(EX)CULTURE IN HUNGARY: ARCHIVE AND SLIDING OF MEANINGS

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ABSTRACT: *In this paper, Budapest's Szoborpark is analyzed as an archive from a discursive perspective considering concepts such as ideology, society, history, discursive formations, subject, and meaning. For this reason, besides theoretical presuppositions, essential historical information is given in order to make the analytical path clear. The objective is to show how symbolic meanings may change in accordance with historical, political, and ideological events in society, as well as to demonstrate how elements that compose urban and public spaces may function as tools in controlling and imposing specific political and ideological interests. The aim is not to defend any socio-political stance but rather to demonstrate how concrete materialities can function symbolically and how their meanings may change according to ideological, institutional, and State-related factors.*

KEYWORDS: *society, archive, ideology, discourse, public space, meaning, Hungary*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to theorize and conduct a discursive analysis of a space in Budapest, Hungary: *Szoborpark*, that is, the Park of Statues, composed of sculptures taken from central and tourist areas of the Hungarian capital that depict the city during the communist period that the country went through (1945–1989). Focusing this study essentially on the notion and the work of the archive according to the Pêcheuxtian discursive approach, the topics to be

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reflected on are the ideological nature of the *archive*, as well as the constitution and the displacement of meanings. However, before addressing these questions, it is necessary to define on which theoretical position this study is grounded. So, in order to support our methodology, other essential theoretical notions will be addressed, as can be seen below: namely, discursive formations, meaning, and subject.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: SOME PRESUPPOSITIONS

In this section, I will briefly articulate some assumptions of the theory developed by the philosopher Michel Pêcheux, the French *discourse analysis* (DA). From this perspective, discourse is considered beyond its materiality (the text); that is, its process(es) and functioning(s), as well as its ideological and social aspects, which occur under different historical conditions of production, are also extremely important for analysis. Thus, I start by resorting to Pêcheux, who stated that "the relation that associates the 'meanings' of a text [and, here, texts may be understood as beyond verbal, but also imagetic, symbolic, etc.] to the socio-historical conditions of this text is not absolutely secondary, but constitutive of the meanings themselves" (Pêcheux 2017: 68).

In another text, the author states that meaning "is determined by the ideological positions that are at stake in the socio-historical process in which words, expressions, and propositions are produced (that is, reproduced)" (Pêcheux 2014: 146). In other words, the conditions of the production of discourse are part of the determination of "its" meaning, the effects of which are, in turn, conceived, the author explains, by the *discursive formation* (DF) which, "from a given position in a given conjuncture, [...] determines what can and must be said [...]" (ibid. 147), representing "a way of relating to the prevailing ideology," as Indursky (2008: 11) points out. Also, in the words of Indursky, the DFs correspond to domains of knowledge endowed with "sufficiently porous boundaries, which allow knowledge coming [...] from another DF to penetrate [them], introducing something different [...], which makes this domain of knowledge heterogeneous in relation to itself" (ibid. 14).

Putting it another way, the operation of a DF, in the intermediation ideology-language and determination of the meaning(s), resembles the operation of a prism: starting from a 'whole,' the interdiscourse (to which it would be impossible for the subject to achieve complete access and domination) we move to fragments and fractions, i.e., directions from/to sayings and meanings allowed in that domain, that, when projected, overshadow or silence other (im)possible ways of saying(s)

or blocking meanings. This whole process occurs, it should be noted, under dependence on *ideological formations* (IF) that, again, according to Pêcheux, constitute complex sets that are imbued with "attitudes and representations that are neither individual nor 'universal,' but that refer more or less directly to 'class positions' in conflict with each other" (Pêcheux 2017: 73). DFs thus "represent 'in language' the ideological formations that correspond to [them]" (Pêcheux 2014 [1975]: 147), concealing, in/through the text, effects of univocity, evidence, and transparency of meanings. When projected through one (or more) DF(s) and materialized through the language, discourse is embedded with ideological disputes of classes, meanings, and constant conflicts in a social formation. In this way, it is possible to perceive that meaning is not systematically isolated, stable, or alien to what is supposedly external to it. On the contrary, the exterior runs through it, substantially constituting and determining it.

Like discourse, the subject is also constituted, or rather, interpellated by the ideological element. Moreover, as it is necessarily inscribed in DF(s), it can also be fractioned and discursively heterogeneous. According to Pêcheux: "individuals are 'interpellated' into subjects-speakers (in subjects of *their* discourse) by discursive formations" (ibid. 161 – author's emphasis), that is, by ideology. Therefore, from a discourse analysis perspective, the subject is also historically determined since "one is subject by the subjection to language in history. One cannot say anything if he/she is not affected by the symbolic, by the signifying system. There is neither meaning nor subject if there is no subjection to language" (Orlandi 2006: 19). Thus, the subject, to (self) signify – a gesture which, by being symbolic, the subject is always interpellated to perform (Orlandi 2012) –, is inevitably submitted to the historical and heterogeneously constituted entanglement of language, (re)producing statements related to a position of the DF to which they are identified, not necessarily consciously.

Observing the theoretical outlines so far, it is considered, therefore, that, due to their inscriptions in discursive formations – which, in turn, are subject to ideological conditions and are heterogeneous –, discourse, subject, and meaning are, as a result, also mobile and plural, irregularly constituted by dispersion, even if under the effect of univocity and transparency, and socio-historically interconnected inseparably. Therefore, it is worth, from this moment on, thinking about the archive, which, while being a process resulting from social practices, becomes discursivity(ies) and, in this way, like any discourse, is subjected to positions associated with DFs and, consequently, to ideology and all that stems from it. In dealing with the archive through the assumptions of discourse analysis, I will be mobilizing reflections by Michel Foucault and going through the process of ideological determination proposed by Pêcheux (1994). According to Sargentini (2014: 24–25), this is possible because, in the 1980s,

discourse analysis was established as a discipline of interpretation and turned to the reading of archives considering the Foucauldian archaeological perspective.

SZOBORPARK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARCHIVE IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In February 2017, it was reported[2] that, on the initiative of a Hungarian extreme right-wing party, *Jobbik*, a sculpture honoring György Lukács, regarded as one of the leading philosophers in Hungarian history, would be removed from one of Budapest's central parks. In justification, the party claimed that Lukács was involved in the country's communist period, and the goal existed to eliminate the symbols that referred to communism from public spaces. Without a totally certain destination at that time, it was speculated that the philosopher's statue would join the many others (also seen as related to communism, already removed from the central part of Budapest) that remain isolated in a park, the *Szoborpark*, designed precisely to house images said to be linked to communist ideology, and that have been removed from the urban landscape of the capital.

Considering this, I sought information about this welcoming space. As mentioned above, *Szoborpark* – also known as *Memento Park* or *Memorial Park* – is an open-air park of statues and plaques, created in 1993, four years after the official end of the communist regime in the country, and located in the suburbs of Budapest. The park has more than forty sculptures of symbolic figures from the history of communism, Soviet and Hungarian soldiers, and followers of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods in Hungary. Among the main statues are Marx, Lenin, Engels, and the replica of Stalin's famous boots – the remaining part of the large sculpture of the Soviet leader that was displayed in the center of Budapest and was brought down by thousands of protesters during the 1956 Revolution. According to Fernandes,

> *these public art pieces were not destroyed but suffered a* ***symbolic decharacterization when they were relocated from the central parts*** *[...] of the Hungarian capital to a less noble space. [...] As a closed enclosure on the outskirts of the capital, Szoborpark has the symbolism of imprisoning and confining communism in a stronghold far from everyday life.* (Fernandes 2011: 214 – emphasis added)

2 In the video *The Final Exile* (CEU 2018) it is possible to see people demonstrating against the removal.

In light of this, I propose to take, as a starting point, *Szoborpark* as a unity – that is, an effect of a historical process – constituted from the pieces of knowledge of a nationalist discursive formation and then apply questions and procedures of analysis, treating it as an archive.

As stated earlier, the theoretical work on archives in the area of DA is based on the Foucauldian conception of the field. That is why I start by turning to Foucault (2013) to say that the archive to which I am referring here does not concern texts or documents that a given culture may keep as a testimony to its past and its identity; neither is it about the institutions that will complete, in some societies, the work of maintaining and offering access to texts and documents of a community. It is, in fact, about "a whole *set of relations* that particularly characterize the discursive level," that is, what causes discourses "to be born *according to specific regularities*." In other words,

> *the archive is, at first, the* ***law of what can be said, the system that governs the*** *emergence of utterances as singular events. [...] it is which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the* ***system of its enunciability.*** (Foucault 2013: 157–158 – emphasis added)

Thinking about the archive according to this view is, therefore, seeing it as a (dis)articulator of groupings of meanings and of discursive familiarity effects. It is seeing it as a regency system (Foucault's term) of (non)sayings. Facing these Foucauldian conceptions, Pêcheux (1994) contributes by bringing the ideological aspect of the archive into the discussion. According to Mittmann, who starts from Pêcheux, the archive carries in itself the ideological effects of stability and naturalization and also contains "the game of forces that occurs [...] selecting what can enter and excluding what cannot be part of it" (Mittmann 2014: 36). Thus, when studying the archive from a Pêcheuxtian perspective, it is essential to consider ideology as a constituent. Being allowed to propose to work on the notion of the archive through the analysis of a park/museum of statues (i.e., an archive of imagetic materialities) already reveals the ideological nature of the conception because, according to Sargentini (2014), for a long time, the image was neglected and not analyzed in the archive, whose materiality was conceived as only the written text. According to the author, this fact allows us to observe that "the archives were not (or are not yet), therefore, a fair space for preservation and conservation, because they are susceptible to what is recognized in each time as materiality *that should compose an archive*" (ibid. 26).

Therefore, still according to Sargentini, one should pay attention to the fact that "it [the archive] is, due to its reading practice, a *revealer of historical,*

political, and cultural interests" (ibid. 25 – emphasis added), a product and a producer of ideological practices. Based on this, I question: What interests can be observed (if any) in *Szoborpark* in terms of an archive? Paraphrasing Mittmann (2014: 33), I ask by whom are determined and imposed the limits and forms of articulation of/in the archive in this case? Considering discourse as an effect of meanings, as postulated by Pêcheux (2010), what meanings can be mobilized through *Szoborpark* as an archive? What does it allow to be said/shown, and what is silenced? What is the shift in meanings when the sculptures are relocated elsewhere in the city?

To try to answer these questions, it is necessary to briefly outline the conditions of production of the period when the statues were placed in the city and those of the period from 1989 to the present day, involving the opening to the capitalist system, the construction of the park and the continuous removal of statues from the central regions of the city, including the statue of Lukács. Thus, when speaking of conditions of production, we are looking at socio-historical contingencies of the (re)formulation of the discourse. According to Pêcheux, this is about the "mechanism of *placement* of the protagonists and the object of discourse" (2010: 78 – emphasis added).

Starting with the conditions of production at the time of installation of the sculptures – the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods of the imposition of new socio-ideological practices on those dominated by the Soviet regime, until 1989 –, I once again resort to Fernandes (2011), who, in turn, starts from Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and Crang (1998). As in other cities under such control, Budapest witnessed "the elimination of the signs of the capitalist economy and the shaping of the city in the image of the ideal of the communist society under construction." In the words of Fernandes, in this context, "the state was given full powers of intervention over the economic and symbolic sectors," and the urban center was prepared "to receive masses of industrial labor but also to promote the celebration and ideological legitimation of power." (Fernandes 2011: 212). Furthermore,

> *in the city-texts of Soviet influence, iconographies are repeated [...] as did the symbolic cleaning of the past happened, the ideological renewal of toponymy and the public evocation, through plaques, bas-reliefs or statues, of relevant characters for the construction of communist societies, such as Marx, Engels, or Lenin. This ideological construction was promoted by scale and verticality, making the citizen disproportionate in relation to the generality of urban symbols. [...] the urban landscape would be an instrument that manipulates apathetic receptors and models a passive*

> *population (Katz–Lazarsfeld 1955). [...] This ideological modeling, with repeated evocations in various urban centers, was supposed to create a network of cities that would be the functional and symbolic support of a supranational socialist territory, in a historical strategy already applied in the expansion and consolidation of political entities also based on urban networks, such as the Roman Empire. On an international scale, these spaces reproduce the strategies used for the consolidation of national identities: the re-interpretation of history; the aggregation of the population around a common narrative (in this case, the one conveyed by the Socialist International). The definition of a territory with a strong identity and its differentiation from the outside world (the capitalist world, of course) (Crang 1998).* (Fernandes 2011: 212–213)

Contrary to what one might expect, given Hungary's history of revolts against the Soviet regime, in the face of economic stagnation and ideological divisions within the Communist Party, "Hungary's transition to economic liberalization was a gradual process, while the collapse of the Communist Party took place entirely peacefully" (Light 2000: 167). In the following year, 1990, Hungary went through its first so-called democratic election, already within a new multi-party political system, after the fall of that regime. On that occasion, the center-right took power. About the monuments, when a new political ideology took over state power, there was a need to get rid of any symbolism that referred to the previous regime. However, according to Williams (2008), most Hungarians supported neither the small number of radicals who wanted the sculptures destroyed nor *Szoborpark* as a solution. On the contrary, much of the population had the preference, usually due to pragmatic reasons of workload or cost, to simply leave them in place.

Thus, as Fernandes (2011: 215) notes, "It was in this atmosphere of discussion that the symbolic landscape of Budapest returned to the evocation of a suppressed past in the communist period." After that, in the "new Budapest," "the greatness of 'Greater Hungary' is celebrated. [...] this new iconographic landscape gains a nationalistic connotation, which is understandable in the face of a recent history of unstable borderlines and strong spatial mobility of the population, often promoted by the Soviet Union itself." In this symbolic "new Greater Hungary," still in accordance with Fernandes' study, at the end of the 1990s, when Hungary was negotiating its accession to the European Union, the symbolism of Christian reference regained strong relevance, especially that related to the figure of Saint István, the Hungarian monarch leader who is said to have created and westernized Hungary.

An example of this recentralization is Heroes' Square, a World Heritage Site since 2001, "which celebrates 19th-century Hungarian nationalism" and "is one of the central elements in the symbolic renewal of Budapest. Under the image of the Archangel St. Gabriel, a symbol of Roman Catholicism that spread in this area, kings and other heroes of Hungarian history are celebrated."

Since then, Hungary has gone through continuous alternation between populist or center-right and socialist governments. Currently, as a parliamentary republic, the country's government is essentially composed of the nationalist and populist *Fidesz* – party of the prime minister, Viktor Orbán. *Jobbik*, in turn, is among the biggest nationalist and conservative parties, along with the extremist and ultranationalist *Mi Hazánk*.

Against this background, it is worth turning to Althusser's reflections on conditions of production. The author brings the Marxist topicality (or building-like metaphor of base and superstructure) into vogue, illustrating the structure of every society as constituted by the base (economy) and the two levels of the superstructure (the juridical-political and the ideological). He explains that such a scheme represents the economic basis (the base) as being the "ultimate determination of what happens on the upper 'floors' (the superstructure)" (Althusser 1996: 110). That is, the economic element determines the juridical-political and ideological ones. Furthermore, the author proposes that in the superstructure, the Ideological State Apparatuses always function effectively according to the dominant ideology of the dominant class. This is so because, by possessing State power and the (Repressive) State Apparatus, the dominant class and ideology overlap, maintaining hegemony over the Ideological State Apparatuses: "To my knowledge, no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (ibid. 117).

Thus, following the author's precepts, the dominance of the Ideological State Apparatus (in the case of the object of this analysis, the cultural apparatus) is verified as being on the part of the dominant political ideology, which holds State power in a given period. In the Stalinist and post-Stalinist dictatorships, there were the installation and the exaltation of the symbolic figures of the revolutionary leaders. In the opening to the West and to the capitalist system, from 1989 to the present day – a time of accelerated growth of the nationalist far-right both in Hungary and in the rest of Europe – there has been the removal of any figures that would endorse the old system. Considering this, Fernandes conceives the city as a space of many appropriations, which are symbolic and functional. Because of this, it reflects the heterogeneous and conflicting superimposition of different territorialities, agents, practices, and memories. So, the urban space would be, according to the author, "a heterogeneous socioeconomic and cultural

product in constant (re)construction" (Fernandes 2011: 211), which is shaped by the interaction of the State and different institutions, entities, and cultural and contestation movements that compose historically the society. Thus, the city may be considered "a territory of ideological expression, cultural manifestations, celebration, consumption and work, protest, resistance, and affirmation" (ibid. 211).

In this way, it is possible to observe that what constitutes the *Szoborpark* today could be considered two archives. The park is a re-elaboration/re-signification concerning social, historical, and political circumstances. In other words, even if scattered throughout the city and representing the most varied images, the statues and plaques constituted an archive because they had, as a specific regularity, the symbolic function of the exaltation of – a common practice in the Soviet regime[3] – the socialist leaders and important figures of the period. Their main function was to signify communist sovereignty and power, an ideology that should be followed. The celebration and glorification of such ideology was thus the organizing/articulating principle of the meanings of this archive. With the fall of the regime in 1989 and the opening to the West and the capitalist system in Hungary, the statues and plaques started to be removed and sent to the park in 1993. Since then there has been another archive, although with the same elements, now being gathered in a small common space.

The archive becomes "another" because, from that moment on, the articulation of meanings and sayings shifts. The acts of relocating and silencing the statues come to constitute the system that manages the meanings. Now, the sculptures work in favor of a past to be contained, selectively remembered, or, still, in favor of forgetting. It is worth noting that such physical and semantic transitions are dependent on the different historical contingencies through which the country has passed, and trace memories – that is, "remnants of history, real or fictional, with which the subjects relate through an imaginary relation (re)updating them in their discourse" (De Nardi 2003: 79) –, (re)produced by distinct discursive formations: one communist and another nationalist. With this, I come back to Pêcheux (2014 [1975]: 146) to reaffirm that the meaning is not in the forms. I also emphasize its non-stability and non-fixity since, as seen with the relocation of the sculptures, the meanings have shifted, allowing other meanings to be attributed. In other words, "interpretation – whether in the process of production or reading – only occurs because of the conformity and conformation of memory" (Mittmann 2008: 117). Still, according to Mittmann,

3 Another example is found in Lithuania: the *Grūto parkas*, founded in 2001, has the same purpose as the *Szoborpark*: to house the sculptures installed in the country during the period of Soviet domination.

> *it is by what can/should be said in the Discursive Formation that certain discourse fragments from the interdiscourse are triggered by memory and others not, sustaining some meanings and not others, or still, signifying, interpreting, in a certain way and not in another. [...] the injunction to interpretation in a certain sense works under the activation of a historical memory already constituted.* (Ibid. 123)

Finally, I share Williams' words: the author states that "the size, location [...] and accessibility of spaces [...] are vital in reaffirming the importance of an event, and often in reshaping its memory," with "spaces themselves constituting meaning by taking on both a physical location and an interpretive perspective" (Williams 2008: 185).

CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to observe that the political-ideological changes resulting from the class struggle are reflected in public, urban, and cultural spaces, constituting various archives under the historical contingencies of the Hungarian context between the 20th and 21st centuries. These transformations align with communist and nationalist discursive formations. From this perspective and following the theoretical approaches of Pêcheux (1994) and Foucault (2013), I reaffirm the historical and ideological determination of the archives: their composition and modes of circulation reveal the political, economic, and ideological interests of social classes, which are often masked by ideological effects of naturalization and stability.

This analysis illustrates how archives are simultaneously products and producers of socio-ideological practices, which are (re)stabilized in different discursive materialities, such as symbols, cities, and shared spaces. It also reveals the functioning of ideology within the superstructure, where the cultural State Ideological Apparatus operates to maintain the ideology of the class holding State power in a given historical period. As Althusser (1996) explains, through control of the (Repressive) State Apparatus and State Ideological Apparatuses, the dominant class asserts its hegemony.

In this context, statues and monuments serve as instruments for manipulating subjects, ideologically interpellating them according to specific State purposes, and homogenizing them through a common narrative. For instance, during Soviet rule, these narratives glorified communist principles, values, and

symbols. Later, the resumption of the "Greater Hungary Nation" discourse opposed Soviet domination, framing it as a dictatorship to be contained and silenced but never forgotten.

Archives, as systems of sayability, thus function as indices of the dominant ideologies possessing State power in specific historical contexts. Initially, they perpetuated Soviet dominance, while later, they symbolically reclaimed Hungarian nationalism, Christian values, and "Magyar" patriotism. This process involved the intervention, appropriation, and (re)determination of the urban cultural Ideological Apparatus by the State. As Fernandes (2011) argues, the manipulation of urban landscapes has consistently been a tool for building pedagogical territories, conveying values, mobilizing masses, and creating narratives that affiliate communities with political ideologies or collective identities such as the nation-state.

The relocation of statues to *Szoborpark*, a fenced, open-air, and less prestigious space, altered their symbolic value. This displacement represents a shift from glorification to a selective remembrance of the past – one that seeks to dominate, contain, and silence certain narratives. However, this "silence" is itself productive, echoing and (re)producing new meanings. Fernandes (2011) describes this as "symbolic de-characterization," but I prefer the term "re-characterization" since the materiality of these objects retains symbolic functioning, albeit in a reconfigured manner, producing new significations within different discursive formations and under different historical contingencies. As Mittmann (2014) asserts, "without a shadow of a doubt, the mode of circulation makes archival documents signify in a particular way."

Meaning, therefore, is never fixed. What appears obvious or evident is shaped by ideological, social, and historical determinations. Meaning is a construction, a process, and ultimately an effect (Pêcheux 2010 [1969]). By analyzing *Szoborpark* through the lens of Pêcheuxtian discourse analysis, I argue that it functions as a text – a signifying space where meaning effects become material. As De Nardi emphasizes,

> *... discourses are woven by history and [...] meanings are only produced by the return to a memory that gives them support and existence. Language without subject, history, or memory is an amorphous element, a pure structure without movement or meaning.* (De Nardi 2003: 80)

In short, in this work, I have refrained from going beyond the archeological character due to its importance for the paper. However, several aspects remain open for further exploration concerning the object I proposed to analyze here, among them the functioning of the statues/the park as images/artworks; the

heterogeneity that constitutes the unity inherent to the representations that compose the park – a topic briefly commented on by Williams: "it may be that the moral significance of different historical acts needs to be neglected and undifferentiated for the park to function as a simple, single statement" (Williams 2008: 194); or, again, regarding a supposed democratic role of *Szoborpark*, the architect of the space, Ákos Eleöd, says that the park is at the same time about dictatorship and democracy since "only democracy can allow us to think freely about dictatorship." (Memento Park Budapest n.d.). However, I question: is this thinking, in fact, free since the sculptures/meanings are (and have been) "taken out of sight," silenced? Freedom provided by prison and conditioned by the State? These are reflections for further analysis.

Last but not least, it is also important to remember the tourist and entertainment aspects that these statues and monuments currently represent. Nowadays, in general, *Szoborpark* serves as one of the many entertainment options in Budapest, a private place offering guided tours, which are primarily attended by foreign tourists eager to learn more about the historical and cultural aspects related to the theme not only in Hungary but throughout Eastern Europe. In other words, the pieces that make up the park can evoke different impacts, whatever these impressions may be: an interesting historical and cultural archive for tourists, a negative memory for those Hungarians who lived through the Soviet dictatorship and authoritarianism, or even "strangely" familiar artifacts, intimately unknown to the new Hungarian generation.

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