

Language, Ideology, and the Human New Interventions

Edited by Sanja Bahun and Dušan Radunovic
Afterword by Ernesto Laclau

Language, Ideology, and the Human

New Interventions

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ASHGATE

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LANGUAGE, IDEOLOGY, AND THE HUMAN

Language, Ideology, and the Human: New Interventions redefines the critical picture of language as a system of signs and ideological tropes inextricably linked to human existence. Offering reflections on the status, discursive possibilities, and political, ideological and practical uses of oral or written word in both contemporary society and the work of previous thinkers, this book traverses South African courts, British clinics, language schools in East Timor, prison cells, cinemas, literary criticism textbooks and philosophical treatises in order to forge a new, diversified perspective on language, ideology, and what it means to be human.

Drawing together the latest research from experts around the world, and with contributions from across the social sciences and humanities, *Language, Ideology, and the Human: New Interventions* provides a view of language, ideology, and the human subject that eschews simplifications and binary definitions.

*To Jakov, who came into the world—and language—while we were
working on this book*

Notes on Editors

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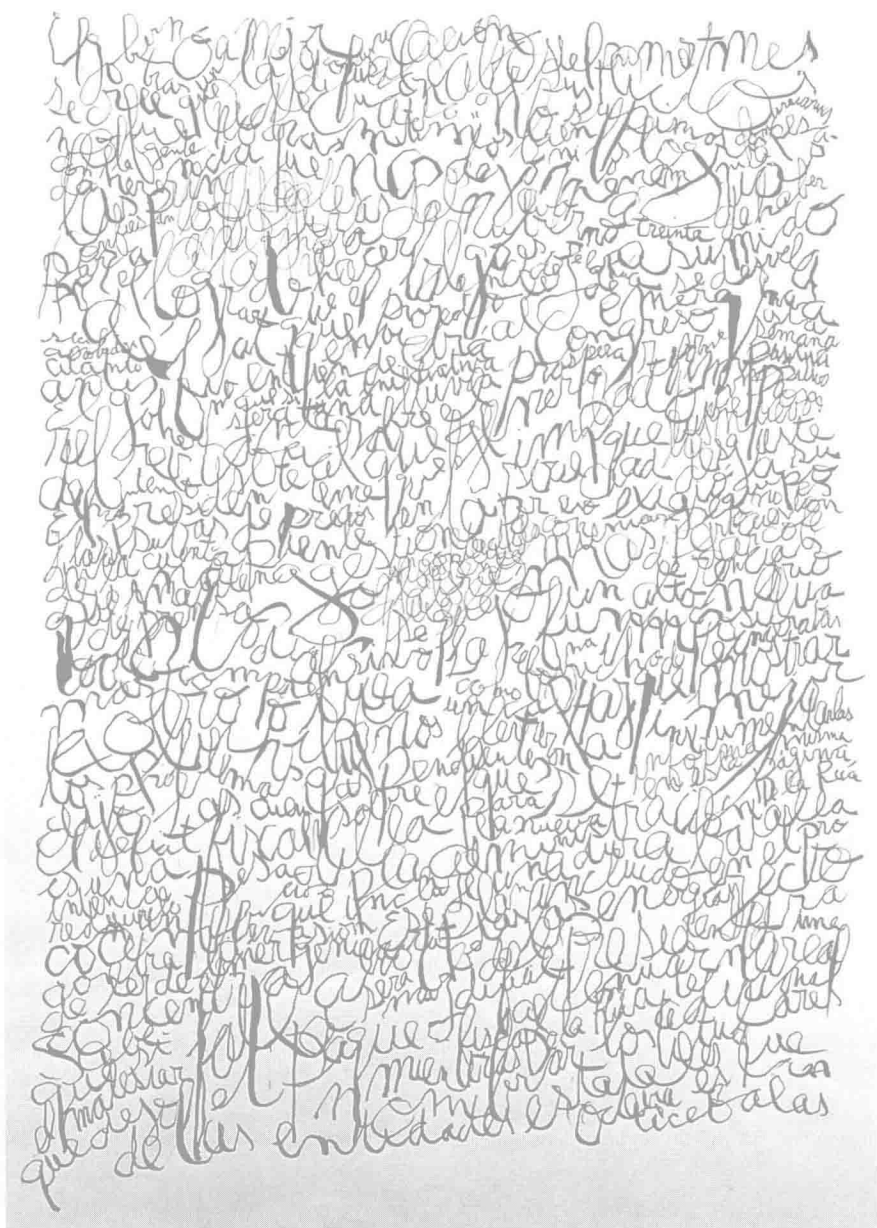
Monina Wittfoth is an independent scholar, working in language theory. Her research crosses the borders of intellectual history, language theory, and stylistics. Wittfoth's doctoral dissertation, *Linguistic Returns: The Currency of Sceptical-Rhetorical Theory and Its Stylistic Inscription in the Platonic and Derridian Text*, argues that a common sceptical-rhetorical conception of language informs the stylistic approaches of thinkers from Parmenides to (late) Wittgenstein. She is currently interested in the cultural legacies embedded in the English dialect of Northern Canadian First Nations.

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We are indebted to numerous friends and colleagues with whom we have discussed these topics, as well as the University of Essex and the University College London, which supported us in the period in which this book came to fruition.



Frontispiece A León Ferrari, *Sin título (Caligrafía)*, 2000, Indian ink on paper, 50×35cm, © León Ferrari, Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari Arte y Acervo. Image © ESCALA

1 11 10/1/80

ON

El tiempo

Hoy, parcialmente despejado. Máxima: 31°. Mínima: 21°. Más información en la página 12, sección 2a.

Año 131 - Número 48,053

Los primeros 30 días

25% es el número de las secretarías eliminadas por medio del plan de reducción de la estructura del Estado.

50% fueron las subsecretarías que de la Rúa eliminó para contribuir al recorte del gasto público.

\$10,000 son los millones a los que llegará el déficit fiscal de este año.

\$20,000 son los millones que componen la deuda de las pensiones.

\$1400 son los millones que se recortaron del presupuesto para este año.

El ejecutivo espera la urgente aprobación en el Congreso de la ley de emergencia por el déficit, que permita combatir la evasión fiscal.



LA NACION

El Gobierno, tras una mejor comunicación

Al cabo de su primer mes, cree que la difusión de sus actos no fue adecuada

"No supimos comunicarnos con la gente. No transmitimos bien los logros ni la pesada herencia que nos dejó Menéndez."

A treinta días de haber asumido, las principales figuras del nuevo gobierno confiesan lo relativo a la hora de hacer balance.

De la Rúa se destaca por lo que el proyecto de ley de emergencia por el déficit, que entrará al Congreso esta semana, sea aprobado cuando antes.

El Gobierno entiende que, si la iniciativa previsional, según una ley vía retroactiva, libera el seguro de jubilación, se genera un movimiento social que genera la reforma impositiva. El Presidente teme que el impuesto cedente, que trunca los nuevos impuestos y los valores de precios en la sociedad, sea el punto de partida de una crisis.

Por eso eligió a su equipo que se encargue de controlar más de cerca la situación. Sigue queriendo mantener una mano firme en el control.

En la conferencia de prensa, a todos los días, se dio un alto funcionario. Más comprensivo, otro explicó: "La reforma impositiva fue vista como un capricho de tecnócratas. Hay que mostrar mejor los problemas que nos llevaron al 'funcionamiento', dijo.

Las cuentas pendientes

El déficit fiscal (sobre lo que se informa en esta misma página) es una pesadilla para la nueva administración. De la Rúa trata de reducirlo con un ambicioso plan que incluye un duro batalla contra la evasión.

Ese plan, incluido en el proyecto de ley de emergencia, se centra ahora sobre los proyectos del Presidente. Entre ellos, el de la ley de emergencia para reducir el déficit.

Mientras de la Rúa quiere que el nuevo gobierno, en primer lugar, se centre en la reducción de los gastos, el plan de emergencia para reducir el déficit.

Frontispiece B León Ferrari, *Sin título (Caligrafía)* (reverse), 2000, original newsprint, 50x35cm, © León Ferrari, Fundación Augusto y León Ferrari Arte y Acervo. Image © ESCALA

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Introduction

Introducing, Intervening, and Introspecting

Sanja Bahun and Dušan Radunović

In early 2000, mere thirty days after taking up office, the government of President Fernando De la Rúa (Argentina) issued a curious press release. In the release, reported in an article in the major Argentine daily newspaper *La Nación* on 9 January 2000, the government admits poor diffusion of messages about its activities and a need to establish “a more fluid contact with the public” (see frontispiece). Failing to live up to the pre-election promises of battling corruption and improving living standards, and faced with growing social unrest, the De la Rúa government had recourse to an ancient tool: *philophronesis*, a figure-mode of speech in which one mollifies the anger of a superior addressee and creates amicable rapport by using gentle words, or even a submissive apology. As it tends to happen with discourses that subsume in themselves conflicting aims and affects, and get disseminated through a multiplicity of relays, the lack of clarity is what distinguishes the government’s message, as reproduced in the article. The apparent irony that the government’s communiqué on communication is so vague was not lost on León Ferrari, one of the most prominent Latin American artists and a long-time devotee of transcription and re-transcription of ideological messages. In his *Sin título (Caligrafía)* (*Untitled [Calligraphy]*), seen on the cover of this book, Ferrari transcribes the article in barely legible script, omitting punctuation, splitting sentences into the smallest conveyors of (non-)meaning, calligraphically rearranging them so that the words and phrases wash up against each other, visually commenting on the “fluidity of contact” with the public that the government professedly sought to establish with this article.¹ Belonging to the visual arts genre of deformed calligraphies that the artist perfected, Ferrari’s artwork probes the interstices between language, ideology, and their human producer and re-negotiator. It is these very orifices, and the challenges of navigating them,

1 León Ferrari’s *Sin título (Caligrafía)* is a mixed media (newsprint and Indian ink on paper) artwork, belonging to the *Escrituras Deformadas* series of calligraphies. It consists of a dated ink transcription (10 January 2000) and the newspaper clipping of the article (9 January 2000) pasted on the back. The work is owned by the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America (ESCALA), the University of Essex, on whose web-site one may find further information about the artwork: <<http://escala.org.uk/collection/artists/leon-ferrari/AUTH171/sin-titulo-caligrafia/O651>>. The editors are indebted to Joanne Harwood, Director of ESCALA, for assistance and conversation about the artwork.

that the book *Language, Ideology, and the Human: New Interventions* sets out to explore.

The conceptual cluster at the heart of this book has received much scholarly attention over the course of last two centuries, that is, since the centrality of language in shaping the human subjectivity became widely asserted and vigorously promulgated in the works of thinkers such as Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. At the end of the nineteenth century, in the wake of the collapse of traditional philosophical systems and the rise of scientific immanentism, language was dominantly perceived as a system-tool relatively independent of human will and unaffected by human activities (thus unrelated to the realm of social ideologies), and, as such, fundamentally inconsequential to any human project or activity in history. As the contradictions attendant to this image of language grew in force, so, paradoxically, did the stature of this empirically inadequate view of language. While Ferdinand de Saussure's propagation of a science of language that would be separate from the field of experience/everyday speech is customarily glossed as the epitome of such approach, his is neither the earliest nor, as new discoveries suggest, most representative example of viewing language as an abstract system of signs.² Nevertheless, the Swiss linguist's conception of language continues to be the most inspiring courier of not only objectivist view of language but also of a particular orientation in the modern humanities, as various discussions in this volume, most notably the Afterword by Ernesto Laclau, confirm. Be it as it may, it is interesting to note that the early twentieth century thought on language actually evolved in two diametrically opposed directions: while a range of thinkers on language returned to the belief in embeddedness of language in the social sphere (Valentin Voloshinov is an apt example here), the discussion of language as a logically structured autonomous phenomenon got a fresh impetus under the auspices of analytical philosophy. Dominated by the formidable (and changeable) influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the latter direction, however, also tremendously expanded our view of language as a social phenomenon and thus posed new challenges to the autonomy of language—from within. (Some of these insights and challenges are addressed in David Gorman's and Monina Wittfoth's chapters in this volume, as well as in Ernesto Laclau's Afterword.) In a rather different, but contemporaneous, development, psychoanalysis—a field of discursive explorations *par excellence*—laid its own claims on the matter through the figure

2 For discussions of dominant scholarly and lay approaches to language in Europe in the long nineteenth century, see Aarsleff; Formigari; Taylor. With regard to Saussure, the Swiss linguist's paradigm shifting pronouncements of synchronic linguistics in *Course in General Linguistics* seem to be at least partly contradicted by discussions in his recently discovered "orangery manuscripts." Saussure's "orangery notes," originally dated 1910–11, and published only in 2002, shed a new light on his views about the linguistics of *parole*, concept of *discourse*, relationship between language/*langue* and extra-linguistic reality, and consequently, the structure of linguistic sign (Bouquet 205 *passim*).

of Jacques Lacan and his followers, while both structuralism (and semiotics) and post-structuralism (deconstruction) returned obsessively to the question of the operation of language in the domain of human action, re-invoking and re-transcribing Plato, Aristotle, and pre-Socratics or, as we have done, traditional rhetoric. In the late twentieth century the field also saw a rapid development of new disciplines and subdisciplines in the humanities, expressly concerned with this issue: socio-linguistics, anthropological linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and critical discourse analysis. Disputes about language and the significance and modality of its social operation continue to permeate the twenty-first century thought and provide ever-expanding areas for scholarly inquiry.

Together with some sociolinguists (Kathryn Woolard, Bambi Schieffelin, ...), theorists of ideology (Louis Althusser, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, ...), and cultural studies and critical discourse scholars (Raymond Williams, Michel Pêcheux, ...), the editors of this volume perceive language and discursive ideological spectrums in which it is embedded as not only correlatable but also intrinsically and fully interactive. At the outset, the editors have adopted a neutral definition of ideology as a conceptual system applicable within a social group: more specifically, ideology is understood here as a structuration of behavioral and socio-political beliefs and cultural practices that condition and organize one's understandings of, or ideas about, the world and one's own position in it. The discursive realm, that is, the modes of perceiving, using, and conceptualizing language, is, then, seen as the determining, or conditioning, part of this structuration: not only is the discursive realm socially constructed, but it is only in/through a discursive space that a palpable notion of the social can exist.³ Such open definition was given to the contributors to probe it, contest it, specify or amplify it. The result is a productively variegated view of ideology—and of particular ideologies—as false consciousness or the only possible organization of the discursive field, as unavoidably totalitarian or covertly anti-totalitarian, as saturated with or empty of the signified, reflexive or conclusive, and, finally, a category that is necessary or—as Laclau argues—residual. All of these approaches imply, however, that there exists an intimate link between ideology and language, and, specifically, between an ideology within which an individual operates and his or her view of language. A scholar's view of language, then, is a language ideology, too. This is why *Language, Ideology, and the Human* hosts critical discussions of a range of theoretical engagements with/ideologies of language: Plato's, Nietzsche's, those of analytic philosophy, of Jacques Derrida and Helen Keller. These are, then, purposefully intertwined with, or pitched against, the conceptualizations of the human such as Kierkegaard's, John Rawls's, Hannah Arendt's, and others. For the patterns of interaction that abide between language and societal context, the

3 An insightful discussion of the history of the concept "ideology" is given in Raymond Boudon's *The Analysis of Ideology*; for a more ideologically charged, yet still inspiring, historical survey of the use of the concept, see Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction*.