The Methodological Framework of the Case Study

This chapter presents a methodological framework of the case study used to critically evaluate the new ideology critique exposed in the preliminary chapters. The main contention of this ideology critique can be summarized as follows: by using a fictional notion of the Real taken from a Žižekian reading of Lacan, we can allow for the production of a critique of ideology in which the truth – the unmasking of the extra-ideological place – becomes not only possible but also necessary as a universal, though fictional, category to make possible the existence of a post-communicative action field as a place in which the ‘validity claim’ of truth in a Habermasian matrix could be saved from being affected by a falsification of truth. The case study chosen is the consensus reached by the discourse of Chilean political elites on the political economy model implemented during the post-Pinochet regime period (1990–2006). The justification and specific research design of the case study are presented later in this chapter. What is important to stress now is that the aim of the methodological design of the case study is to contrast a Habermasian interpretation of the consensus reached by the discourse of Chilean political elites on the political economy model implemented during the post-Pinochet regime period (1990–2006) with that which might result when such an interpretation is subjected to a critique of ideology following a Žižekian approach. On the basis of the conclusions reached in that contrasting interpretative exercise (Habermas versus Žižek), a final re-assessment on the new ideology critique here proposed is offered in the Conclusion of this book.

The strategy of using an empirical case study to revisit a ‘theoretical thesis’, which distances itself from a ‘pure’ conceptual analytical philosophical investigation, demands a complex methodological framework. Indeed, it requires a double research design. On the one hand, it must consider a theoretical defense of a new ideology critique, which has already been developed in Chapter 3 and, on the other, it includes the specific research plan of the empirical case study here presented. Moreover, although the empirical case study might be considered as an autonomous systematic investigation...
in itself, it is mainly used in this work as a strategy to obtain theoretical insights in order that we might return in the interpretative section of this book (Chapter 7 and Conclusion), to re-discuss the accuracy of this new ideology critique. That does not, of course, imply the exclusion of an interpretative level in the case study here considered. However, the important point to bear in mind is that the empirical case study and its research design must be understood as part of a more complex and wider methodological framework, which mainly aims to offer insights into a formulation of a new ideology critique for political analysis.

The methodological approach adopted to analyze the case study is the deep hermeneutic matrix offered by Thompson (1990), which includes three stages: social-historical analysis; formal discursive analysis; and interpretation.

First phase: the socio-historical analysis

The argumentative line of the critique raised by Thompson (1990: 278) against Ricoeur’s deep hermeneutic conception – briefly, that it assumes an excessive ‘semantic autonomy of texts’ from the socio-historical conditions in which the text is produced and received – is followed in this analysis of the socio-historical context in which the case study takes place. Furthermore, this research concurs with Thompson (1990: 282) in assuming that,

The aim of the first phase of socio-historical analysis is to reconstruct the social and historical conditions of the production, circulation and reception of symbolic form. (Ibid.)

However, two modifications are made in this book to Thompson’s first hermeneutic phase described above.

First, although ideology is researched as a meaningful phenomenon expressed through symbols, the notion of symbols used here is mainly restricted to oral semi-structured discourses captured by interviews and translated into written transcriptions. This is not the case in Thompson’s matrix, which also focuses on less structured symbols such as images. Second, in this book, the socio-historical phase is twofold. On the one hand, it focuses on the analysis of the formation and reproduction of social classes, its mobility, its forms of organization, which would exist in the spatio-temporal setting in which the research takes place. Therefore, it does not consider the analysis of any other social structures, such as the division between men and women, that Thompson (1990) expressly incorporates. This is because focusing on a more classical political economy approach rather than on a wider methodological matrix creates more suitable results (for instance, the identification of high levels of income inequality) to contrast Habermas’s communicative rationality with Žižek’s approach, which is the main research proposal of this book. On the other hand, it includes an interpretative historical analysis of the rise and retreat of