

6-1-2015

Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Karczmarczyk, Pedro and Montag, Warren (2014) "Introduction," *Décalages*: Vol. 1: Iss. 4.
Available at: <https://scholar.oxy.edu/decalages/vol1/iss4/8>

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Introduction¹

Warren Montag and Pedro Karczmarczyk

Michel Pêcheux (1938-1983) was one of the fundamental thinkers of the French philosophical scene of the sixties and seventies. His importance, however, has been obscured by a kind of solemn silence. A Marxist philosopher in the Althusserian manner (who published dense, but valuable, texts on the concept of ideology in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*), the “founder” of a discipline, namely the materialist school of discourse analysis that survived the ideological mutation that marked the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s (although not without a series of readjustments which we cannot analyze here). The essays that make up the present dossier offer different versions and evaluations of these phenomena. In this issue of *Décalages* we wish to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Pêcheux’s death by collectively investigating the both the relevance and validity of his thought.

It is not surprising that this issue contains a significant number of contributions from Latin America. The coordinates within which political life in Latin America has unfolded in the recent past have given renewed force to an entire series of concepts of Marxist origin, relocating conflict and confrontation as the nuclear elements of political theory. With this development, Latin America turned the page written in the eighties during the transition to democratic regimes in a number of countries which had earlier suffered under bloody dictatorships. This was the moment in which the left and other progressive forces took on the task of constructing democratic institutions and dismantling the “authoritarian” cultural forms that had been consolidated at the height of the military regimes. The weapons chosen for this political struggle, those of a juridical discourse drawn from the matrix of liberalism, were simultaneously effective and incapable of achieving their stated aims: the construction of forms of political conflict that would never again fall back into “political violence.” They were effective insofar as the use of the language of rights seemed to constitute at the same time the means and the end of what was constructed discursively as a political call emanating from “society,” and because such concepts as

1 We are grateful for Mara Glzman’s perceptive comments.

“authoritarian culture” assumed a moralization of politics that effectively functioned as an interpellation of that very society. They were nevertheless incapable of completely achieving their aims because the adoption of a juridico-liberal framework made the events through which these societies lived their present unintelligible. In effect, a historical understanding and a political judgment restricted to what could be proven in a court of law limited the perspectives that Latin American societies could adopt in their public discussions concerning both the present and the past, as if they sought to capture a three dimensional figure by means of a two dimensional grid. The nineties witnessed a “return of the repressed” when, in a number of countries, neo-liberal positions came to power by means of legitimate elections, often bringing into government former functionaries of the military dictatorships of the seventies. With the new century came a group of post-neoliberal governments which emerged from conditions more conducive to a rethinking of the past and present specific to Latin America. It was thus not by coincidence that in such a context there occurred a powerful resurgence of interest in Althusser: the theoretical force of his work, above all determined the category of overdetermination, made it possible simultaneously to think the space of the relatively autonomous play of politics and to formulate a radical critique of the “theoretical humanism” underlying the liberal juridical ideology that, by means of the category of responsibility, carried out the moralization of politics to which we alluded earlier: everyone is equally responsible for the catastrophe of the 1970s.

This is the context in which the current renewal of interest in Michel Pêcheux took shape. The initial reception of his work, however, began in an earlier period, a fact demonstrated by the translation of his first texts, published in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*², the recognition of his importance by the semiologist Eliseo Verón, the translation of his book on the history of the sciences,³ the influence of

2 We refer here to those texts that Pêcheux published under the name Thomas Herbert (“Reflexiones sobre la situación de las ciencias sociales, y de la psicología social en particular” y “Notas para una teoría general de las ideologías” in *Cahiers pour l'analyse* n° 2 de 1966 y n° 9 1968, respectivamente) translated into Spanish in two different versions. One appeared in Verón, Eliseo (ed.) *El proceso ideológico*, Buenos Aires, Tiempo contemporáneo, 1971, with translations by Marta Carliski y Noelia Bastard of the articles of 1966 and 1968 respectively. The other versión appeared in Herbert, Th. y Miller J.-A. *Ciencias sociales: ideología y conocimiento*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1974, with translations by Oscar Landi y Hugo Acevedo.

3 Fichant, M. y Pêcheux *Sobre la historia de las ciencias*, Buenos Aires, 1971, trad. de Delia Karsz Esquivel.

Les vérités de La Palice (1975)⁴, even though it has yet to be translated into Spanish, and his participation in a conference on political discourse in Mexico in 1978.⁵ Among his major works, the *Análisis automático del discurso*, together with the long essay (written with Catherine Fuchs), “Mises au point et perspectives à propos de l'analyse automatique du discours”(1975), and finally *La langue introuvable* (1981) written with Françoise Gadet⁶ were all translated relatively early on. But the most striking case of Pêcheux's influence in Latin America is that of Brazil, where his importance is greater than anywhere in the world. Nearly the entire of Pêcheux 's corpus has been translated into Portuguese, as has that of most of his collaborators and the most important work in his field. This has led to a production in the field of discourse analysis notable for both its quality and its variety, at the theoretical as well as concrete level. The essay by Zoppi and Baldini in this issue provides an extensive overview of the Brazilian case.

On the terrain of theory, there is a characteristic that appears peculiar to Pêcheux's thought. In the light of the various currents of what in Latin America is called “*textualismo*,” and the efforts to conceptualize the populism inspired by Laclau, Pêcheux's conception of discourse may be understood as a modalization of the Lacanian *pas-tout* or “not all.” This characteristic is at work in the crucial concept of “interdiscourse,” which grasps the efficacy of discourse not as virtualities of a systematicity but on the basis of the constitutive exteriority of interiority and a plurality of references that cannot be reduced to a systematicity. Interdiscourse is not totalizable. In this “not all,” the materialist character of this concept and the legacy of Marxist thought itself is at play. In fact, like ideology, discourse, also a producer of obviousnesses, is a whole, *for itself*, a pure interiority if it is understood on the basis of itself (as intradiscourse), but, as Althusser argued in the case of ideology, it is “not all,” that is, pure exteriority for a materialist theory of discourse (as interdiscourse). This “not all” summarizes the irreducibly political character of Pêcheux's notion of discourse, a notion displaced in such a way that it no longer functions within a purely technical framework.

4 En 1976, there appeared an interesting review of this work in the Mexican journal *Dianoia*, vol. 22, n° 22, a cargo de Corina Yturbe.

5 Pêcheux's presentation, “Remontémonos de Foucault a Spinoza,” was published in Monteforte Toledo, Mario, México, UNAM/Nueva Imagen, 1980, pp. 181-199.

6 *Análisis automático del discurso*, Madrid, Gredos, 1978, trad. de Manuel Alvar Ezquerra y *La lengua de nunca acabar*, México, FCE, 1984, trad. de Beatriz Job.

In *Les vérités de La Palice*, Pêcheux argues that the *pons asinorum*, or decisive question, of historical materialism, which must be understood in as precise a manner as possible, is the following: in what way is it possible for ideology, which has no outside for itself, to be a pure exterior for science? The close connection he himself established between discourse and the subject-form of discourse made this problem all the more pressing. If scientific knowledge is a process without a subject, is it possible to think science as a discourse? If this were the case, would it then be the discourse of a subject, the discourse of the subject of science? Pêcheux rejected this way out of the problem: the inherence of the subject-form in discourse would render scientific discourse impossible. Instead, Pêcheux sought to think the “knowledge-effect” as a theoretical labor carried out on the subject-form of discourse, rather than as its elimination or supersession. This in turn suggests that the problem that Pêcheux posed in 1975 as the central theoretical question facing historical materialism is in fact a continuation of the problem of the transformation of problematics as articulated by Althusser in the preface to *Lire le Capital*: transformations that cannot be thought as the displacement of a subject or as a movement that places it in a position beyond the subject-form which reflects what is visible in a problematic, but as transformations that occur “in place,” as transformations of the space proper to the problematic itself, that is, in its structure.

The question then arises of the kind of space must this be, or rather, of how we may think its structure, a structure in which the possibility of such transformations resides. We would like here simply to propose the provisional hypothesis that the most radical consequences of Pêcheux’s thought must be sought in his early texts which provided the basis for later works such as *La langue introuvable*. In the latter, Pêcheux and Gadet mobilize the reflections contained in Jean-Claude Milner’s *L’amour de la langue* on the consequences for linguistics of the existence of psychoanalysis, consequences which are condensed, in particular, into the notion of “*lalangue*”. Milner insists in this text on posing the question of “the real of *langue*” as the very object of linguistics. Milner’s point is that “the impossible of language,” given the specific relation between prohibition and transgression in this domain, distinguishes the object of linguistics from other scientific objects. Linguistic prohibition is such that it has no existence apart from or prior to “its”

transgressions, from which follows the anti-Popperian position that rejects the notion that “the exception proves the rule.” The real of linguistics would thus be *lalangue*, which cannot be conceived as a substrate or something beyond *langue*, but as the immanent possibility of its de-stratification, as exhibited paradigmatically in the formations of the unconscious. The concept of “*lalangue*” allows us to think *langue* as the result of an operation of stratification, understood as the establishment of distinctions between levels of discourse, that is comparable to Russell’s theory of types. The stratification proper to language is both always already given and also always already overflowing itself. Linguistics, however, persists in thinking its object in the form of mere legality, that is, as a domain of stable objects. Thus, from the time that the social processes determined the constitution of languages as we now know them in relation to the necessities of the bourgeois economy on a national scale (the constitution of national languages through generalized literacy and their legal use in a given territory) the space of linguistics was configured around the polarities of rationalism (logicism) and empiricism (sociologism). This division of the field of linguistics is susceptible to a simplisitic political reading according to which the figure of the norm is conservative, the representation of a political imperative imposed on language, while the empiricist position would refer to a pure meaning prior to any mediation, and to the possibility of freedom without impossibility, which at the extreme culminates in a flirtation with the figures of the “noble savage” or its most recent incarnation, the good schizophrenic. To pose the question of the real of language, however, is to be placed outside of this simple and dichotomous political reading.

It is important to recall in this connection that the masters too will resort on occasion to the impossible. The inquiry into the real of language must confront the existence of the division between the correct and the incorrect, the fact that “not everything” can be said, even as that which is prohibited is inevitably said. In opposition to the division of the correct and the incorrect which is the concern of rationalism, the contradictory division of the real does not refer back to a primary Order. Milner thinks the the real of language as contradiction, thus distinguishing the impossible of language, contradictory in itself, from its debased currency, the merely prohibited. Pêcheux and Gadet differ from Milner on the possibility of finding the real of language in the interior of a complexity that is

also contradictory, a possibility that emerges from their connection to Marxism. As a consequence, the alternatives understood as exclusive on the terrain of linguistics, that is, alternatives outside of which nothing exists, are seen by Gadet and Pêcheux as the two horns of a dilemma, the polarities of a single ideology. The bourgeoisie were compelled to constitute a uniform national language that included subordinate variations (such as local languages and dialects), and that distinguished between a rigid language of production and law and a flexible language of commercial or political publicity.⁷ To use the example of the familiar slogans of May 68, Gadet and Pêcheux question, on the terrain of linguistics, the idea of abolishing the impossible (“Be realistic; demand the impossible”) through a transfer of “All power to the imagination,” that is, understood in relation to the field of linguistics, to the production of theories of enunciation that tended to re-establish the unrestricted rights of a subject understood as the origin of meaning.

The question of the impossible proper to language as advanced by Milner is inscribed in a tradition of reflections on the “structurality of structure,” constituted by a series of thinkers who arrived at the notion of contradiction as constitutive of structure as such. The struggles over the primacy of arbitrariness or the concept of value in Saussure, renewed after the discovery of his work on anagrams, or Lévi-Strauss’s reflections on Mauss in which he explores the concept of the floating signifier, devoid of signification as such, both interior and exterior to the structure, at once central and marginal, allow us to conclude, with Derrida, that structure thus conceived must have an absent center and, precisely because it lacks a center, opens an illimitable semiotic play, which it nevertheless denies. In the Althusserian camp, the concepts of determination in the last instance and overdetermination gave rise to a lively debate concerning the limits of the double functioning of the economy (structuring-structured). *Lalangue* refers here to that which in language has always overflowed its boundaries, the speech that is prohibited but nevertheless spoken, that which is hidden but nevertheless seen by everyone: the materiality of the signifier. Returning to the fact that ideology “has no outside,” but is “nothing but the outside,” we are left to conclude that the outside of *langue* is *lalangue*.

7 A consideration of the Latin American case must take other factors into account which themselves resist a simple political interpretation: language as a means of conquest and colonization. Language as an emancipatory element linked to the project of Latin American unity.

The extent of Pêcheux's influence in the Anglophone world offers a stark contrast to his standing in Latin America. While *Les Verites de la Palice* (1975) was translated into English in 1982, and *Analyse automatique du discours* in 1995, crucial texts, from the early essays published in *Cahiers pour l'analyse* to the cluster of often co-authored articles that appeared in the last five years of his life, and, above all, *La langue introuvable* (1981) remain untranslated. The unavailability of some of Pêcheux's key texts is all the more noteworthy given the resurgence of interest in Althusser and those who worked closely with him, from Balibar and Macherey to Badiou and Rancière. After all, it was Pêcheux more than any of the other "Althusserians" who attempted to both to wrestle with the contradictions of the ISAs essay, by far Althusser's most frequently cited text in the English speaking world. Pêcheux acknowledged its functionalist account of the reproduction of the forces and relations of production at the same time that he attempted to develop the lines of thought within it that resisted absorption into a functionalist model of the reproduction of capitalism in order to capture the aleatory moments of what was generally understood to be an untroubled systematicity. This labor required a detour: to think necessity, in this case the necessity of the Ideological State Apparatuses and the interpellation of individuals as subjects that takes place through them, as the contingent outcome of struggle and encounter required an acknowledgment of the presence of discourse in these processes. But to postulate what we might call the mutual immanence of discourse and ideology in its material existence, required in turn a materialist theory of discourse. It was precisely at this point that Pêcheux lost many of his Anglophone readers, especially those interested in the ISAs essay. Today, 30 years after his untimely death, there are signs of a new interest in Pêcheux—of which the present issue of *Décalages* is an expression—but we need nevertheless to confront and analyze the obstacles that to some extent continue to restrict the appreciation and perhaps comprehension of his thought in the English-speaking world.

The nature of some of these obstacles is surprising. Althusser's ISAs essay irreversibly transformed the way we think about the set of questions once designated by the term "ideology." The essay's power, however, lay not in its solutions to old problems, but rather in the series of new problems it posed, particularly those concerning the mechanisms of subjection and subjectivation. We now know, after the

posthumous publication of the “Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses,” that the entire set of problems and questions that appeared in relation to the concept of interpellation, emerged as such several years before Althusser wrote the manuscript from which the ISAs essay was extracted. It was in the *Three Notes*, composed of Althusser’s contributions to a discussion of “the theory of discourses” that included Balibar, Macherey, Badiou and, although his name does not figure in the editorial preface, Michel Pêcheux, that Althusser first used the term “interpellation” in a systematic way. It was here that “interpellation” replaced terms like “imputation” or “attribution” to capture the specific character of the subject discourses retroactively produced as their origin and center. The questions of whether all discourses, including “scientific” discourse, “recruited” subjects in this way (or at all) and on what grounds one might distinguish the different kinds of discourse other than the subject position specific to them proved troubling to Althusser.

The result, and we certainly cannot understand Pêcheux’s itinerary (or the reception of his work) unless we acknowledge it, has largely gone unnoticed: *the fact that “discourse” as a concept and even as a word all but disappeared from the ISAs essay*, where it appears only twelve times in the entire text. Of these twelve occurrences, only two refer back to the discussion on discourse from which his theory of the ideological interpellation of individuals as subjects emerged. In the first of these, Althusser recalls the fact that a knowledge of ideology can only develop “from within” it, by resisting the imposition of the subject form in order to allow a “subject-less” and thus scientific discourse to be born: “we have to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subject-less) discourse on ideology.” In the second, Althusser enumerates the “modalities of materiality,” which include not only the materiality of “an external verbal discourse,” but also that of “an ‘internal’ verbal discourse (consciousness).” Both the possibility of a subject-less discourse and the re-definition of consciousness as existing in the materiality of discourse were crucial elements of Althusser’s recasting of the concept of ideology: Pêcheux was one of the few to “dare” to address the questions congealed in these formulations in a systematic manner and to heed Althusser when he warned (as if he were speaking of his own earlier “flirtation” with discourse theory) that “Linguists and those who appeal to linguistics for various purposes often run up

against difficulties which arise because they ignore the action of the ideological effects in all discourses – including even scientific discourses.”

In fact, the very scarcity of such references seemed to imply that Althusser had deliberately and necessarily (from a theoretical point of view) abandoned the concept of discourse in favor of the notion of ideological apparatuses in an effort to identify the modality or “modalities of materiality” specific to ideology. The sense of a “progression” from discourse to apparatus was overdetermined by what appeared to be a similar trajectory in the work of Michel Foucault. The elaborate theory of discourse developed in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* was quite rapidly and abruptly abandoned, to the consternation of a significant contingent of Foucault’s followers, and replaced in *Discipline and Punish* with “discipline” as the material or “non-discursive” incarnation in which discourse was always already realized. In the case of Althusser, such an argument, however, presents a series of difficulties. First, it assumes that Althusser’s work can be understood as a progressive resolution of problems driven by a rationality internal to it, as if the later Althusser is necessarily superior to the earlier. From this perspective, Althusser’s relatively brief and inconclusive attempt to elaborate a theory of “discourses” and the relation between ideology as Althusser understood it (that is, as a set of practices of subjection/subjectivation or better a collection of sites of struggle around processes of subjection/subjectivation) and discourse must be seen as a kind of compromise formation destined to be cast aside in favor of more adequate models.

Pêcheux’s entire trajectory can be understood as a rejection of this view and as a recognition of the necessary place of discourse in Althusser’s theory of ideology. Thus, if his work on the concept of discourse, and on linguistics more broadly, was not reducible to the question of ideology, above all in its effects, neither was this work carried on without this question constantly in view. Pêcheux’s meditations on language seldom stray far from Althusser’s essay, from its “ideas” as well as its carefully calculated lexicon, even as he, in a series of texts, from *Les Verités de la Palice* to his last essays, attempts precisely to identify the ways in which the aporias of the ISAs essay are inseparable from the question of language or, more accurately, of discourse. Pêcheux’s acute awareness of the elliptical and radically incomplete nature of Althusser’s text, and his sense that

its problems could not be formulated, let alone resolved, except by means of a theory of discourse that did not yet exist, gave his work a sense of urgency that has not always been appreciated. It was, at least in part, this imperative that compelled Pêcheux in his attempt (in collaboration with a number of other researchers, including Françoise Gadet, Paul Henry, Claudine Haroche, Catherine Fuchs and others) to lay the foundations for a materialist theory of discourse. This project in turn required him (with Gadet) in *La langue introuvable* to confront the concept of *langue* with its dependence on metaphysical models behind the “logicism” and formalism of structural linguistics and Generative Transformational Grammar in order to clear the way for the study of discourse in its material existence

Given the fact that the trajectory imposed on Pêcheux by the the conflicts proper to the ISAs essay paradoxically deprived his work of interest to the essay’s ever-increasing Anglophone readership for whom the term “discourse” became a sign of the idealist excesses of French philosophy (“there is nothing outside of discourse”), it is imperative to understand that Althusser’s abandonment of “discourse” derived from positions not only distinct from, but diametrically opposed to, those based on the Anglo-American rejection of “the linguistic turn.” The anxiety concerning a “descent into discourse,” was grounded in a hierarchical dualism of spirit and matter, mind and body and words and things that both Althusser and Pêcheux vehemently rejected. It was precisely Althusser’s dissatisfaction with his own explanation of the irreducible materiality of discourse, that is, the fact that discourse was neither a representation, reflection, or expression determined by something more real than itself of which it was destined to remain a secondary and derivative emanation, that determined him to set the question of the discourses aside. Althusser’s “Three Notes” notes finally foundered on the problem of causality: if discourse was neither determined by an expressive causality, given its materiality, nor by the transitive causality of direct contact with extra-linguistic materialities how could it produce real effects? Here we see the effect of the absence of the concept of immanent or structural causality he had identified in *Lire le Capital*, an absence that renders any explanation of discourse and its effects impossible.

It was thus left to Pêcheux to develop not simply a materialist theory of discourse, but perhaps even more importantly a theory of

the materiality of discourse and of the forms of causality immanent in discourse. The requirements of this task led him from the verticality of representation or expression (the theory that discourse was a realization of a potential utterance or group of utterances previously existing in a latent condition as part of a system of potential utterances) to the horizontality of the effectivity proper to discourse: how does discourse produce the effect of meaning? How do discourses produce the subject-effect? More particularly, and the great interest of Pêcheux's work lies here, interpellation could be understood not simply as a being called or summoned to language, but also as the simultaneous production of the conjoined twins of ideology: obviousness (*évidence*) and forgetting (*oubli*). It is the concept of discourse that allows Pêcheux to remove these concepts from the register of subjectivity, consciousness and interiority and accord them an "objective," external and unconscious, reality that exists nowhere but at the surface of language. Discourse, operating through processes of synonymy and substitution, determines not only what can and cannot be said (and thought), but also what must be said, what cannot *not* be said. His acute awareness of what he liked to call "the line of least resistance," in this case, the various formalisms and functionalisms with their "obvious" explanations of the work of discourse, rendered them all the more unacceptable to Pêcheux. Drawing on psychoanalysis and the theory of the lapsus, parapraxis and the pun, he found his way to what Althusser called a materialism of the encounter or an aleatory materialism. Pêcheux, inspired by Freud and Lacan, proposed what we might call an aleatory materialism of the letter, an insistence on the primacy of the unconscious, of sound over sense, the work of homonymy and punning, as if the brute materiality of writing or sound perpetually displaced meaning and disrupted the very order of discourse, itself coextensive with the social order that is constantly disturbed by its internal enemies, its equilibrium nothing more than an equilibrium of conflicting forces. Pêcheux was the very opposite of a theoretician of the order of discourse: with extraordinary energy and an intelligence that never failed, he devoted himself to the comprehension of the swerve through which a word deviates from the ordered sequence to which it belongs and of the return of utterances upon themselves in an emptying out of meaning, the break, the gap, the hesitation in which something other can be thought.

To conclude, we would like to touch on one final element that

underscores Pêcheux's indispensability in the current conjuncture: it is what allows us to see something of his work on *lalangue* in his earlier texts. In effect, Pêcheux complicated Althusser's model by recognizing different forms of ideological interpellation, including that which is peculiar to neoliberalism. Pêcheux arrived at certain questions concerning the reconfiguration of the relations of production in response to an immense and ever increasing reserve army of labor. Neoliberal interpellation appears iconoclastic in relation to the interpellation proper to Keynesianism, or the welfare state. Neoliberalism changed the modality of the operation of the Ideological State Apparatuses, which in comparison to the previous period appear to have contracted. It is no longer (or no longer only) a matter of the apparatuses enclosing the great masses in order to produce docile and useful individuals. The function of the *Träger* of the relations of production is no longer stable, relatively speaking, in the neo-liberal context. While Althusser spoke of subjects who "work all by themselves [*qui marchent tout seuls*]," as if there existed more or less fixed and established routes, or of "workers for life," as a paradigmatic effect of the class struggle, in doing so, he alluded to a conjunction of realities that today often appears as a painful reminder of the past, even this past increasingly regarded by large sections of the world's population with nostalgia and envy. The dizzying acceleration of the mobility of the *Träger* function has transformed the character of ideological interpellation. In 1975, Pêcheux could offer the joke as the best means of apprehending the mechanism of interpellation ("This is my father, I am calling to report that Pablo will not be in school today"), and the proliferation of jokes, wordplay and puns in *Les vérités de La Palice* surprised even Pêcheux himself when he returned to his text a few years later. This time, the joke seemed less to capture a failure in the mechanism of interpellation than expose a new form of interpellation in a different context. In the face of a slogan like "down with exploitation," neoliberal interpellation may respond "I am not an exploiter . . . because I have not had the opportunity to become one" ("there are no more cannibals; I just ate the last one"), that maintains the identification of of the subject with the Subject and the humanist assumptions that in the last instance reaffirm the model of *homo oeconomicus*. In doing so, however, through irony and cynicism, he argued that "the exception proves the rule," a definition of the real of language that is a bit difficult to manage for a classical philosophical discourse that

tends to think in terms of stable objects. It is nevertheless not surprising that, given the conditions of ideological interpellation, the dominant philosophical forms from the 1980s on, showed a preference for triviality, irony and frivolity, behind which could be heard a reference to human nature (the Subject) in the form of an egoism or of a finitude postulated as irrefutable. In this context, Pêcheux alerts us, and has done so from the time of the essays in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, to the importance of the “social listening” that can hear what the *Witz* lets slip, as if it were the other face of, or the crack in, interpellation. In *La langue introuvable* the wager is doubled and we are invited to distinguish between the forms of the joke that affirm ideological interpellation, as if interpellation immunized itself against openly accepted contradictions, from other forms, also at the limit or margin of sense, in which interpellation exhibits its fragility, its exteriority, the fact that it will always be “not all.” Michel Pêcheux is thus for us one of the names of an immense task.