a more detailed critique of Critical Realism, along the same Althusserian lines, see Read 2013.

299) and, secondly, to an unresolved tension within Althusserianism between functionalism and voluntarism (Elliott 1987, 326). These are by no means minor considerations, and before we proceed to substantiate the theoretical basis of Rodríguez's work, we will regress, in terms of our review of *De qué hablamos*, to weigh the consequences for politics, and, in particular, for Spanish politics, of the all-encompassing notion of an ideological unconscious.

'Spain is different'

The problem facing Marxists, according to Rodríguez, is that the infrastructure of exploitation is so refracted under capitalism as to blind its victims to the reality of their oppression: the extraction of the social surplus, it bears repeating, takes place indirectly, at the economic level, through the buying and selling of lives.² Particularly afflicted in this regard has been the Spanish Communist Party, notwithstanding the prestige it accrued traditionally as the major oppositional force to fascism. What the SCP failed to see in the post-Franco decades, because it considered it 'exterior' to its concerns, was the internationalization of monopoly capitalism, materialized in the financial structures of power and concentrated quintessentially in the presence of the American embassy. 'Which explains why the Marxist Left hardly spoke of the economic reality that enveloped Francoism. The only talk was of how to finish off Francoism politically and of how to foreground the question "And after Franco, what?"' (2013, 27). Sustaining such a discourse was the Stalinist allegiance to the notion of 'socialism in one country', the equivalent tactically of fighting on the enemy's territory. In effect, the SCP fell into the trap of thinking in terms of an authentic internal isolation. And with predictable results: principally, the Party found itself gradually drawn into a singularly debased brand of liberal politics and, for its own part, affiliating ever more closely to a reformism that would eventually lead to its own eclipse. To explore this process in further detail, Rodríguez turned to the work of the Greek Marxist, Nicos Poulantzas.

² This process was further obscured in more recent times by the arrival of the internet: our socio-vital relations are now so deeply rooted in our ideological unconscious 'that we do not perceive them' (Rodríguez 2013, 10n3).

Published in 1978 and now neglected, along with the rest of Poulantzas' work ('one more enigma among others' [32]), *State, Power, Socialism* furnishes an effective prism through which to view the political processes in evidence in post-Franco Spain. In direct reversal of his earlier work, in which he had emphasized the monolithic power of State hegemony, in this work Poulantzas specifically includes popular struggles within the domain of the State and its relevant apparatuses. According to Rodríguez, this additional complexity was achieved at a price, namely the marginalization of class exploitation. The Greek's covert design was to bypass the Leninist image of *dual power*, otherwise the opposition between the bourgeois State and the Party laying siege to it (32-33). His fear was that the associated narrative, which spoke of the fall of the fortress-state, masked what would likely ensue, namely the suppression of democratic liberties. Eventually, it would transpire, even the soviets would be absorbed into the Party, which accordingly would be identified with the State. While never suggesting that Lenin and Gramsci were anything other than embryonic Stalinists, Poulantzas had seemingly become distrustful of the power of the masses and preferred to focus instead upon contradictions internal to the State, understood in terms of the correlation of forces within Parliament and Ideological State Apparatuses.

Now this is all very well, except that, according to Rodríguez, Poulantzas is forgetting one crucial factor, namely the operations of the matrix effect of the social formation, which determines that, in the case of Western democracies, the kind of State in question is thoroughly capitalist. And what was true of the political instance was equally true at the level of its ideological counterpart, whose central tenet – 'I am born free' – was inscribed in every interstice of the social edifice. Indeed, so pervasive was this tenet that, after the death of Franco, liberal ideologues successfully cast the SCP as the 'enemy of freedom'. How could it be otherwise, the prevailing rhetoric ran, given the Party's role as a totalitarian satellite of the USSR? What more was one to expect of what remained a relic of the civil war? For when all was said and done, was not Eurocommunism still communism? And however much the Party surrendered in political terms, notably through the Moncloa Pact, the more vulnerable to this caricature it appeared to be.

But it was not simply the orthodox CP that was under threat – we are still summarizing Rodríguez's account – but Marxism itself. The message that

the market is fundamentally exploitative needed to be silenced, if, that is, capitalist restructuring was to take effect. And silenced it was. Of course, a few figures continued to offer resistance, notably Althusser and his followers, Manuel Sacristán in Spain, some British historians, such as Christopher Hill, Maurice Dobb, Perry Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and, in America, Paul Sweeny and Paul Baran, not to mention the odd cultural critic, such as Raymond Williams. But by the mid-1980s it was all over, and some of these same individuals had surrendered to the illusion that it was possible to operate through the capitalist state, even as the latter was being overrun by neo-liberalism. Not that parties such as Labour in Britain or the Socialist Workers Party in Spain cared: both were in any case soon abandoning any pretence to be fighting for socialism. And, finally, the fall of the USSR completely sealed the fate of social democracy in general, so much so that even postmodernism, with its deconstructions and linguistic play, trembled to its roots. 'There was now no alternative but to accept an established neo-liberalism' (46). And at this point a terrible truth emerged: capitalism's capacity to regulate itself was conditional upon its fear of the oppressed; once this fear had dissipated, it felt free to run riot, which is exactly what it proceeded to do.

The ideological unconscious

The second section of *De qué hablamos* reproduces the Introduction to *Teoría e historia*, which spells out in detail what Rodríguez understands by the 'ideological unconscious'. As should be immediately apparent, the text is deeply indebted for its own theoretical framework to Althusser and to the latter's focus upon the 'mode of production', understood as a 'structure in dominance', consisting of its economic, political, and ideological levels or 'instances'. The primacy or 'determinacy' of the economic, to briefly remind ourselves, is refracted, 'in the last instance', through the matrix effect of the 'social formation' as a whole, in which one of the other instances may otherwise be 'dominant'. The 'relative autonomy' of each instance manifests itself in the form of a transitive or 'linear' causality, overdetermined by the intransitive effectivity of the whole. Important though such concepts are for the Spaniard, even more so is, firstly, the Althusserian insistence upon the need to break with the bourgeois subject/object paradigm and, secondly, the notion that ideology constitutes a system of representations that are 'secreted' by

the prevailing social relations and legitimized in the Ideological State Apparatus.

While these and other such formulations had the immediate effect of undercutting the notion of a consciousness transparent to itself, much remained to be worked out: the lived relation between individuals and their world, Althusser had argued somewhat confusingly, 'only appears as "conscious" on condition that it is unconscious, in the same way that it only appears simple on condition that it is complex, that it is not a simple relation but a relation between relations, a second degree relation' (Althusser 1990a, 233). To compound the mystification, Althusser had also begun to flirt with Lacanian psychoanalysis, whose category of the libidinal unconscious, along with its associated concepts, was far more developed than its Marxist ideological equivalent and, once introduced into Marxism, began to corrode the latter's indigenous categories from within.

Upon all of this, the work of Rodríguez represents a significant advance. To begin with, while Althusser had emphasized the *unconsciousness* of ideology, it fell to the Spaniard to formulate theoretically the substantive notion of an *ideological unconscious*, an innovation achieved through his focus upon the invention of the proto-form of the bourgeois subject, through which, in the struggle against feudalism, the bound serf is displaced by the proletarian 'free' to sell his/her labour power.

The notion of the subject (and the whole problematic within which it is inscribed) is radically historical because [...] it is secreted directly (and exclusively) from the very matrix of the bourgeois ideological unconscious: the 'serf' can never be a 'subject', etc. But for that very reason also the theoretical perspectives originating in the same bourgeois ideology will never be able to accept that their own unconscious is at root an ideological (that is to say, historical) issue, but will always believe that the elements and logic peculiar to such an 'unconscious' constitute the truth about the human condition, in all its clarity. (Rodríguez 2013, 76)

The ideological unconscious in question sustains, among other things, the modern notion of literature, understood as the 'inner truth' or creative intimacy of an interiorized individual, be this an 'author' who, by definition, is able freely to express him/herself in 'his' or 'her' work, or a 'reader' who, similarly, is free to interpret a work as s/he sees fit. The object undergoes a corresponding liberation: from a signature (of its

Lord), it is transformed into a *literal thing*, exposed to the gaze of the subject. To appreciate fully the force of such cultural transformations, it suffices to draw a contrast with the feudal scribe who 'comments' upon the only 'books' known to feudalism, namely the Bible and the Book of the World, an activity subject to all manner of interpretive norms and constraints and, in consequence, potentially precarious to life and limb. The bulk of the population was saved from such concerns by the fact that it was maintained in a state of illiteracy.

The message is clear: the Spaniard will have no truck with the Althusserian notion of a universalized subject of ideology and will, more broadly, take his distance from Althusser's alleged ahistoricism and philosophism. The 'serf' and 'subject', according to his view, are to be understood as simply the privileged categories or *notions* through which is objectified the basic *functioning* or internal operations of the feudal or bourgeois matrices. It would be a grave error, Rodríguez argues, to confuse the categories with the functioning: the distinction, a crucial one, is that between what a social formation *says it is* and what it *actually* is. Each ideological matrix attributes to its relevant categories the character of essential, unalterable realities that determine the way in which people understand themselves and so live their lives. The ideological matrix, so defined, simply reproduces, at its own level, the basic class contradiction that constitutes a particular set of social relations. The importance that Rodríguez attributes to the latter is what distinguishes him from some of his fellow Althusserians, in whom attention shifts from the matrix effect of the whole social formation to its corresponding Ideological State Apparatuses. And with radical consequences, against which Rodríguez warns: '... while admittedly the "school" is a State Apparatus, it is not what "creates" ideology, but, at best, only what materializes and reproduces it' (87). The Spaniard elaborates: '... the dialectic inscribed in literary texts (what produces them as such, their internal logic) is the expression of an *ideological unconscious* that is not "born" in the school, but directly within the actual social relations and is secreted only from them' (87). There is, allegedly, an unmistakable whiff of Weberian 'institutional sociology' about the converse claim, namely that it is the material institution (the Protestant church) that creates ideology (the Protestant religion) (87). At this point let us return to *Theory and History* in order to pursue the details of Rodríguez's argument.

Private versus public

Spanish Absolutism, it transpires, is characterized by the co-existence of two conflicting sets of social relations, the first associated with a feudal aristocracy and the second with an emergent bourgeoisie, whose equally conflictual ideologies, respectively those of *substantialism* or *organicism*, on the one hand, and *animism*, on the other, determine the nature of cultural (re)production. These sets combine, according to Rodríguez, in a single structure, a public/private dialectic, that, while ultimately favourable to capitalist development, is characterized increasingly throughout the 16th century by a resurgent feudalism. The dialectic translates, in Althusserian terms, into the *dominance* of a *relatively autonomous* political instance, *determined* at the primary level by economic forces struggling to impose the logic of their own development within the *private* sphere but thwarted at the level of the State.

What is it, Rodríguez will ask, that causes the relations of 'service' (between serf and lord) to pass over into another, radically different set of relations, involving those between subjects? His answer is categorical: 'Obviously, the appearance of a new social force, the bourgeoisie, not only as a "class" but as the bearer of a specific mode of production ("capitalism", here in its first "mercantilist" phase) radically opposed to the feudal mode of production' (2002, 103). It is important in this context, the Spaniard will argue, not to get carried away by one's enthusiasms. The battle between the feudal aristocracy and the emergent bourgeoisie is one thing, that between conflicting sets of social relations, another. The problem with the former is that it invites the personification of classes, specifically in the form of a transcendental or Hegelian subject. Social relations, by way of contrast, cannot be thought within the category of the subject. As far as these are concerned, the only important question relates to whether, and in what circumstances, the final exit from feudalism was achieved, whether through the cities, as in Italy in the 14th century, or the absolutist state.

To substantiate his argument, Rodríguez draws upon the *Epístolas familiares* (translated as *The Golden Letters*) of Fray Antonio de Guevara, as they relate to the rebellion of the *Comuneros*. Guevara's text, the Spaniard argues, demonstrates irrefutably that it mattered very little precisely which individuals, whether noble or otherwise, were the ones to undertake the defence of 'liberties', to resist taxation, to reject the

hierarchy of 'bloods', to question the existence of 'lords', and so on. What mattered was the attempt at implementation of bourgeois relations in their first mercantilist phase, towards which both contending parties, the 'State' and the 'cities', contributed in their different ways.

For this reason, when he condemns bourgeois 'excesses', Guevara (like Charles V, in a certain sense) does so from the standpoint of the 'public level', a structure that [...] permeates his writings and personal attitude in general from top to bottom. This 'public level' imposed itself on the basis of the need to 'coexist' both with the ("dominant") seigneurial organization and the bottomless appetites of the 'mercantile' bourgeois fractions. (2002, 112)

Cashing in the details of his analysis theoretically, Rodríguez nuances the concentration of two competing sets of social relations. Although the product of the impact of bourgeois relations upon the feudal organization, the State, we learn, does not represent them to the same degree or in the same way; rather, it 'tends unavoidably – by its mere existence – to “serve” bourgeois relations of production infrastructurally, although “superstructurally” its apparatuses are dominated by the nobility' (116, translation revised). The fact that some of its apparatuses are ideological returns us to the question of how the public / private dialectic is played out ideologically.

While in Althusserian terms the State cannot 'create' ideologies – that is, by definition, the task of the ideological instance – it does exert a transitive effectivity over them, both thematically and functionally. Bourgeois relations, it was suggested above, secrete a very specific ideology, *animism*, which gives rise to the creation of new art forms, notably the new Petrarchan lyric, the theatre, the picaresque, the 'dialogue', the novel, etc. These forms, unsurprisingly, will embrace the public/private dialectic to its fullest extent, the latter conditional upon the existence of its two autonomous spaces. But only for a relatively brief period, say to 1530. The same forms will survive under absolutism only to the extent that they are filled with a substantialist content. *Substantialism*, by way of contrast to animism, will 'assume' the same dialectic reluctantly, through the pressure of bourgeois relations exerted at the infrastructural level. At the same time, it must also 'deny' the autonomy of both spheres, 'insofar as it continues to take for granted, as an indisputable truth, the existence of a unitary (“totalizing”’,