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Formation, Social

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Social formation is a Marxist concept referring to the concrete, historical articulation between the capitalist mode of production, persisting precapitalist modes of production, and the institutional context of the economy. The theory of the capitalist mode of production—its elements, functioning at the enterprise level and the level of market relations among enterprises (e.g., processes of competition, concentration, and centralization), and its contradictions, tendencies, and laws of motion—can be found in [Karl Marx's *Capital* \(\[1867\] 1967\)](#) The capitalist mode of production as such is an abstraction, accessible to research only through social formations; that is, through its concrete, historically specific manifestations in nation states, regions within nations (e.g., the South), or regions encompassing nations (e.g., the [European Union](#)). Though Marx (1818–1883) did not define this concept, its meaning and significance can be inferred from his work, particularly from this statement:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labor is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled ... and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire foundation of the economic community which grows out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship between the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers.... which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and ... the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis—the same from the standpoint of its main conditions—due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances. (Marx [1867] 1967, vol. 3, pp. 791–792)

Marx postulates here a necessary, dialectical interrelation between relations of exploitation and political relations, between economic and social systems, a point previously made as follows: “The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness” (Marx [1859] 1970, p. 20). The historical specificity of the relations of production is crucial for understanding the social formation in its universality (i.e., as a capitalist social formation) and in its particularity because, empirically, “the same economic basis” (i.e., the capitalist mode of production) will show “infinite variations” due to a social formation’s unique characteristics among which, the presence and persistence of precapitalist modes of production are of key importance. This is why the study of social formations entails the investigation of the articulation of modes of production; that is, the specific ways in which the capitalist mode of production affects precapitalist modes of production, altering them, modifying them, and even destroying them (Wolpe 1980, p. 2).

[RECENT INTERPRETATIONS](#)

The relationship between the capitalist mode of production, social formations, and social change has been interpreted in determinist and dialectical ways. Literal, atheoretical readings of the work of Marx and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) reduce their views to technological and economic determinism, a result produced also by sophisticated but undialectical readings (e.g., Cohen 1978) that ignore the dialectical nature of Marx’s thought. Marxist concepts are essentially material and social; for example, a machine, in itself, is a physical object that becomes a means of production or a productive force when it enters the production process in the context of historically specific relations of production. Changes in the forces of production occur, it follows, always in the context of political struggles. Cohen, on the other hand, attributes to the productive forces a primary, determinant role in historical change, and he radically divides the social (e.g., relations of production) from the material or extrasocial (i.e., nature, humans, forces of production). Cohen’s undialectical materialism and determinism has to rely, unavoidably, upon transhistorical sources of change: a universal tendency of the productive forces to develop and a “somewhat rational” human nature capable of coping with scarcity (Cohen 1978, pp. 132–160). From this standpoint, then, historical changes are the effect of changes in the forces of production, undialectically understood as mere technological change. Class struggles play no role in historical change for political actors are reduced to rationally adapting to the effects of changing circumstances.

A determinist understanding of Marx would lead social scientists to expect that the penetration of the capitalist mode of production in social formations where precapitalist modes of production are widespread would soon produce qualitative changes in their economic

system (e.g., modification or destruction of the precapitalist modes of production) and their superstructure (e.g., culture, legal, and political institutions). Determinist perspectives, however, underestimate the resilience of the noneconomic characteristics of social formations and the extent to which production is a thoroughly social activity that requires social and cultural conditions of possibility that cannot be instituted by decree. Despite appearances, for example, the drastic economic changes introduced in [Russia](#) after 1917 and in Eastern Europe after [World War II](#) (1939–1945) were, to some extent, superficial, for those countries quickly reverted to capitalism. There are many complex economic and political reasons why revolutionary change did not produce deep and qualitative superstructural changes, but reliance on the determinant and automatic effects of changing the mode of production must have contributed in important ways.

The literature on social formations subject to the penetration of the capitalist mode of production through gradual, nonrevolutionary processes indicates that forms of articulation between the capitalist mode of production and precapitalist modes of production cannot be logically deduced from Marx's theory of the capitalist mode of production. The notion of articulation refers to "the relationship between the reproduction of the capitalist economy on the one hand and the reproduction of productive units organized according to pre-capitalist relations and forces of production on the other" (Wolpe 1980, p. 41). How these processes actually interact varies a great deal from one social formation to another, thus leading to the construction of conflicting perspectives about the nature of social formations: (1) Social formations lack a necessary structure; one mode of production may dominate or several modes of production may be articulated with or without one dominant mode; (2) A social formation's necessary structure may be formed by a dominant mode of production and its conditions of existence, which might include elements of precapitalist modes of production, or it may simply be the effect of the articulation of any number of modes and their respective conditions of existence; (3) Given a dominant mode (e.g., the capitalist mode of production) in any social formation, all other modes will be subordinate to its structures and processes so that they are reduced to mere "forms of existence" of the dominant mode (Wolpe 1980, p. 34).

These and other perspectives entail different implications depending on whether the mode of production is defined in a restricted sense, as a combination of relations and forces of production, or in an extended sense, encompassing linkages among enterprises as well as other economic and political/cultural elements constitutive of the mode of production and conducive to its reproduction over time (e.g., distribution, circulation, exchange, the state) (Wolpe 1980, p. 40; Marx [1859] 1970, pp. 188–199). Because modes of articulation are unique to specific social formations (e.g., in [South Africa](#), racial ideology reproduced and sustained capitalist relations of production [Wolpe 1980, p. 317]; in [Peru](#), agrarian reform contributed to the proletarianization of Indian communities [Bradby 1980, p. 120]), it could be erroneously concluded that social formation and articulation are useless concepts, for their use in research is unlikely to yield testable empirical generalizations.

These concepts are exceedingly important, for they contribute to the adjudication of an important issue in Marxist theory: the extent to which Marx is or is not an economic determinist. The historical and empirical variability in the conditions of reproduction of the capitalist mode of production that is documented through research in social formations and modes of articulation demonstrates the non-determinist nature of Marx's theories.

While the structure, processes, contradictions, and tendencies of the capitalist mode of production remain the same, thus constituting the "innermost secret" of the economic and political structures in social formations where the capitalist mode of production is dominant, the historical conditions for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production vary historically and cross-culturally in the terrain of social formations, where political struggles carried under a variety of banners (class, race, religion, and nationalism) shape the different and specialized outcomes of capitalism's never-ending expansionary tendencies.

Dialectically considered, social formations are the unity between the universal (the capitalist mode of production) and the particular, the concrete conditions within which the capitalist mode of production operates. The concept of social formation, unlike the abstract non-Marxist concept of "society," opens up the possibility of a realistic and historical understanding of social reality, based not on inferences from transhistorical tendencies, functional prerequisites, or concepts of human nature, but upon the historical specificity of the social formations within which capitalism operates.

SEE ALSO [Marx, Karl](#)

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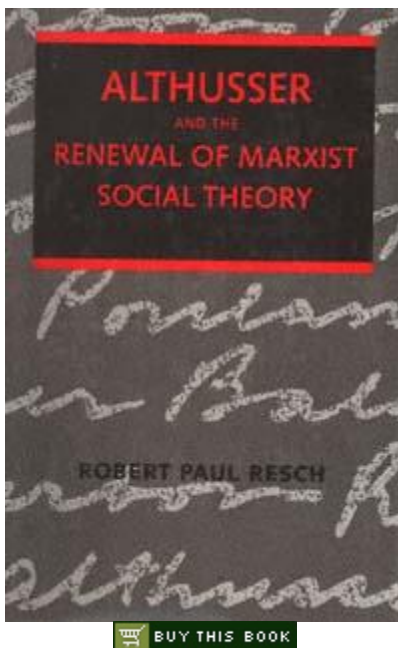
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Chapter 2 Modes of Production and Historical Development



Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory

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In *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, Althusser interrogates Marx's theoretical framework in order to clarify the object and method of historical materialism and to develop general, cross-cultural concepts to facilitate the scientific production of comparative historical knowledge. Thus Althusser's concern for the conceptual foundations of historical research also involves an explicit and vigorous defense of the scientific nature of historical inquiry as initiated by Marx. While Althusser is highly critical of certain forms of traditional Marxist and non-Marxist historical thinking—reductionist concepts of causality (as well as the refusal to recognize society as both structured and determined), the use of anthropocentric or teleological categories as explanatory principles of historical process, the reflectionist tendency to posit a perfect correspondence or relation of identity between concepts and their real-world referents (as well as the historicist tendency to deny the validity of general concepts altogether)—the objective of his critique is constructive, not destructive.¹

The Structural Marxist problematic is predicated on a realist view of science expressed succinctly by Althusser in the form of a "materialist thesis" asserting "the primacy of the real over thought about the real" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 87). For Althusser, objective reality precedes and circumscribes the historically relative production of knowledge, and therefore it is possible to reject both extreme relativism and extreme objectivism for a philosophical position that recognizes

Introductory Conclusion

In designating these remarks as both an introduction and a conclusion, I am not attempting to subvert the modalities of time and space or to call into question the boundaries between and within texts. My intentions are less exalted and more substantive. Read as an introductory essay, these remarks are intended to provoke those readers, the vast majority of whom, I suspect, will find a book defending Marxist analysis quaint if not downright foolish. I wish to confront such readers with what I view as fundamental shortcomings of contemporary post-Marxist and postmodern social theories, in particular, with the mind-numbing ideological conformity on which so much of their mind-boggling methodological and theoretical innovations are based. Read as a conclusion, I summarize certain aspects of Structural Marxist analysis that distinguish it as a major, modernist rethinking of Marxism and that demonstrate, in my opinion, the ongoing value of Marxism as a scientific research program. As both introduction and conclusion, these pages call the reader's attention to the momentous global developments of the past decade in such a way as to challenge the prevailing post-Marxist and postmodern consensus regarding the "exhaustion" of Marxism and modernism. While there is no point in denying the declining influence of Marxism and modernism on contemporary debates, I view this decline as a regressive aberration whose explanation must be sought in the politics rather than the validity of social theory.

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The Vicissitudes of Structural Marxism

It is now some twenty-five years since Louis Althusser's books *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* intervened in the febrile political culture of Paris and established Structural Marxism as an alternative to Saussurean semiology, Western Marxism, and the various post-Marxisms that proliferated during the sixties.¹³ In its brief lifetime Structural Marxism has developed into certainly the broadest and arguably the most powerful theoretical project to have emerged since World War II. Althusser's own work, that of his associates and students, and the efforts of the heterogeneous group of philosophers, social scientists, literary critics, and political activists influenced by him constitute a formidable body of knowledge spread across a broad range of human cultures and theoretical problems. Over the decades Structural Marxism has more than held its own in sometimes fruitful, often virulent, polemics with most of the major schools of social theory—the phenomenological poststructuralism of Derrida, the structural-functional historicism of the *Annales* School, the Nietzschean postmodernism of Deleuze and Foucault, the Saussurean psychoanalysis of Lacan, the universal pragmatics of Habermas, and the humanist historicism of E.

P. Thompson, to name only the most prominent.^[2]

Such "staying power" is all the more remarkable because Althusser and many of his colleagues were members of the French Communist Party (PCF) and thus firmly committed to communism as a global anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movement. Critics of the theoretical dogmas of "vulgar Marxism" as well as anti-Stalinist advocates of Eurocommunism and greater mass participation within the Party, many of the Althusserians nevertheless firmly rejected many of the theoretical tenets of so-called Western Marxism that held a predominate position within the academic Left in Europe and the United States during the decade of the sixties.^[3] In addition to being anti-Stalinist, Western Marxism espoused a Hegelian interpretation of Marxist philosophy—one that emphasized "totality" at the expense of economic determination and "negativity" rather than class struggle as the "dialectical" motor of history. Western Marxism maintained that capitalism had solved its economic contradictions and had eliminated the working class as a politically relevant concept. Capitalism became a system of "domination," not exploitation, and Western Marxists turned to methodological individualism first to complement but increasingly to subvert their monolithic, essentialist concept of totality. "Alienated" individuals and "re-

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ified" culture became explanatory principles for radical theorists faced with a capitalist society that had apparently subverted the dialectic of negativity by means of economic prosperity, representative democracy, and mass culture.

The more invulnerable capitalism appeared to be, the more voluntarist the concept of practice and the more irrationalist the foundations of radical social theory became until, finally, irrationalism and voluntarism were united in the concept of *praxis*. Firmly rejecting the idea of Marxism as an objective science, Western Marxism turned, via Hegel, to the early writings of Marx, in particular to *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, to fashion "Marxist humanism"—a combination of libertarian voluntarism and ethical idealism presumably more appropriate to the unlimited, albeit alienating, bounty of "post-industrial" capitalism. This neo-anarchism became the dominant ideology of the New Left and signaled a shift from Hegelian Marxism to Nietzschean *gauchisme* among radical intellectuals. Courageous in its rejection of racism, sexism, imperialism, commodification, and bureaucracy, the New Left was nonetheless a middle-class reform movement crippled by its simplistic reduction of social struggle to a contest between "individuals" and "power." Evincing little concern for the economic taproot and class structure of power, the New Left presented no serious challenge to the hegemony of capitalism.

Althusser and his followers relentlessly criticized the theoretical weaknesses and the political illusions of Western Marxism and the New Left while at the same time charting a new and brilliant theoretical course between the Scylla of voluntarism and the Charybdis of economism. Far from evading the criticisms leveled against scientific Marxism by its critics, the Althusserians focused on precisely those areas—the relative autonomy of ideology and politics, epistemological relativism, social subjectivity and practice, the production and reception of art and literature, the popular-democratic state, pre-capitalist modes of production—which non-Marxists and Western Marxists alike have regarded as decisive refutations of "orthodox" Marxism. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Structural Marxism constitutes a comprehensive and largely successful response to a century of accumulated problems within the Marxist tradition.

However, in attempting to reconcile his profound theoretical achievements with his deeply felt hopes for egalitarian reform within the French Communist Party and for renewal and solidarity within the European and world communist movements, Althusser created a tragic

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impasse that brought him great personal anguish, an eventual break with the Party leadership, and a growing disillusion with the political impotence of his own work.^[4] Forced revolutionary optimism and strident Eurocommunist political rhetoric could not offset the sobering, even pessimistic assessment of contemporary capitalism produced by Structural Marxist analysis. Similarly, Althusser's critique of Stalinism and his call for reform could hardly compete with the bitter legacy of dictatorship in Eastern Europe and decades of Soviet domination of European communism, especially the PCF. At every turn the PCF leadership demonstrated its political incompetence and its distrust of the rank and file. In May 1968 the Party leadership subverted the largest general strike in French history in return for purely conventional concessions, while its opportunistic shift to a Popular Front electoral strategy in the seventies had no discernible effect on the authoritarian bureaucratic structure of the party. Furthermore, the decisive shift of the PCF away from Bolshevik revolutionary slogans toward a Eurocommunist vocabulary stressing national and democratic social transformation took place at precisely the time a national reformist strategy was being negated by international economic developments. Unable to halt growing middle- and working-class support for the Socialist Party (PS) or counter *gauchiste* enthusiasm for Mitterand's shotgun marriage of modernization and *autogestion*, the PCF executed another unfortunate shift in the late seventies, a return to sectarian, blue-collar workerism with disturbing racist and chauvinist overtones. Not surprisingly, the PCF's electoral fortunes continued to decline during the eighties—despite the failure of the Socialist government's reform program and the triumph of neo-liberalism over *autogestionnaire* socialism within the PS.

In any case, despite Althusser's opposition to the tactics of the PCF, his communism has provided a

convenient pretext for either obloquy or indifference from both the Right and the Left. Not only has the stigma of communism legitimized scurrilous distortions of Althusser's work, but it has also permitted critics of Structural Marxism to ignore the devastating critiques leveled by Althusser against their own theoretical assumptions and methodologies. Even sympathetic critics are often misled by Althusser's communism; serious works that concede the significance of Structural Marxism, books such as Alex Callinicos's *Althusser's Marxism* (1976), Ted Benton's *Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism* (1984), and Gregory Elliott's *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (1987), fail to grasp adequately the significance of Structural

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Marxism because they refuse to separate Althusser's theoretical achievements from his failure to provide a political solution to the "crisis of Marxism" and the global reverses experienced by the Left during the last decade.

The capitalist accumulation crisis of the seventies and the savage restructuring of global capitalism during the eighties may have created propitious conditions for a return to Althusser's thought and a relaxation of the *cordon sanitaires* surrounding Structural Marxism. To explain the dramatic shift from prosperity to austerity in the capitalist heartlands, we have little choice but to admit the theoretical failures of post-Marxist and postmodern social theory and to revive Marxist principles of economic determination and class struggle. Furthermore, events of the past decade have effectively discredited two illusions that have hitherto served as impassable obstacles to a renewal of Marxist social theory: first, the illusion of capitalism with a human face and unlimited bounty; and second, the illusion of socialism as a command economy controlled by an oligarchic political dictatorship. Unfortunately, these twin illusions still persist as integral assumptions within contemporary social theory; until they are eliminated, they will continue to inhibit our capacity to comprehend contemporary and historical developments.

Emperors	Without	Clothes:
Contemporary Fashions in Social Theory		

The repression of Marxism has seen a corresponding revival of alternative traditions ranging from neo-liberal rationalism (Rawls, Habermas, Elster), functional pluralism (*Annales*, Geertz, Turner), and voluntarist irrationalism (Foucault, Deleuze, Baudrillard).^[5] Divergent as these tendencies appear at first sight, they share a large common ground. All of them reject economic determination and class struggle as explanatory principles, of course, and all share a hostility to Marxism that is more or less fundamental to their traditions and whose significance can hardly be understated. Moreover, each of these movements subscribes, in varying degrees and sometimes with sharply divergent emphasis, to methodological principles of pluralism, relativism, and individualism—a formidable post-Marxist, postmodern triumvirate whose vulgarization in recent years has occluded the very possibility of explaining why things happen in history.

Pluralism, relativism, and individualism work together and reinforce

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each other, but for heuristic purposes we may treat them separately. Pluralism signifies causal indeterminacy—an emphasis on the simultaneity of diverse social phenomena as well as their interrelationship and interaction without, however, any regard for their relative efficacy or causal significance. Ultimately such indeterminacy degenerates into vulgar pluralism: everything, somehow, causes everything else and yet no single thing has any determinative power at all. The process of everything causing everything else produces, willy-nilly, something called "culture" and, over time, a cultural condition called "modernity" (and now postmodernity). Relativism embraces a historicist-hermeneutic view of knowledge whereby what we know is relative to our own culture and what we know of history is doubly constrained by a communication gap between cultures. Ultimately this view degenerates into vulgar relativism, a collective solipsism that reduces history to a literary genre or an exercise in translation: knowledge of history exists, if at all, only in fragments and impressions (or agglomerations of the same) whose validity, uncertain in any case, declines precipitously with any attempt to move beyond the struggle for communication to statements of fact aspiring to the status of scientific explanation. Individualism is anthropocentric; it places an autonomous human being at the center of historical explanation and conceptualizes history from the perspective of the consciousness and practice of individuals. Ultimately such "humanism" degenerates into vulgar individualism: history as a struggle of "people," undifferentiated in their uniqueness, struggling for fundamental yet amorphous "freedoms" against an oppressive but confoundedly hydra-headed "power."

Although it is no refutation of these principles to point out their historical association with inegalitarian and anti-socialist intellectual movements, their revival, phoenix-like, from the ashes of Hegelian Marxism and the New Left is surely not without significance. Both neo-liberal rationalism and postmodern irrationalism are firmly rooted in distinct traditions of bourgeois meritocracy—economic individualism and romantic individuality respectively. The genealogies of these traditions—on the one hand the "democratic" subordination of political equality to economic inequality in Bentham and J. S. Mill, and on the other the "humanist" subordination of mass mediocrity to an

aristocracy of spirit in Goethe and Nietzsche—are sufficient testimony to their profoundly elitist animus. The elitism of functional pluralist tendencies is only slightly more sophisticated. From Saint-Simon and Comte through Durkheim and Parsons, this technocratic tradition has ac-

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cepted elitism simply by denying its existence, masking domination and exploitation with euphemistic assertions of the cooperative nature of the social division of labor, the organic interdependence of social structures, and the autonomy of culture in relation to political and economic structures. That tacit acceptance of elitism and the ubiquitous evasion of exploitation reveal an underlying complicity beneath the superficial opposition of Left and Right in contemporary social theory—and the real source of its dramatic and general decline in recent years.

Postmodernism has played a particularly prominent role in the decline of social theory.^[6] Postmodern social theory combines a populist aesthetics (based on the autonomy of culture, the abolition of distinctions between art and mass culture, and a presumed affinity between the discontents of a bohemian avant-garde and those of mass consumers serviced by the culture industry) with a neo-anarchist political philosophy (premised on the vitalist "will to power" of Nietzsche and the ontological mysticism of Heideggerian phenomenology). Postmodernism oscillates between two polar extremes, cynical accommodation and libertarian dissidence. The former tendency, perhaps best expressed in the work of Jean Baudrillard, denies the possibility of objective knowledge of social formations and their history not simply by asserting the principle of epistemological relativism but even more radically by moving beyond epistemological relativism to ontological relativism. Baudrillard's "hyperreality" of self-generating signs detached from any real signified (and from the exigencies of the capitalist mode of production as well) abolishes meaningful differences between ideas and objects and dissolves the very distinction between critique and affirmation. Such radicalism in philosophy can produce only passivity in politics. While Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality may have a certain descriptive value, it offers no explanation of contemporary culture. Indeed, Baudrillard's conceptual framework preempts the possibility of such an explanation, and it is difficult to resist the suspicion that this is precisely the source of his appeal. Sooner or later, explicitly or implicitly, by design or default, postmodern cynics conclude that in society, as in theory, anything goes.

In contrast to its fraternal twin, dissident postmodernism revels in the obstreperous rhetoric of political rebellion. Revealing and resisting the spontaneous generation and diffusion of "power" throughout society, dissident postmodernists, such as Michel Foucault, claim to have discovered the only form of radicalism appropriate for defending "freedom" in "post-industrial" society. However, postmodern dissidence

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purchases its radical credentials at a high cost. By abandoning allegedly "totalitarian" global analysis for fragmentary "genealogies" of particular social phenomena, postmodern rebels end up hypostatizing both the "power" they resist and the "freedom" they defend. Even less willing to admit the economic taproot of power and domination than were their forerunners in the New Left, dissident postmodernists attempt to resist power on an ad hoc basis—everywhere, in all forms, and all at once. Ultimately such resistance collapses under the magnitude of its task and the futility of its method. At the point of exhaustion, postmodern dissidents capitulate to the greater wisdom of their cynical and accommodating counterparts. In the end, "resist everything" is merely the flip side of "anything goes." If everything is bad, it is not long before bad begins to look, if not exactly good, at least irresistible.

The domestication of dissident postmodernism in the eighties (the shift of Lyotard and Foucault from *gauchisme* to "Americanism" are only more serious examples of a general phenomenon parodied by the career of Baudrillard) substantiates Fredric Jameson's contention that postmodernism reflects, rather than critiques, "the cultural logic" of multinational capitalism. The short-lived predominance of postmodern dissidence during the seventies deserves further study. I suggest, provisionally, that dissident postmodernism has functioned as the loyal opposition during the birth pangs of multinational capitalism and in this respect has been simply the ideological obverse of the New Right. The anti-Marxist or post-Marxist rhetoric of postmodernism is obviously crucial in this regard. The more blatant effects of economic determination and class struggle became during the seventies and eighties, the more stubbornly they were denied by postmodern theorists. Indeed, a large part of what is left of the New Left has rationalized its crushing defeat by blaming it on traces of Marxism still at work within the radical movement and its social theory.

As resistance became pointless, postmodernism turned exclusively to its central preoccupation with aestheticizing rather than explaining reality. Assimilation and adaptation have thus become the final legacy of postmodern social theory. This outcome is not really surprising because the bohemian individuality endemic to postmodernism is at bottom a variant of the functional pluralist assertion of the autonomy of culture. The elective affinity between postmodernism and functional pluralism is manifested in the appropriation of cultural anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas by postmodernists. While I do not deny the value of certain insights of these anthropolo-

gists, I take exception to the reification of culture on which their work is based. Such reification, it seems to me, preempts causal explanation of cultural phenomena and rests content with superficial, albeit clever, descriptions and interpretations of symbolic structures and practices. It is one of the arguments of this book that starting from the "autonomy" of culture or the "freedom" of individuals begs central questions that any respectable social science must confront: namely, why given cultures and given individuals act in the ways that they do. However suggestively, postmodern cultural anthropologists have for the most part simply reproduced and even compounded the deficiencies of their Durkheimian and Weberian predecessors.

But it is not the postmodernists alone who have contributed to the decline of social theory during the last two decades. Competing vigorously for an expanded share of the lucrative post-Marxist market, neo-liberal rationalist problematics (pragmatism, social contracts, decision theory, etc.) have experienced a great resurgence as well. Members of the neo-liberal Left such as Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls, and Jon Elster claim to provide a sober, no-nonsense alternative to the rhetorical posturing and flamboyant nihilism of postmodernism—without, however, threatening sacred post-Marxist premises of pluralism, relativism, and individualism or violating taboos on the principles of economic determination and class struggle. Whether they define "rationality" as a transcendental structure of human communication, as a socially useful fiction of political consensus, or simply as an old-fashioned rational-choice theory, the neo-liberals are every bit as uninterested in explaining why things happen—in this case the relation between the "rationality" of a culture, its mode of production, and the hegemony of its ruling class—as are their postmodern colleagues.

There is something eerie about contemporary discussions of rationality, rights, and justice. Such discussions—organized around notions of free and equal individuals possessing a commonly held rationality uncontaminated by class power and engaged in distortion-free communication and decision making—blithely ignore the elementary fact that such conditions do not and cannot obtain in capitalist societies. Surely, one would think, the sheer irrelevance of such discussion to the global economic *Gleichschaltung* of the eighties (and the ideological and political restructuring following in its wake) would preclude their proliferation. If not irrelevance, then surely the transparent ideological bias of their assumptions would undermine their credibility. Surely a generation of philosophers who had cut their teeth on Lukács and the

Frankfurt School would immediately recognize the "individual" as posited by the new utilitarians to be a self-serving stereotype of the professional middle class. Surely they would recognize in the new rationalism an eclectic hodgepodge of ahistorical, class-blind atavisms haphazardly culled from neoclassical economic theory, behaviorist psychology, and analytical philosophy. Surely they would see in new theoretical models of "communicative rationality," "distributive justice," and "game theory" Panglossian caricatures of frankly apologetic and openly elitist concepts of Cold War political science such as "equilibrium democracy" and "political pluralism."

Obviously this has not been the case. Purveyors of visions of democratic angels dancing on the head of capitalist pins may be justly accused of peddling wish fulfillment to the middle classes, but this is precisely the source of their strength. Taking rights seriously is an alternative to taking equality seriously. Talking about distortion-free communication and distributive justice is a way of not talking about ideological hegemony and economic exploitation. Decision theory and methodological individualism are ways of evading the facts of class power and the absence of personal autonomy. Collectively, the various neo-liberal rationalisms divert the attention of social theory from the way things really are and why in order to speculate upon how things that can never be might actually be if only they could be.

Academic portfolios that temper elitism with reason and morality provide ideological values that apparently more than offset their theoretical liabilities in the minds of cautious liberal investors. Alternatively, postmodernism provides a bolder entrepreneurial alternative for intellectual raiders seeking quick academic returns through swashbuckling radicalism unencumbered by intellectual responsibility. Such is the depressing reality of what Althusser, almost alone, dares to call the class struggle in theory. Having abandoned economic determination and class struggle as explanatory principles, contemporary social theory has cheerfully abdicated its obligation to explain why things happen. During an age of (uneven) prosperity and global Cold War such behavior was at least comprehensible; in a period of global austerity and untrammelled capitalist restructuring it is simply reprehensible. In the wake of the collapse of capitalism with a human face and the bankruptcy of all the theoretical enterprises whose revenues depended on it, perhaps we may begin to see a devaluation of junk bond concepts whose ideological yields are unsecured by explanatory value.

Marxism and the Collapse of Capitalism with a Human Face

The failure of a kinder and gentler capitalism makes possible a revival of Marxist social theory not only by discrediting capitalist humanism as a viable political ideology but also by bringing into strong relief the existence of the professional middle class as a distinct and relatively privileged *class*, not a "life-style" more or less synonymous with citizenship.^[2] This class—existing in a contradictory position between the ruling class, which actually owns the means of production, and the white- and blue-collar fractions of the working class—is something like a new petty bourgeoisie. It possesses, in the form of symbolic capital (credentials, degrees, and bureaucratic positions), assets analogous to the personal property of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, and it fiercely defends these assets against threats of "devaluation" from below (from the working class seeking equal opportunity) and from above (from the capitalist class always anxious to de-certify and de-skill labor power). Despite its contradictory class position, however, the professional middle class overwhelmingly supports capitalism. Indeed, the hegemony of the capitalist system relies heavily on an ideology of meritocracy whose truth is manifested in the existence of this class and whose allure assures the compliance of the working class for as long as upward mobility is even a remote possibility.

The restructuring of global capitalism has made the illusions and limitations of upward mobility more transparent than they have ever been before. It is abundantly clear that neither the small liberal humanist fraction of this new petty bourgeoisie (concentrated in the public sector, the media, and the universities) nor its larger social Darwinist fraction (concentrated in the private sector as corporate managers and providers of professional services to capital) speaks for "the people," much less the working class. If the social Darwinist fraction of the professional middle class has arrogantly and ruthlessly spearheaded the attack on the white- and blue-collar workers, the liberal humanist fraction has cravenly submitted, with only occasional crocodile tears, to the "inevitability" and even the "rationality" of the onslaught.

Having abandoned economic determination and class struggle as explanatory principles, neither the postmodern nor the neo-liberal Left was able to comprehend, much less resist, the restructuring of global capitalism. Both were equally unable to respond to the politics of re-

sentment created by the New Right to manipulate shamelessly the fears and anxieties of those endangered by economic dislocation. The befuddlement of the "radical" fringe of the professional middle class paled in comparison to the ideological trauma experienced by its much larger and much more influential "liberal" fraction. Unwilling to criticize capitalism—that is, unwilling to point out that it was capitalism and not the "welfare state" that was destroying the standard of living of the working class—liberal politicians and social theorists were struck dumb by events. After decades of attacking the secondary "dysfunctions" of capitalism while constantly expanding and justifying its primary relationships of exploitation and domination (and carving out a comfortable class position for themselves in the process), liberal members of the professional middle class were powerless to explain the end of prosperity or escape its immediate political consequence—a right-wing populist pogrom directed against themselves.

The web of illusions spun by liberals during the age of prosperity—illusions about the end of class struggle and economic crises, illusions about the autonomy and neutrality of the state, illusions of capitalist democracy protecting "the people" from "special interests"—legitimized a particular regime of capitalist accumulation, one that promoted mass consumption coordinated with mass production and stabilized by an interventionist state. This regime of accumulation, referred to by Structural Marxists as Fordism, emerged in the aftermath of World War II out of fears of a return to pre-war depression and class conflict and was designed to accelerate the valorization of capital within the national market, maintain full employment and rising wages, and create a stable political consensus for capitalism. Pioneered by the United States and exported to Europe after the war, Fordism did introduce a period of unprecedented, if short-lived, prosperity throughout the capitalist metropolises—a prosperity flawed only by a dizzying increase in corporate wealth and power and by a relentless subsumption of everyday life to commodification and the cash nexus. Prosperity lent credence to the liberal web of illusions—so successfully, in fact, that the working class ceased to believe in the reality of its proletarian status. White- and blue-collar workers accepted the illusion, reinforced through a formidable network of ideological apparatuses, that they were primarily "middle-income" consumers and not "working-class" producers.

Unfortunately, Fordism was a national capitalist structure inscribed within an international capitalist mode of production. The interna-

tional integration of capitalism engineered by the United States and imposed on Europe and Japan by American economic supremacy has proven to be the most fundamental creation of the post-World War II decades. With the recovery of Europe and Japan, Fordism became increasingly dysfunctional for capitalist accumulation and

increasingly "irrational" from the perspective of capital. Pressures of inflation and competition during the sixties produced a classic confrontation between the standard of living of the working class and the profitability of capital during the seventies, an "accumulation crisis" whose outcome during the eighties—economic restructuring for capital and "austerity" for everyone else—was a foregone conclusion. However, given the fabric of lies that had been woven around Fordism, the international economic crisis provoked large numbers of working-class voters to strike out not against capitalism, the real cause of the problem, but against the only "conceivable" causes—"permissive liberals" (incompetent administrators who had lost touch with the work ethic) and "the idle poor" (economic parasites who, like the liberals, lived comfortably on welfare provided by the largesse of hardworking Americans). The capitalist ruling class, architects and beneficiaries of Fordism, gratefully turned the intense but misguided resentments of middle-income workers—the real targets and ultimate victims of economic restructuring—against a series of carefully selected political and ideological scapegoats whose only common denominator was their lack of economic power.

Sadly, it is only now, after the internationalization of capital has reduced their vote to insignificance and their middle-income lifestyle to standards unthinkable two decades ago, that the majority of citizens in the capitalist heartlands of North America and Europe are beginning to realize they were duped by the Thatchers and Reagans of the world. In the face of steadily declining standards of living for the working-class majority and steadily increasing wealth concentrated in the hands of a minuscule capitalist ruling class and a shrinking minority of professionals and managers, is it possible for a social theory committed to telling the truth about capitalism to re-emerge? As illusions of upward mobility yield to the realities of class polarization, perhaps recognition of their working-class status will cease to elicit reactions of disbelief, shame, or outrage from the majority of "the people." The illusions of capitalist democracy and upward mobility may become harder to sell—perhaps economic determination and class struggle might even re-enter the lexicon of social theorists for whom the end of class struggle has been axiomatic for decades.

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Marxism and the Collapse of Socialism with an Inhuman Face

The second great obstacle to a renewal of Marxist social theory has been the existence of "state socialist" dictatorships—societies characterized by a ruling class of bureaucrats controlling the means and distribution of "state-owned" production through a non-democratic monopoly of political power. The collapse of Stalinism has finally discredited the notion that socialism is simply a matter of the development of the forces of production without regard to the question of popular control over them.^[8] At the same time, centrally planned and administered "command" economies have failed to provide a sufficiently prosperous alternative to market mechanisms. These deficiencies cannot be laid entirely at the door of either economic backwardness or the exigencies of Cold War military production. The lessons are clear enough; socialism without democracy is a sham, and socialism without some market mechanisms is impossible to sustain. However, these lessons do not, as we so often hear, sprinkle historical holy water on capitalism: democracy without socialism and market mechanisms without democratic control over economic power are hardly less of a sham than Stalinism. With respect to democracy, the collapse of socialism's inhuman face is simply the obverse of the collapse of capitalism with a human face: either democracy means democratic control over the means of production and the process of accumulation, or it means nothing at all. The absence of either political or economic equality is always exploitive, and arguments masking inequalities of economic or political power behind rhetoric of political rights, social cooperation, or economic efficiency are never more than rationalizations of class exploitation.

State ownership of the means of production may or may not be a necessary condition for socialism, but it is most definitely not a sufficient condition. The collapse of Stalinism signals the end of a tradition of revolutionary dictatorship that privileges anti-democratic and coercive means over purportedly egalitarian and humanistic ends. Equally significant has been the failure of centrally planned command economies of the Soviet type. Not only has the Soviet attempt to "leap over capitalism" and to move from economic backwardness to industrial prosperity by means of cadre mobilization and party coercion rivaled the worst aspects of capitalist development, but it has also failed to catch up with, let alone surpass, capitalism. The collapse of Bolshevism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe signifies the failure of what

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Stalin called "socialism in one country" and a necessary return to Marx and Engels's conception of capitalism as a world-historical force whose ultimate development is a global mode of production.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels rejected the possibility of "socialism in one country." They understood that no economic system can outproduce capitalism because no conceivable system of coercion is capable of extorting as much surplus value from its workers or more effectively compelling its ruling class to

expand and innovate. No social system, in short, is more "totalitarian" than capitalism. Understanding the nature of capitalism, Marx and Engels understood that communism as a "local event"—that is, socialism in one country—would be destroyed by its relative backwardness, by its "limiting effect on the universalization" of the "intolerable powers of capital." The possibility of communism presupposes the development of capitalism as a global system whose class structure is truly international and homogeneous. Capitalism is a global process whereby "separate individuals . . . with the broadening of their activity into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them . . . a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance, turns out to be the *world market*" (Marx and Engels 1978, 163).

If capitalism is indeed a world-historical force and its development global rather than national, then its transformation must also be understood globally rather than nationally. Capitalism will disintegrate only when it has become general, when the "universal development of productive forces . . . produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the 'propertyless' mass (universal competition) [and] makes each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others" (Marx and Engels 1978, 161-62). The contradictions of capitalism—the elimination of real scarcity by creating artificial scarcity, the integration and interdependence of social production by reproducing class inequalities of wealth and power, the development of productive technology by producing crises, dislocation, and suffering—become progressively more irrational and intolerable as capitalism eliminates its rivals and begins to collapse in on itself in an orgy of "creative destruction" whose only real purpose will be the restoration of profitability for the ruling class. However, until it has subsumed completely every aspect of social existence in every region of global space, capitalism will always appear progressive and will always be able to resolve temporarily its contradictions by expansion as well as destruction.

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The expansion of capitalism is inseparable from class struggle—a power struggle between wages and profits whose ultimate stake is democratic control over the means and distribution of production. The lesson to be learned from the collapse of both Stalinism and Fordism is that this struggle can no longer be conceived in purely national terms. As stereotypes of proletarian factory workers have given way to more complex concepts of a working class segmented into white- and blue-collar fractions, so stereotypes of "Third World" revolutions must yield to the reality of globally integrated production and the internationalization-multinationalization of the class struggle. The hardships caused by the dissolution of Fordism in the capitalist heartlands are now inseparable from the sufferings of working people in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, who daily watch their hopes for democracy and prosperity sacrificed to the ambition of their professional middle class and to the harsh reality of the transition to capitalist relations of production. As daunting as this process of globalization seems to us now, the final outcome of capitalism's multinational restructuring will be to put democratic socialism back on the table—internationally, once again, but this time at a much higher level of socio-economic development and integration. The development of capitalism is, after all, the development of the conditions of the possibility for socialism: "communism is not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself," it is rather "the real movement which abolishes the present state of things" (Marx and Engels 1978, 162). As former communist countries join the capitalist global economy, they will discover soon enough the exploitation behind the opulence displayed in our television commercials and the class domination concealed behind our fervent enthusiasm for democracy. Most, I suspect, should look to Turkey or Brazil rather than Western Europe or the United States for a more realistic glimpse of their immediate future. But this is not really the point; what is most significant is the collapse of the last formidable obstacle to the internationalization of capitalism and the internationalization of social democracy. Those depressed by the thought that we are only now at the end of the beginning of global capitalism may take heart in the fact that we have also arrived at the beginning of the end.

Stalinism, let us not forget, was a monster created by the development of global capitalism. Its dissolution in no way validates Cold War rhetoric centered around the concept of totalitarianism—a term introduced as much to distort as to comprehend the nature of the Bolshevik Revolution.^[2] While pluralism, relativism, and individualism deny or

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trivialize the significance of class exploitation and domination in capitalist societies, their maleficent antithesis, totalitarianism, projects onto the history of the Soviet Union a dystopian fable of an even harsher oppression stemming from the absence of capitalism. The complicity between the diatribes that passed for Soviet studies during the Cold War decades and contemporary post-Marxist social theory is worth noting because its persistence continues to be a major ideological obstacle to the revival of Marxist analysis. Vulgar pluralism, relativism, and individualism are all rooted in an elitist conception of freedom whose antithesis, egalitarian democracy and collective ownership of the means of production, must be portrayed as the absence of liberty, the end of history, and the loss of individuality. Totalitaria, if I may be forgiven the name, is a truly paradoxical space, a place where oppression is everywhere and nowhere, completely irrational in its lack of purpose but terrifyingly rational in its purposeful application. Most significant, economic exploitation and class struggle do not exist in Totalitaria, and thus a Marxist analysis of its structures of domination is ruled out of court. Explanation devolves instead on a

Manichaeian conflict between "liberty" and "oppression," a mythical contest whose enabling concept is the striving individual for whom liberty exists only as a predatory meritocracy—a zero-sum struggle for power—and for whom oppression is defined as any interference with the right of "talented" elites to exploit the "mediocre" masses. This view of the world, of course, is that of the professional middle class, and it is embraced enthusiastically by both its liberal and conservative fractions, each as unwilling as the other to call into question the assumptions on which rest their class freedom from proletarianization and their class power over the working class. Even as its theoretical bankruptcy was demonstrated by the "unthinkable" phenomenon of Gorbachev, the oxymoronic anti-Marxist myth of Totalitaria continues to thrive not because it explains anything—it never explained anything—but because it corresponds to the deepest class fear of the professional middle class (the dangers of participatory democracy and economic equality) while preserving its fondest class illusion (the identity of its class interest with the very principles of freedom and justice).

On the Concept of Modernism

Surely the least recognized aspect of Althusser's thought has been its modernist character. In the course of defending historical knowledge as

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scientifically valid, Althusser has initiated an original and powerful modernist renewal of Marxism, one that successfully avoids the extremes of reductionism and pluralism, objectivism and subjectivism, mechanism and voluntarism. In defending Althusser's work as a modernist science of history, I am necessarily contesting the view that modernism has been exhausted or superseded and reaffirming the modernist critique of positivist, idealist, and historicist tendencies that preceded it. Defining the term modernism is, of course, controversial.¹²⁰ Most generally it refers to the cultural outlook of European intellectuals from the late nineteenth century to the present (or at least until the advent of postmodernism in the sixties). However, such a conception is so panoramic as to include almost everything of significance written or produced after 1890 and so eclectic as to render itself virtually useless for analytical purposes. To formulate a more precise and adequate concept of modernism, it is necessary to identify those intellectual characteristics that were, if not absolutely new at the end of the nineteenth century, at least newly dominant.

Modernism—to construct a historical concept appropriate to phenomena as diverse as cubism and constructivism, Saussurean linguistics, the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, Freudian psychoanalysis, Joyce's *Ulysses*, the cinema of Eisenstein, Brechtian theater, the sociologies of Weber, Simmel, and Durkheim, the philosophies of Frege, Rickert, and Mach—is an attitude toward knowledge, representation, and experience marked by a peculiar combination of ontological realism and epistemological formalism. Modernism evinced a greatly increased sense of the complexity of the object world, but even more important, to explain this new complexity modernists were compelled to posit the existence of abstract structures and forces underlying empirical reality. The existence of causal mechanisms about which our knowledge could never be certain or complete rendered physical, social, and human nature disturbingly less familiar than they had seemed to the nineteenth-century mind and significantly altered the terms of traditional oppositions such as those between art and science, emotion and reason, faith and knowledge, idealism and materialism, and freedom and determination. At the same time, the process of representation itself became a major preoccupation of modernism. The modernist philosopher, artist, or scientist was increasingly conscious of the formal structures that significantly determined his or her perception of the objective world and of the implications of such determination for the production and expression of meaning. From symbolic logic to non-repre-

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sentational painting, abstraction not only provided a more rigorous and more fundamental access to reality but also demanded an awareness of the structured limits of that access, the irreducible gap between reality and our capacity to grasp and communicate it. Applied to the very production of meaning, abstract formalism created yet another breach within a variety of received traditions ranging from scientific positivism through idealist philosophy to romantic art and literature—and, of course, within the various political theories and conceptions of history deriving their inspiration from these sources.

The synthesis of ontological realism and epistemological formalism realized within the modernist tendency toward abstraction is not unique to the European turn of the century. However, this period is a watershed insofar as abstract formalism suddenly rose to predominance in all areas of intellectual and cultural production. In light of contemporary debates, two points regarding this historic shift of consciousness need to be made. First, it is important to remember how devastating the new modernist outlook was to empiricist and romantic views of the individual as a unified subject by whom and for whom reality is created and who is capable of grasping the truth of reality directly. In this respect it mattered little whether the individual was viewed as rational or irrational, whether reality was grasped by reason or by intuition, or whether history was viewed as progressive or cyclical: modernism was equally disconcerting to all these constructions. Equally imperiled were empiricist and romantic views that

purported to grasp reality as a totality—that is, in terms of its ultimate meaning, nature, or teleology—and furthermore to comprehend it with rational, reflectionist, or intuitive certainty. In the face of modernism, empiricism retreated into a subjectivist pragmatism and the analysis of language and romanticism into aestheticist rebellion and philosophical mysticism.

Second, it is important to situate modernism within the context of monopoly capitalism and, more specifically, with respect to contradictions between the seemingly inexhaustible growth of technological knowledge, productive capacity, global and national integration on the one hand and the seemingly intractable persistence of class exploitation, political tensions between capitalist and socialist visions of democracy, imperialist domination, and international rivalries on the other hand. Neither the empiricist tradition, historically imprinted by the bourgeois struggle against aristocratic tradition and the egalitarian populism of the masses,^[11] nor the romantic tradition, itself an oedipal

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rebellion of cultured bourgeois "sensibility" against the competitive materialism and narrow-minded moral intolerance from which it sprang, was able to face up to these new contradictions, which, at bottom, constituted an attack on elitism by the propertyless and uncultured masses. Thus modernism, the intellectual movement that revealed, sometimes in spite of itself, the manifest contradictions and irrationality of capitalist society, became identified willy-nilly with the forces of progressive social change and the political Left. (The exception that proves the rule is Lenin's rejection of modernism and his return to the empiricist principle of reflectionism. Althusser strongly defends Lenin's commitment to objectivism and realism as well as his unsophisticated, if essentially correct, critique of the subjectivist and relativist tendencies indisputably present in neo-Kantian and empiriocritical philosophy. However, Althusser also acknowledges that Lenin was no philosopher, and he rejects Lenin's acceptance of a pre-modern, empiricist epistemology as well as Engels's notion of Marxist philosophy as a dialectics of nature.)

For these reasons it is incorrect to associate modernism with empiricist and romantic tendencies that continue to exert an influence by appropriating certain modernist insights and infusing them with pluralist, individualist, and relativist tendencies. For the modernist, however abstract and complex the structural determinations at work in the world may have become, they remain objectively real. Knowledge of them is not only possible, it is being produced at dizzying speed. Sensitive to the structured limitations inherent in the production and communication of meaning and knowledge, the modernist nevertheless subordinates epistemological relativism to a more general principle of ontological realism. The modernist, in other words, remains convinced of the validity of knowledge and thus the possibility of comprehending, criticizing, and improving the existing state of affairs and eliminating systematic inequality and exploitation. Empiricist rationalism and romantic irrationalism, on the contrary, remain committed to elitism and to the status quo precisely insofar as they reject the validity of knowledge on epistemological grounds. Vulgar pluralism, individualism, and relativism, as they have been deployed both separately and together, split the modernist synthesis of realism and formalism in order to reduce our knowledge of social reality to discontinuous fragments of subjective interpretation. In the wake of these moves, the only responses are despair, anger, and, ultimately, conformity.

My argument is that modernism is socially as well as intellectually

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progressive. Being constructive rather than destructive, producing knowledge rather than denying its possibility, clarifies a basic difference between modernist and postmodernist sensibilities too often obscured by their common antipathy toward the empiricist smugness of nineteenth-century positivism. Modernism is anti-empiricist, but it retains a deep underlying continuity with the rational, realist, and materialist tradition of the scientific revolution. Despite its parasitic relationship to modernism, postmodernism's roots are elsewhere, in the anti-scientific tradition of irrationalism, vitalism, and nihilism. As for neo-liberalism, it remains, despite appearances to the contrary, pre-modern in its outlook. From the rubble of empiricism, neo-liberalism has attempted to salvage idealist and individualist assumptions about reason, rights, and justice whose anachronisms are barely concealed by their new, high-tech veneer. The games and models are now more sophisticated, perhaps, but they are still rigged in favor of the ruling class. Because there is nothing really new about the neo-liberals—not even a heightened awareness of their own class bias—there is no reason to withhold from any of them the title "genius of bourgeois stupidity" bestowed by Marx on the original neo-liberal, Jeremy Bentham.

This is not the place to survey the relationship between modernism and historical knowledge; suffice it to say that historical thinking was central to nineteenth-century culture and imbued with traditions incompatible with modernist thinking. Marx was the first to combine structural causality and the historicity of knowledge, but because Marxist modernism is necessarily identified with principles of economic determination and class struggle, it could hardly be acceptable to the ruling classes in capitalist society. Nowhere, in fact, have the consequences of modernism been more disruptive than in the human sciences, where relationships between modernism and social science have always been overdetermined by political and ideological considerations. On the Left, the modernist scientific achievements of Marxism have been sacrificed repeatedly to the exigencies of divergent political

movements, while on the Right, overwhelming pressures to discredit Marxism and to develop an apologetic alternative vision of capitalist society have pushed social theory "beyond" modernism. The deprecation of the notion of a scientific history is also a function of ideology and politics: history is respectable now only if "fictionalized" by literary critics, "modeled" by philosophers, and splintered into an infinite number of genealogies by historians themselves. Such histories, even when expressly motivated by critical intentions, discredit their own

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analysis by rejecting, in advance, the scientific value of their findings and by refusing to pursue the question of general structures, interrelationships, and determinations.

Fortunately, historical thinking has also been subjected to more constructive and substantive criticism of a modernist type, most recently from the major figures of French structuralism, including, of course, Althusser himself. It is important to recall that French structuralism was more than merely the application of Saussurean linguistics to a variety of social phenomena.^[12] Defined broadly in terms of its focus on abstract structural determinations and their epistemological significance and in terms of its critique of empiricist rationality and autonomous human practice, structuralism must be acknowledged as one of the most important modernist movements of the twentieth century. Structuralism did more than give a distinctly French flavor to social theory; through the work of Althusser, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Derrida, Greimas, and Barthes, the human sciences were radically transformed in a surprisingly short time. Althusser's rethinking of Marxism was very much at the center of these developments. Not only did he draw from classical Marxist texts latent theoretical conceptions they themselves did not or could not specify; he and his associates also developed altogether new concepts that revived historical materialism as a modernist and scientific practice. Althusser constructed bridges between Marxism and non-Marxist modernism that simply had not existed before. This perhaps more than anything else has frustrated critics on both the Left and the Right: from communist thinkers and activists a sophisticated body of work making use of non-Marxist concepts, including many considered inimical to Marxism; from academic philosophers and social scientists an unabashedly Marxist problematic based on a modernist rejection of pluralism, relativism, and individualism.

Structural Marxism as a Modernist Science of History

Althusser was also a major architect of the Structuralist critique of traditional historicism—rejecting linear continuity, teleological views of the evolution and realization of historical processes or goals, autonomous human agency, unified social subjectivity, undifferentiated concepts of distinct social structures, direct or reductive forms of causality, and the idea that historical knowledge is self-evidently true or complete.

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However, unlike the work of other prominent Structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss and Foucault, the objective of Althusser's critique was to revive historical thinking, not to destroy it. Althusser sought to establish the scientificity of history by an original reworking of the ideas of science and historical discourse and to elaborate a nonreductive view of economic determination that would do justice to the complexity of social formations and human subjectivity within a Marxist framework of class struggle. Although the many individuals discussed in this book vary in their degree of commitment to Althusser's problematic—some accept all the central concepts of Structural Marxism while others choose more selectively among them—all share a large common ground. Although I have deliberately cast my net widely, I believe I am justified in representing the following précis as a more or less unified theoretical problematic.

The object of Structural Marxist analysis is a social formation structured on the basis of a mode of production. Structural Marxists insist that the economy is determinant "in the last instance," but they conceptualize economic determination not directly, in reflectionist terms, but indirectly, in terms of a hierarchy of heterogeneous, unequal, yet interrelated structures exercising various economic, political, and ideological functions. The mode of production, comprised of relations of ownership and production obtaining between laborers and non-laborers with respect to the means of production, defines the economic function. The economic function is held to be determinant; that is, the mode of production is understood by Structural Marxists as constituting the deep structure of a social formation.

The economic functions of ownership and production united in the mode of production may be separated at the surface level of the social formation. The function of economic ownership may be exercised within institutional apparatuses distinct from economic production and thus, at least superficially, non-economic in nature. Given this state of affairs, it is necessary to distinguish the determinant role of the economic function, the deep structure of the mode of production, from the dominant role that a particular institutional apparatus, be it political, ideological, or economic, may exercise at the surface level of the social formation. It is typically the case that the institutional apparatus exercising the function of economic ownership will be dominant at the level of the social formation. However, it is always the deep structure of the mode of production that accounts for dominance at the level of the

social formation.

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Structural Marxism conceives of economic determination within a modernist framework of structural causality. The social formation is a parallelogram of economic, political, and ideological forces manifested in determinate social structures and relations. While the economic function is primary, political and ideological functions have their own distinct character and effectivity, and all determinate structures and relations—political, ideological, and economic—are simultaneously, if unequally, at work as a structured whole, the social formation. In addition, Structural Marxism lacks any teleology or goal toward which economic determination is propelling the social formation. Economic determination refers to the historical effectivity of the social formation as a complex whole on individual structures and relations. The social formation, in other words, constitutes the historical matrix or intransitive conditions of existence of individual structures, yet it exists only as the "complex unity" of their present or transitive effectivities. Because the economic function is always primary within the historical matrix (if not always dominant as a distinct institutional form), all social structures and practices are "always already" assigned a place and a function indirectly—that is, in the last instance—determined by the economy.

Structural Marxism also recognizes contradictory tendencies within and between social structures, contradictions stemming from the uneven development of the social whole and the relative autonomy of individual structures. The primacy of the economy sets boundaries or limits on political and ideological structures, but it does not specify each and every political institution, nor does it directly determine ideological apparatuses such as the family, the university, or the church. Political and ideological structures have a relative autonomy and an internal dynamic that is not coordinated in advance with the development of the economy. At the same time, economic determination is itself contradictory since the production of objective changes within the economic structures and relations themselves may not readily facilitate their reproduction. Thus economic determination "in the last instance" respects the variety of causal determinations at work within the social whole, neither ignoring their particularity nor presuming their reproduction over time. This is a modernist vision of complex determination that avoids mechanical statics and teleological evolution without slipping into vulgar pluralism.

Structural Marxism is a science of social formations. However, Althusser rejects the notion that historical science will ever grasp the to-

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ality of history once and for all or be able to transform itself from an interpretive to a predictive form of knowledge. He recognizes that individual or "regional" theories (of politics, discourse, and so on) will never correspond perfectly with each other, nor will they ever lose the particularity that is a function of their distinct theoretical object and inquiry. Philosophically, Althusser defends the validity of historical knowledge by subordinating, in classic modernist fashion, the historicity of knowledge to the reality of its object. While he admits the conventionality and historicity of all knowledge and insists on the distinction between reality and thought about reality (the fact that thought about reality is never fully adequate, never corresponds perfectly to reality itself), Althusser subordinates such epistemological qualifications to the principle of ontological realism that asserts the primacy of reality over thought about reality. Without pretending to prove apodictically the validity of scientific knowledge (epistemological questions can never be proven or disproven by philosophy and philosophy has no claim to being the arbiter of any science, including history), Althusser takes a position in philosophy defending the category of science and the scientificity of historical materialism on the basis of their explanatory power and on the basis of a series of withering critiques of alternatives put forward by their opponents.

Structural Marxists take exception to the semiological premise that discursive practices and other social phenomena are structured as arbitrary and autonomous systems of differential signifiers only marginally related to any objective reality or signified. For Structural Marxists, discourse is not only syntactic; it is also semantic. All discursive practices are fundamentally bound up with social relations of power; they are neither free-floating systems of metalanguages (Barthes) nor ahistorical transcendental structures (Lévi-Strauss). However, Structural Marxists also reject the claims of those, like Foucault, who claim that discourse is *just* power (and thus largely independent of meaning, object, and validity or theoretical determinations) and that power is spontaneous, unmotivated, and unrelated to class interests. By elaborating functional concepts of scientific, philosophical, ideological, and aesthetic practices, Structural Marxism has developed a powerful general theory of discourse and a firm theoretical foundation for historical analysis of its social production and reception. Finally, Structural Marxism is able to ground discursive practice in history without slipping into historicist or hermeneutic solipsism.

Structural Marxism vitiates a long-standing debate between techno-

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logical determinists and defenders of class struggle as the explanatory principle of historical development. Since

technology only exists in the context of class struggle, and since class powers and interests only exist in the unity of the forces and relations of production, Structural Marxists reformulate the question of historical development in terms of distinct modes of production and their interrelationship (articulation). In the case of any mode of production, the relations of production are dominant because it is the function of ownership to appropriate the social product and to allocate a portion for reproducing the existing forces of production. In the case of any articulation of two different modes of production, it is always a matter of the dominance of the more productive over the less productive mode and the subordination of the reproduction of the latter to that of the former. Individuals exercising the ownership function within a mode of production, of course, constitute its ruling class, and the ruling class of the dominant mode within a given articulation will dominate the dominant class of the subordinate mode. In sum, within any given mode of production we may speak of the dominance of the relations over the forces, yet the question of technological determinism versus class struggle cannot be meaningfully posed. However, within any articulation of two modes of production, we may speak of technological determinism but only in the sense of the one mode (one unity of forces and relations and one class struggle) dominating a second.

The concept of a mode of production also permits Structural Marxists to demonstrate the relevance of economic determination to non-capitalist social formations. First, by conceptualizing the forces and relations of production as two social relations among three elements—laborers, technology, and non-laborers—Structural Marxists are able to isolate the economic functions of ownership and production within any given social formation. Second, by distinguishing both economic and non-economic functions from particular institutions that are the bearers of those functions (the lineage, the manor, and so on), Structural Marxist analysis is able to specify relations of determination invisible to methodologies that are content simply to describe institutions and behavior patterns. Third, by specifying relations and their structured interrelationship, Structural Marxists are able to balance general theory and concrete research in a productive and interactive fashion, developing general concepts of a variety of distinct modes of production while respecting the historical individuality of social formations in a given time and place. In short, the concept of a mode of production

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posits, in classic modernist fashion, abstract structural determinations as objectively real as gravity, yet like the force of gravity, visible only in their effects. Structural Marxism is quintessentially modernist not only because it insists on the objective reality of abstract structural determinations, but also because it recognizes the impassable gulf that separates knowledge—that is, abstract concepts of reality—from its object, reality itself.

Far from denigrating human subjectivity, as is so often claimed, Structural Marxism has always recognized its significance and devoted considerable attention to developing concepts of both subjectivity and practice. The difference between Structural Marxism and its postmodern and neo-liberal rivals is that for the latter, human subjectivity is accepted as the basis of social theory, while for Althusser and the Structural Marxists, the social structures and relations that produce social subjects are primary. Structural Marxists wish to explain first the structures and processes by which social subjects are created and second the relationships between social subjectivity, power, and practice. Structural Marxism explores the contradictions among the different ways we are all constituted as social subjects as well as the tensions between forces of submission—inherent in our conformity to the roles and positions that we are assigned by society—and forces of empowerment stemming from our capacity to act as social subjects by means of these same roles and positions. Social agents are not mindless robots; they are creative, decision-making players within a rule-bound yet open-ended and interactive system of dispositions, discourses, and interests. This system, or *habitus*, is a historically specific and class-based structure whose enabling-restricting capacities cannot be reduced to the utilitarian free will of "man" or to a mechanistic reflection of the relations of production. Social subjectivity is a condensation of structural forces whose effectivity—the practice of individual social subjects—is precisely as open-ended as the contradictions within and among these same structural forces, including, of course, knowledge itself. The science of history has its own indeterminacy principle insofar as knowledge of its particular object alters the object of its particular knowledge. In comprehending both the intransitive and transitive dimensions of social subjectivity (without collapsing one into the other), Structural Marxism advances not only our knowledge of the past but also our capacity to act effectively in the present.

Unlike the many proponents of Western Marxism, Althusser defends the "vulgar" Marxist thesis that "class struggle is the motor of history."

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While not presuming the ubiquity of class exploitation in human society, the Structural Marxist concept of a mode of production exposes exploitation where it exists, penetrates the myriad forms within which it is disguised, and discredits the variegated ideologies by which it is legitimized. Structural Marxist "orthodoxy" with respect to class struggle turns out to be quite unorthodox: it is, in fact, nothing less than a reconceptualization of the ontology of social subjects as class subjects. For Structural Marxists, not only are individuals constituted as class subjects by virtue of their objective relation to the means of production, as in the traditional concept of class, but they are also class subjects by virtue of their objective relation to non-economic structures and relations. Because the myriad

positions and roles constituting the social space are always already structured by their historical conditions of existence, they are always already assigned a place and a function commensurate with the primacy of economic functions within the social formation. Social subjects who internalize this system of relations and who occupy these positions and roles are therefore necessarily constituted as members of social classes.

Defining class in terms of the internalization of a structured hierarchy of positions and roles has earned Structural Marxism enemies on the Left as well as the Right. For many on the Left, what such an approach gains in scientific explanation it loses in mythic power, ideological appeal, and political utility. By presenting the full complexity of the contemporary class struggle and revealing how deeply rooted capitalist hegemony actually is, Structural Marxist analysis rejects the mentality of "instant gratification" that has infected contemporary political thinking on the Left. Of course, any demonstration of the ongoing validity of class analysis threatens the political Right, but by producing a sophisticated, non-reductive class analysis, Structural Marxism undermines the whole anti-Marxist consensus of contemporary social theory and disrupts the otherwise smooth transition from anti-Stalinist Marxism to vulgar liberalism undertaken by so many fugitives from the Left. Finally, the Structural Marxist concept of class discredits recent attempts by many social historians to eliminate class analysis from historical research by means of a tactic I would call "anti-reductionist reductionism." What began as a legitimate critique of vulgar Marxist reflectionism has now reached a point where almost any attempt to provide a class-based analysis of historical events is condemned as "reductionist." The loss of explanatory power attending this substitution of vulgar pluralism for class analysis—for this is the essence of anti-reductionist reductionism—seems to have passed unnoticed.

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This is particularly the case with those postmodern methodologies that substitute an explanation by power for an explanation of power. Structural Marxist theory possesses a concept of power every bit as relational and differential as its postmodern rivals. However, unlike postmodern theories, for which power is everywhere and nowhere, a primal energy spontaneously erupting from the senseless flux of "history" to oppress and dominate otherwise "free" individuals, Structural Marxism demonstrates how power is grounded in the hierarchy of social structures and overdetermined by class relations—how, without necessarily transforming them directly, class power limits the range of variation of all other forms of power. Structural Marxist analysis also explains how class power "condenses" in a capitalist state that is formally separated from economic relations and is even popular-democratic in nature. Structural Marxism explains why, in capitalist modes of production, the popular-democratic state is necessarily a class state whose primary function is to organize the hegemony of the ruling class and reproduce existing relations of class exploitation.

Democracy and Socialism: A Final Anticipatory Note

The fact that Structural Marxism is a modernist form of social theory does not mean that it is right, of course. It is the burden of this book to persuade, by argument, the value of what has just been asserted dogmatically. The reader must decide the extent to which the remaining chapters succeed as a useful synopsis of Structural Marxist theory and, more ambitiously, as a reassessment, synthesis, and defense of Structural Marxism. It is the reader who will decide whether or not the Structural Marxist concepts and positions discussed herein are as powerful as I find them to be and whether or not economic determination and class struggle will become once again central concerns for social theory. Despite its enormous explanatory power, however, I am under no illusions that Structural Marxism has resolved the "crisis" of Marxism. This crisis is not, after all, a crisis of scientific explanation but rather a political and ideological crisis of imagination manifested as the absence of a new vision of democracy and socialism that might serve as a feasible alternative to Fordism and Bolshevism. This book does not propose a political program, nor do I believe the presence or absence of a viable political strategy to be a valid litmus test for the claims of Structural Marxism as a science of history. However, Althusser and his followers do make a positive contribution to the resolution of the crisis

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of Marxism, insofar as any revival of democratic socialist politics must spring from searching critique of existing capitalism and capitalist democracy and insofar as such a critique is contingent on our ability to see capitalism for what it is—a class-based mode of production that is inherently exploitive and fundamentally antithetical to democracy.

Ultimately, democracy and socialism are indistinguishable. Any theory of democracy that fudges this elemental fact, in order to pretend that capitalist-representative democracy is of the same nature as socialist-participatory democracy or to argue that the former is evolving, slowly but surely, into the latter, is self-deluded and pernicious. Capitalist democracy is not simply a form of representation; it is a power structure that reflects and reproduces class inequality and exploitation by separating and delimiting those spheres that permit democratic principles from those that exclude democracy. No socialist strategy can be taken seriously that ignores or obscures the class barriers beyond which the extension of democracy becomes a challenge to capitalism.^[13] No democratic

strategy can be taken seriously that ignores or obscures the fact that real power in capitalist society does not rest on direct control of the state but rather on the existence of private ownership of the means of production and the exclusion of producers from control over them. Political rights may or may not be extended universally under capitalism, but if they are, the power of property depends on a rigid separation between the political and economic spheres and the relative autonomy of the state. Because liberal capitalism can never extend democracy into the economic sphere, "the people" can never have any real political power. Because the taproot of political power is economic, those with economic power decide what the issues are, what policies are acceptable, and who the candidates will be.

Participatory democracy rejects the separation of the economic and political spheres that is the mystical secret of capitalist hegemony. Participatory democracy does not mean that diversity and conflict will disappear from politics; it means only that class power will no longer be the structuring force behind political diversity and conflict. However, as C. B. Macpherson (1977) cautions, participatory democracy at the local level and delegated democracy at every level above that (with or without parties) will work only if decision makers and policy formulators elected from below are held responsible to those below by being subjected to reelection and recall. Participatory democracy must extend from the city council to the workplace, and thus socialism and democracy cannot be meaningfully dissociated. Socialism does not mean that market forces should not be permitted; it means only that the accumu-

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lation process will no longer be controlled by a minority class responsible to no one in its pursuit of profits and possessing virtually unlimited powers over a working-class majority. Minority control over the means of production and the distribution of the social product, exercised by a capitalist elite (defined by private ownership) or by a bureaucratic class (defined by "public" ownership), precludes meaningful political participation by the majority of citizens by denying them responsibility and power. Distributive justice, even if such a thing were possible to decide upon and implement, is not enough: no matter how much class inequalities of income are reduced, class inequalities of power will remain to undermine, sooner or later, any merely juridical system of justice. The ruling class, Macpherson reminds us, does not vote primarily with ballots: it votes with money, influence, and power. Such a state of affairs produces and reproduces political apathy: inequalities of class power discourage mass political participation by rendering it virtually ineffective, while the absence of democratic control over the means of production completes the vicious circle by creating and perpetuating inequalities of class power.

A revival of democratic socialism can begin only with a scientific understanding of capitalism as a mode of production and representative democracy as an expression of class power. By insisting on the primacy of economic determination and class struggle, Structural Marxism not only explains more and better than its post-Marxist and postmodern rivals; it also makes possible, arguably inevitable, the emergence of a new vision of democratic socialism—a creative, utopian vision grounded in reality but aiming at its transformation and transcendence. Such a vision will not center on concepts of rights or justice, because these ideologies signify, at best, half-hearted, ineffectual efforts to protect a vast majority possessing formal rather than substantive freedoms from a small minority who actually exercise power and who actually are free. The new utopian ideology will center necessarily around the concept of equality, the only substantive concept of right and justice (a truism amply demonstrated by the virtual absence of equality from contemporary debates).

Despite the tragic absurdity of the notion that equality could be realized in the most backward regions of the world under the pressure of staggering internal and international obstacles, and despite the unfortunate (and oxymoronic) identification of equality with tyranny that has been successfully imprinted into the political unconsciousness of capitalist societies, only a fool can believe the ideal of equality can be eliminated permanently from a society where it represents the objective

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interests of the majority. Capitalism itself necessarily keeps alive the ideals of equality, democracy, and socialism. Despite the misguided hopes of Althusser (and some of the others) that the PCF could be the agent of a viable renewal of the political ideology of equality, it remains the case that only the Marxist notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat—the ideal of the masses learning to govern themselves by the actual practice of governing themselves—that keeps alive the possibility that humanity might raise itself above the level of bestiality.

However discredited by the experience of Bolshevism, the ideal of equality remains the only ideological standard by which the social Darwinist kernel concealed by the humanistic husks of neo-liberal rationalism and postmodern dissidence can be exposed effectively. A commitment to equality is the only recourse for those who are truly concerned with democracy and socialism. The alternative is to accept the vision of the "end of history" being put forward by the New Right: permanent crises of overproduction and restructuring, permanent exploitation of a powerless working-class majority by a minority controlling the means of production, permanent subordination of human needs and social welfare to the exigencies of commodity production and capitalist accumulation, permanent domination of the people by an oligarchy monopolizing political power and controlling the political process; in short,

the iron heel of capitalism stamping on the face of humanity—forever.

There is no point in pretending that democratic socialism is obtainable even in the intermediate term. At the same time, however, there is no reason to betray the possibility of such a future by intellectual backsliding and accommodation to the capitalist status quo. I do not believe that the humanist-moral-spiritual-ethical rebellion against capitalism expressed by figures as diverse as Bloch, Sartre, Marcuse, Thompson, Foucault, and Habermas is antithetical to the conviction of Althusser and his followers that an objective science of history, necessarily Marxist in orientation, is possible. I am, however, convinced that there is nothing useful to be gained by conflating the anticipatory principle of hope and the analytical principle of knowledge: the best hopes, it seems to me, spring from possibilities that actually exist. Said another way, it is also the responsibility of the reader to take a position for or against the renewal of social theory, for or against the contemporary evasion, if not outright repression, of the central task of any science, social or otherwise: telling the truth about its object.

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both the social determination of knowledge as well as the validity of that knowledge. Althusser's defense of realist position in philosophy will be taken up later, but it is necessary to introduce it now to explain why my discussion of Structural Marxism originates with its concept of history and not, as is frequently the case, with its epistemology. The reason, baldly stated, is that Althusser rejects the philosophical guarantee of truth as irrelevant to the production of scientific knowledge. To be sure, in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, Althusser attempted to establish something resembling a philosophical-epistemological guarantee for historical knowledge, but this effort was less central to his overall project than is generally recognized and was, in any case, repudiated by Althusser soon after the publication of these texts. The ensuing shift from what is often, if misleadingly, referred to as an "epistemological Marxism" to a Marxist (or a historical-realist) concept of epistemology will be discussed at some length in chapter 3. Here I will simply preface the following discussion of Althusser's historical concepts with his, for the moment, unsubstantiated claim that "sciences produce knowledge from their object by constituting it" while producing knowledges "of their object in the specific mode that defines it" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 46).

It is the absence of such a combination of a rigorous definition of its theoretical object and the specification of concepts and discursive protocols capable of producing knowledges of that object that Althusser finds most disturbing in the existing practice of history:

History lives within the illusion that it can do without theory in the strong sense, without a theory of its object and therefore without a definition of its theoretical object. What acts as its theory, what it sees as taking the place of this theory is its methodology. . . . What history lacks is a conscious and courageous confrontation with one of the essential problems of any science whatsoever: the problem of the nature and constitution of its theory, by which I mean the theory within the science itself, the system of theoretical concepts on which is based every method and every practice, even the experimental method and practice, and which simultaneously defines its theoretical objects. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 109)

Obviously this shortcoming does not in any way restrict the sheer volume of historical research. On the contrary, even as the problem of a theoretical object is theoretically evaded or ignored, it is practically resolved in an explosive proliferation of different categories or genres of history (diplomatic, economic, intellectual, social, and so on). Nevertheless, as Althusser's collaborator Etienne Balibar observes, there is

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something curious about such histories: they tend to receive their objects of inquiry (women's

experience, popular culture, technology, or whatever) passively rather than actively and rigorously creating them. The actual constitution of the object of their research usually lies outside the theoretical practice of these histories in the realm of other practices, theoretical or otherwise. The unfortunate result of this state of affairs is the absence of any concept of the relationship between these various histories. Thus for Balibar, each particular history is something of a paradox: "a discourse (supposedly critical *par excellence*) which depends, for the constitution of its object on an uncritical operation—these histories encounter in their conceptualization and in the nature of their explanations, the insoluble problem of the mutual frontiers between this component history and other histories, and the history of the totality" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 248-49). This problem, Balibar contends, cannot and will not be resolved until history actually takes up the task of constituting its object instead of passively accepting it from elsewhere.

Althusser and Balibar are not expressing a desire for a "philosophy of history" that will specify the "essence" of history, its evolution and realization. Nor are they defending the idea that total, complete, or even direct knowledge will result from a decision to take up a more scientific methodology with respect to historical research. Rather, they are claiming that in spite of genuine limitations, scientific knowledge of history is possible. Structural Marxism insists on the possibility of general scientific concepts that define the field of historical investigation, concepts adequate to the complexity and particularity of social phenomena across the broad spectrum of time and space. This body of concepts (what Althusser calls a "problematic") has as its theoretical object "social formations." Social formations are "structures of structures" integrated or articulated into a meaningful whole, yet each individual structure has a distinct existence in its own right. Social structures within a social formation are inscribed within a hierarchy of determinations that assigns them a place and a function, yet each possesses its own relative autonomy and mode of determination nonetheless. Althusser defends economic determination and class struggle as principles of explanation, yet he also insists that economic relations are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to explain historical phenomena. The strength of Structural Marxism is its ability to hold these seemingly contradictory positions in productive tension: to establish firm relationships between concepts of the social whole and concepts of its compo-

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nent structures while maintaining throughout an awareness of the discrete levels of analysis appropriate to both.

Althusser: The Social Formation as a Totality of Instances

In *Reading Capital*, Althusser and Balibar define a social formation as a "totality of instances articulated on the basis of a determinate mode of production" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970, 207). Let us take this definition as our point of departure and, for the moment, concentrate on the social formation as a "totality of instances." The "instances" to which Althusser and Balibar refer are themselves distinct structural levels of social relations and "practices," each possessing a functional unity and composed of more specific structures. Practice is central to the concept of every instance—"all levels of social existence are the site of distinct practices" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 58)—but Althusser makes no hard and fast distinction among social structures, relations, and practices. Social relations are concrete actualizations or empirical manifestations

of social structures, while social structures are realized, reproduced, and transformed through rule-bound yet open-ended *practice*, a term Althusser defines simply as "transformations effected by a determinate human labor using a determinate means (of 'production')" (Althusser 1969, 166). It is therefore pointless to speak of an opposition between "impersonal" structures and "human" practices within Structural Marxism. The thrust of Althusser's thinking is not to oppose the human and the inhuman; rather, it is to comprehend the contradictions between and within the structured relations and practices that constitute human beings as social subjects and constitute places, positions, and roles as the social space within which all human practice necessarily occurs. The predominance attributed to practice does not imply that human beings are the autonomous subjects of such practices—a position Althusser rejects—but it does firmly situate all social practices within the field of human activity.

Social formations are a complex hierarchy of functionally organized institutions or instances whose unity can be neither ignored altogether nor reduced to a single closed system.²⁴ In principle, the number of instances is open rather than closed, and the specification of distinct practices is a heuristic rather than an axiomatic process. Initially, Althusser specifies three instances, economic, political, and ideological, as designating practices necessary to the concept of a social formation insofar

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as they refer to functions without which human social existence cannot be conceived. Economic practice refers to the transformation of nature into socially useful products, political practice to the reproduction and administration of collective social relations and their institutional forms, and ideological practice to the constitution of social subjects and their consciousness. Of course, Althusser and others have offered extended treatments of other types of practice—theoretical, aesthetic, and so on—that may have greater or lesser predominance depending on the particular type of society we are talking about.

All practices are viewed by Structural Marxists as unevenly developed or "contradictory." Although there are variations among different writers, we may fairly summarize the contradictions within each of the instances in the following fashion:

1. In economic practice, contradictions exist between relations of cooperation and exploitation within the labor process (the forces of production) and economic ownership (the relations of production). These contradictions are expressed as the antagonistic class interests and capacities of laborers and non-laborers with respect to control over the means and results of production.

2. In political practice, contradictions exist within and between relations of representation and relations of hegemony expressed in the antagonistic interests of the "power bloc," those classes or fractions of classes that effectively control the institutions of collective social organization, and the "masses," other classes or social groups within the social formation lacking such control.

3. In ideological practice, contradictions exist within and between relations of qualification (relations that empower and enable individuals as social subjects) and relations of subjection (relations that restrict individuals to specific roles and capacities).

To avoid another common misunderstanding of the Structural Marxist problematic, it is essential to keep in mind the distinction between the universality of economic, political, and ideological *functions* and the variety of determinate *institutional forms* within which these

functions may be located historically. In particular, we must avoid the mistaken notion that there exists a single institutional form within every social formation that will correspond to the European concept of the market, the state, or the church. On the contrary, one or more of these functions may be exercised by different social institutions and manifested in relations particular to a specific social formation or mode of production. The historical specificity of functions (or combinations

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of functions) does not, however, negate the applicability of general concepts for each function (any more than the general concept of a social subject is negated by the fact that a particular human being may combine distinct attributes or functions—mother, worker, citizen, and so on). While each function is material in that it exists in and through concrete material apparatuses, any concrete apparatus may combine a variety of functions and thus have an effectivity in more than one instance. Finally, it is important to recognize that there are different degrees of abstraction and specificity within the Structural Marxist problematic. For example, the general concept of a social formation as "a totality of instances articulated on the basis of a determinate mode of production" in no way implies that a particular social formation, say an African tribe or a European nation-state, can be deduced from general concepts (any more than it can be objectively built up from data "uncontaminated" by conceptual presuppositions). While there are real, qualitative differences between, for example, economic relations in lineage-based agricultural societies and industrialized capitalist states, there is also a level of generality and abstraction at which we can refer to both of these social formations as having economic relations.

The multiplicity of distinct practices exists always and only in the "complex unity" of a determinate social formation (another heuristic term applicable to forms of integration as diverse as a tribal territory and the global economy). At the level of analysis of the social formation, the economic, political, and ideological instances exist as a system of interrelated, interdependent practices and institutions to which Althusser refers as an "articulation," a unity of relations of domination and subordination. Althusser calls this simultaneous unity of distinct and unequal modes of determination "structural causality." At the same time, however, Althusser also insists on other, "regional" levels of analysis at which the "relative autonomy" of the instances must be acknowledged. Each instance, he maintains, has its own distinct rhythms of development internal to itself such that the social formation is always "unevenly developed," always a constellation of multiple contradictions whose ultimate outcome cannot be predicted. Althusser refuses any move that would "resolve" the tension between structural causality and relative autonomy in the direction of mechanistic determinism or pluralistic indeterminacy. Although each instance has its own relative autonomy, this autonomy exists only as a "specific effectivity" within the structured whole of the social formation, that is, as

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the historical product of the unequal, distinct, and simultaneous effectivities of the complex unity of instances. Each instance, in other words, has a relative autonomy that is particular to itself but that has nevertheless been assigned a place and function within the complex unity of the social formation by the social formation itself (the historical matrix or condition of existence of each

and every instance). By insisting on a structured hierarchy of determinations embodied in distinct and relatively autonomous institutions and practices, Althusser declares that the social formation cannot be understood either as a functional-pluralist organism in which everything causes everything else or in terms of a reflectionist-essentialist totality in which every practice may be understood as a microcosm of the whole.

The Social Formation Articulated on the Basis of a Mode of Production

Remember that Althusser and Balibar define a social formation not simply as a totality of instances but as a totality of instances "articulated on the basis of a determinate mode of production." The instances are articulated in relations of domination and subordination—a "structure in dominance"—and it is the primacy of the forces and relations of production which determine "in the last instance" the hierarchy of determinations within a given social formation. This formulation, which smacks of reflectionism, in reality demonstrates the care and sophistication with which Structural Marxists assert the traditional Marxist principle of economic determination. By the term *mode of production* Althusser and Balibar mean not only the forces and relations of production but also their social conditions of existence and the reproduction of those social conditions. Thus the concept of a mode of production refers not simply to the economic instance, the forces and relations of production proper, but also to the level of the social formation itself, insofar as other, non-economic instances are essential to the reproduction of the forces and relations of production. While the term *mode of production* is less comprehensive than the term *social formation*, it is more comprehensive than the economic instance alone. As a structured relation, a mode of production is subject to the same law of uneven development that applies to all social structures and therefore to the same tensions between tendencies toward reproduction and transformation. Nevertheless, whether by explicitly economic means or by institutional forms that may be predominantly political or

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ideological, it is the structural requirements of the economic instance that constitute the organizing principle, the structure of dominance within a given social formation.

Economic determination in the last instance—for all practical purposes synonymous with the primacy of a mode of production—cannot be justifiably criticized for reducing the social formation to a mere reflection of the economy or for eliminating the dynamic effect of contradictory development in favor of some form of static functionalist equilibrium. A contradiction inheres in the uneven development of the economy, a contradiction manifested in various forms of social and economic crisis and in the constant struggle between antagonistic class interests within the forces and relations of production. Another type of uneven development can result from the existence of more than a single mode of production within a social formation. In *Reading Capital*, Balibar introduces the idea that social formations might be articulated on the basis of multiple modes of production, and as we shall see, this notion has been developed at greater length by Pierre-Philippe Rey and others. Not only does the articulation of multiple modes of production introduce additional complexity into the principle of economic determination, but it also provides an essential concept for thinking about historical transformation within the parameters of structural causality.

The economic function is determinant in the sense that the forces and relations of production establish "limits of variation" within the social formation as a structured whole.

However, the "general contradiction"—namely the class antagonism within the forces and relations of production—cannot be understood in isolation from the contradictions between and within other social practices whose specific effectivities react back on the economy: "[the general contradiction] is radically affected by them, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various levels and instances of the social formation it animates" (Althusser 1969, 101). Althusser likens this process to a "parallelogram of forces" wherein forces of different magnitude confront each other such that the resulting magnitude constitutes a new and different force reflecting the primacy of economic contradictions, but never purely or simply. The primacy of the economy, transmitted to the present from the past by the matrix effect of the mode of production, projects itself into the future as an ensemble of unresolved contradictions and as yet unrealized possibilities.

The concepts of a mode of production and uneven development, when coupled with the realization that social structures are always

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manifested in social relations and actualized by social subjects, explain how it is that Althusser can make the claim (in his 1972 article "Reply to John Lewis," in Althusser 1976) that "class struggle is the motor of history" without thereby abandoning the concepts of structural causality he defends in his earlier books, *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. The key to resolving this exegetic question is the fact that for Althusser the determinative effectivity of "class struggle" is not opposed or antithetical to economic determination in the last instance. They are actually the same phenomenon, structural causality, seen from the different perspectives of human relations and functional forces—both subject to determination in the last instance by the economy. As "non-economic" social *structures* are conceptualized by Althusser as a mode of production—that is, from the point of view of their determined but contradictory relationship to the transformation and reproduction of the forces and relations of production—so non-economic social *relations* (which are the concrete manifestation of structural forces) are viewed in terms of their specific effectivities with respect to the transformation and reproduction of the social relations of the economy, namely, antagonistic class relations. The statement "class struggle is the motor of history" restates rather than contradicts Althusser's definition of a social formation as a "totality of instances articulated on the basis of a determinate mode of production." Corresponding to the structural concept of mode of production, moreover, is a particular concept of social relations referred to by Althusser as "social class," by which he means the class bias or class valence of non-economic social relations. How it is that individual human beings are constituted as members of social classes is a question to which we will return.

With this schematic overview of Althusser's concept of a social formation, we have laid the groundwork for the remainder of the present chapter and its successor and introduced certain important themes of the book as a whole. One of the difficulties in reading Althusser is that his essays form a network of mutually supporting arguments (often cast in the form of polemics directed against positions that Althusser rejects) in such a fashion that it is difficult to assess his work except in its entirety and after taking at least one turn around it. We have completed this first turn and are now in a position to grasp the general outline of the Structural Marxist problematic and perhaps to appreciate the interesting solutions it offers to certain well-established criticisms of Marxist theory, particularly to the charge of economic reductionism. By means of the concepts of a mode of production and social class relations, it is

possible to understand why an Inca high priest, a French feudal lord, a Soviet *apparatchik*, and an American industrialist may each be said to embody the interest of an exploiting class and be an active participant in an ongoing class struggle. Furthermore, by employing the concepts of a social formation and structural causality, it is not necessary to reach such an understanding by ignoring the importance of religion, vassalage, party membership, or private property in a particular society or by simplifying the historical complexity of particular social formations in order to render concepts of class struggle and economic determination applicable to them.

The Materialist Rationalism of Spinoza

Althusser's concept of structural causality has its roots in the philosophy of Spinoza, who in Althusser's opinion should be credited with an "unprecedented theoretical revolution in philosophy," a revolution that makes him, rather than Hegel, "Marx's only direct ancestor" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 102). Althusser's enthusiasm for Spinoza, perhaps the most determined defender of metaphysical rationalism in the history of philosophy, has occasioned a great deal of confusion in Althusserian criticism. Althusser is often condemned out of hand by those who do not understand or do not bother to understand either Spinoza's philosophical position or what Althusser accepts and rejects in it.²³ We must keep in mind that Spinoza wrote at a time when the distinction between philosophy and science was not yet clear, when science was still known as "natural philosophy," and when the struggle between science and religion was still political and violent. What strikes Althusser so forcefully about Spinoza's philosophy is the rigorous and original materialist and realist positions that it defends and the superiority of Spinoza's concepts of causality and knowledge over those of Descartes and Leibniz, against whom Spinoza's achievement must be measured. Althusser is not a Spinozist who reads Marx, however; he is a Marxist who reads Spinoza. This means, above all, that Althusser is not (as Spinoza most certainly is) a philosophical rationalist: that is, he does not operate on the basis of indubitable, because logically necessary, propositions from which further knowledge, equally certain, can be deduced by the proper exercise of reason.

What is so revolutionary about Spinoza's philosophy, for Althusser, is the fact that it provides a concept of causality that explains the infinite phenomenal universe in terms of a single substance, God or Na-

ture, without recourse to a transcendent being, origin, or goal required to render the order of things intelligible. For Spinoza, God is infinite, but immanent in the infinity of Nature (substance under the attribute of extension) and its eternal laws, outside or beyond which there can be nothing. God or Nature is *causa sui* or self-determined, Spinoza contends, but only in the sense of being subject to the immutable laws of its own essence. There is nothing arbitrary in Nature, no moment of creation and no external intervention, for there is nothing conceivable outside Nature. Nature, then, is nothing but its effects (the attributes and modes or states of substance). The finite mode of phenomenal elements and the infinite flux of their causal interaction are not reflections or expressions of Nature; rather, they *are* Nature—elements structured by the natural

law of the whole but at the same time constituting the whole by their reciprocal activity. Nature actively creating itself in its attributes and their various modes (*Natura Naturans*) is only the obverse of Nature as the existing, established structure or system of the universe (*Natura Naturata*). Both the elements and the whole are necessary and complementary aspects of causality.

Spinoza also defends a materialist position with regard to human nature, rejecting the Cartesian dualism of mind and body in favor of monism, a single substance with attributes of thought and extension. The human mind, in other words, is inseparable from the human body; human intelligence is nothing more than the mental correlate of the physical complexity of the body. This means that human beings are to be understood as natural bodies and therefore by means of the same natural laws that apply to all other phenomena. Spinoza's displacement of the human subject from the center of the universe, and his recognition of the distorting effect of taking human nature as an explanatory principle, is viewed very sympathetically by Althusser. Finally, although it does not concern us directly at this point, it is significant for Althusser that Spinoza defends *realist* as well as a *rationalist* position with regard to knowledge. Spinoza, like Althusser, holds that ideas and their objects correspond—that is, that valid knowledge is possible. The difference between them, the irreducible and irrevocable effect of Althusser's Marxism, is that while Spinoza offers a rationalist proof of this correspondence—since ideas and objects are attributes of a single substance, they not only correspond but are identical—Althusser rejects the rationalist enterprise as "speculative" and denies the claim that human reason is able to achieve certainty with regard to metaphysical puzzles such as the nature of being. Denying the possibility of a ration-

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alist proof of a realist epistemology does not, as we shall see, entail abandoning a rational defense of scientific realism. It does, however, mark an absolute distinction between Spinoza's rationalist certainty and Althusser's materialist thesis regarding the primacy of the real over thought about the real.

But even this assessment does Spinoza a great injustice from the Althusserian point of view. Descartes and Leibniz were also rationalists, yet Althusser finds their positions worse than useless to a science of history, leading as they do to epistemological subjectivism and empiricism (in the case of Descartes) and essentialist idealism (in the case of Leibniz). By contrast, Spinoza's rationalist materialism leads to Marx's historical materialism—albeit indirectly, through Hegel's idealist and teleological reworking of Spinoza's system and Marx's subsequent critique of the Hegelian dialectic, which resulted in the independent recovery of certain of Spinoza's insights. For Althusser, Spinoza's rationalist view of knowledge, unlike that of Descartes or Leibniz, cannot be simply dismissed; instead, its realist kernel must be extracted from its rationalist shell. Spinoza distinguishes between different levels of mental activity, imagination (ideas tied closely to the body and the individual experience) and reason (ideas of ideas, ideas based on objective general concepts and logical principles of coherence). Spinoza bases this distinction not on the epistemological distinction between truth and error but on differences in degrees of "adequacy," that is, objectivity, logical coherence, and breadth of explanatory power. Thus, for Spinoza there is no such thing as absolute error; because every idea has a material cause, it expresses, however inadequately, a certain degree of understanding of the real world. Nor can there be total or absolute adequacy for any human intelligence, but only for God, who is infinite and therefore

circumscribes all thought and extension as perfectly adequate knowledge.

As we shall see, Althusser accepts the realist implication of Spinoza's conception of differing degrees of adequate knowledge and incorporates them into his own distinction between science and ideology, but he nonetheless rejects the corresponding rationalist proof by which Spinoza renders adequate ideas necessarily and absolutely true. Spinoza is not simply arguing that both imagination and reason correspond, with different degrees of adequacy, to reality. He is also asserting, by virtue of the logical consequences of his proposition that Nature is a single substance with attributes of thought and extension, that objects and ideas must have perfectly corresponding structures. Furthermore, Spi-

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noza insists that we, as rational beings, have some intuitions (he calls them "common notions") about which we are absolutely certain and from which additional truths can be established without the possibility of error. It is this rationalist certainty that Althusser rejects. Even in his early works Althusser denies the possibility of any philosophical (or scientific) guarantee of truth or certainty. The materialist thesis, that thought about the real presupposes the primacy of the real over thought, is accompanied by an insistence that "the elements of thought . . . not be confused with the order of the real," a completely different thing from Spinoza's rationalist proof of the identity of idea and ideatum: "No doubt there is a relation between *thought* about the real and this *real*, but it is a relation of *knowledge*, a relation of adequacy or inadequacy of knowledge, not a real relation, meaning by this a relation inscribed in *that real* of which thought is the (adequate or inadequate) knowledge" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 87).

Althusser defends the position that there is a correlation, not an identity, between thought and reality, but he cannot prove it, and he rejects Spinoza's rationalist claim that it can ever be proven. Therefore, the frequently encountered idea that Althusser's general concept of "practice" was meant to serve as a transcendental, pseudo-Spinozist copula linking ideas and reality is simply untenable.⁴⁹ However, Althusser's early formulation of philosophy as the "Theory of theoretical practice" faintly echoes Spinoza's notion of a second order of thought, *cognitio reflexiva* or "ideas of ideas," at which level it is possible to distinguish, with complete certainty, "vague experience" from rational understanding. By positing Marxist philosophy, or dialectical materialism, as a "Theory of theoretical practice" in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, Althusser does not fully distinguish himself from the rationalist tradition that claims that philosophy, not science, decides what is scientific knowledge and what isn't. Given Althusser's general opposition to rationalism, however, his eventual rejection of the idea of a philosophical "Theory of theoretical practice" was a foregone conclusion. Spinoza's formulation does, in fact, correspond to Althusser's description of an "epistemological break" between a science and what that science retrospectively labels "ideology," but it is also radically distinct from Althusser's concept by virtue of the latter's *historical*, not rationalist, materialism. Althusser never abandons the concept of an epistemological break, but he progressively empties it of its rationalist significations of absolute truth and error. Scientific realism thus becomes a position to be defended in philosophy, not an apodictic proposition demon-

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strable by philosophy (philosophy being neither a science nor the arbiter of science).

Spinoza's idea of causality, to return again to our central theme, accounts for the relationship of phenomena, including human beings, in terms of the structure of nature without recourse to any external agency such as an interventionist God. This is an astounding achievement for the seventeenth century, an age in which religion was still the dominant ideological force and in which the awakening opposition to superstition came as much from Renaissance humanism as it did from natural science. Spinoza's "rejection of all philosophies of the Subject—either God or Man" accounts, in Althusser's opinion, both for the magnitude of his achievement and "massive repression" of his thought "at the end of the age of God . . . and the beginning of the age of Man" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 102). For the last four hundred years, the discourse of reason has been dominated not by the impersonal materialism of Spinoza but by the philosophies of his rivals Descartes (through Locke, Hume, and Mill) and Leibniz (through Wolff, Kant, and Hegel). For Althusser, as for anyone who will concede even the slightest influence of social and political struggles on the "life of the mind," such an outcome is hardly surprising. Yet Althusser presses further, much further, the negative consequences of these developments both for philosophy and for the science of history.

The Critique of Transitive and Expressive Causalities

Althusser contrasts Spinoza's philosophy with the traditions of Descartes and Leibniz in two respects: first with regard to their respective capacities to deal with the problem of causality and second with regard to their respective capacities to explain social as opposed to natural phenomena. Althusser characterizes the Cartesian view of causality by the term *transitive causality*, by which he means an "analytic effectivity which reduces the whole to the result or sum of its parts," and the tradition of Leibniz by the term *expressive causality*, denoting an emphasis on the "primacy of the whole as an essence of which the parts are no more than the phenomenal expressions" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 186-87). Defining these terms in this way, Althusser feels justified in expanding their reference, applying the term *transitive causality* broadly to include the tradition of British empiricism and, in an even more sweeping generalization, employing the term *expressive causality*

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to characterize Hegelian dialectics, economism of the "vulgar" Marxist variety, and the "absolute historicism" of Gramsci, Lukács, and Korsch (which posits the incommensurability of historical epochs).

Along a distinct but not unrelated axis, Althusser finds the traditions of Descartes and Leibniz equally predicated on the category of a subject—the subject of knowledge, history, and so on. It matters little, for Althusser's purposes, whether the subject is Leibniz's omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent Creator of this the best of all possible worlds or Descartes's free and rational human being inaugurating (albeit still with God's blessing) the heroic struggle of Man to realize reason in history. In either case, Althusser argues, the reliance on the category of the subject, whether God (idealism) or Man (humanism), necessarily introduces a teleological distortion into the scientific understanding of history. In emphasizing the connections between empiricism, historicism, idealism, economism, and humanism, Althusser necessarily ignores the many things that distinguish them. Critics have feasted on this fact, without, it must be added,

being able to deny (when they bother to acknowledge it at all) the general thrust of his argument—that such connections exist and that they are significant.

Transitive or linear causality is criticized by Althusser for being simply a "history of elements" lacking any concept of either the structured interrelationship between elements or the radical differences between elements in different structural contexts. This type of causality, usually associated with the empiricist tradition of Locke and Hume, treats causality like a game of billiards in which homogeneous but atomized elements bounce off each other in a linear and unique sequence lacking any general structure beyond the cumulative effects of the series of individual collisions. Not only does linear causality ignore such crucial factors as the historical specificity and transformation of elements, but it also cannot grasp the unity of different social formations that accounts for the historical individuality of the elements. Linear causality, in fact, dissolves a particular structure into its elements in order to construct from them a "history" that can be no more than an ahistorical genealogy of contemporary categories transposed onto past events. Taking the "history of ideas" as his example, Althusser argues that transitive causality is based on three theoretical presuppositions that are always active within it:

The first presupposition is analytic; it holds that any theoretical system and any constituted thought is reducible to its elements: a precondition that enables one to think any element of the system on its own, and to compare it

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with another similar element from another system. The second presupposition is teleological: it institutes a secret tribunal of history which judges the ideas submitted to it, or rather, which permits the dissolution of (different) systems into their elements, institutes these elements as elements in order to proceed to their measurement according to its own norms as if to their truth. Finally, these two presuppositions depend on a third, which regards the history of ideas as its own element, and maintains that nothing happens there which is not a product of the history of ideas itself. (Althusser 1969, 56-57)

Expressive causality is the converse of transitive causality. Within the problematic of expressive causality, all the phenomena of any one period—its economy, polity, law, philosophy, and so on—are viewed as externalizations of one internal principle that is the essence of those phenomena, manifesting itself in each and expressed by every one of them. Such thinking may take either a materialist form, for example, "economism" (Althusser's pejorative term for economic reflectionism) and "mechanism" (various forms of positivist materialism—for example, social Darwinism—which reduce social processes to natural ones), or an idealist form, such as the spiritual unity of Leibniz's "pre-established harmony" expressed in each material monad and in each mind that "concentrates the whole into itself" as if into a "total part," or finally, the "identity of opposites" of the Hegelian dialectic (including by extension all forms of Hegelian Marxism). In all its forms, expressive causality presupposes an immanent cause, an inner essence, applicable everywhere and at every moment to each of the phenomena within the totality in question.

Expressive causality is usually determinist, but one variant, "historicism," assumes a radically aleatory posture. Taking Antonio Gramsci's conception of Marxism as an "organic ideology" as his point of departure, Althusser defines historicism as a peculiar blend of transitive and expressive causalities (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 126-36). For historicism, all social phenomena, including knowledge itself, are reduced to organic expressions of a totality (for Gramsci, a "historical bloc"), while totalities succeed each other in a contingent, transitive fashion explained in terms of human freedom (for Gramsci, the activity and experience of the masses). Historicism, Althusser contends, privileges social action over the structural conditions of its existence and epistemological relativism over scientific realism. The historicist assimilates all social practices into a single practice, an undifferentiated historical *praxis*, which is then hypostatized as the autonomous driving force of history. By grounding knowledge in the expressive unity of a "concrete"

totality, the historicist further privileges subjectivism and voluntarism by relativizing the production of knowledge itself. In Gramsci's case this voluntarism took the form of a Marxist "inversion" of the liberal historicism of Benedetto Croce, the Italian neo-Hegelian philosopher of "liberty," but the result is the same for all historicisms, Marxist or otherwise—an awkward combination of expressive causality with respect to the present (a problematic of totality), transitive causality with respect to the past (a problematic of elements and origins), and "experimental" freedom with respect to the future (a problematic of pragmatism: whatever works is true). While Althusser evinces great respect for the "enormous historical and political genius" of Gramsci, especially for his concept of hegemony, he rejects Gramsci's "absolute" historicism in favor of a position that defends the primacy of realism over relativism in philosophy and the explanatory priority of social structures over human practice in history.

Expressive causality presents itself as a complex totality—the infinite interrelationships between Leibniz's monads, the infinite mediations of the Hegelian totality—but in Althusser's view, the apparent complexity of the product of expressive causality conceals an even more basic simplicity. Expressive causality reduces a complex of diverse phenomena to a single, undifferentiated essence such as *Geist*, pre-established harmony, genetic endowment, and so on. From the perspective of expressive causality, as with transitive causality, the historical process is viewed as a linear continuum within which a single internal principle unfolds its successive moments and the several totalities that follow one another become merely the successive expressions of these successive moments. A cross-section at any point through the historical continuum, as it is conceived under the aegis of expressive causality, will always reveal such a simple essence, what Althusser calls an "essential section": "A vertical break made at any moment in historical time will reveal a totality all of whose parts are so many 'total parts' each expressing the others, and each expressing the social totality that contains them, because each in itself contains the immediate form of its expressions the essence of the totality itself" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 94).

Structural Causality and *Darstellung*

In contrast to transitive causality, expressive causality does have a category for the effectivity of the social whole on its elements, but Althus-

ser maintains that this category is "premised on the absolute condition that the whole is not conceived as a structure." In fact, neither transitive nor expressive causality is capable of thinking the structural unity of distinct elements. "If the whole is posited as structured, i.e., as possessing a type of unity quite different from the type of unity of the spiritual whole . . . not only does it become impossible to think the determination of the elements by the structure in the categories of . . . transitive causality, it also becomes impossible to think it in the category of the global expressive causality of a universal inner essence immanent in its phenomenon" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 187). The proposal to think the determination of the elements of a whole by

the structure of the whole poses a different problem altogether, one first recognized, Althusser contends, by Spinoza, then buried in darkness until finally rediscovered by Marx.

According to this third notion of causality, which Althusser calls *structural causality*, relations between elements of the whole are not exterior to the whole, as is the case with transitive causality, nor are they expressions of its immanent principle, as with expressive causality. Instead, the whole is nothing less than the reciprocal effectivities of its elements, at the same time as these elements are determined by the whole, that is, by their interrelationship with all the other elements within the whole. The cause of the effects is the "complex organization of the whole" while the latter is precisely "the sum of the effects and their interrelationships." The structure of the whole is "immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that is *the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*, in short [it] is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements [and] is nothing outside its effects" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 188-89). The whole becomes what Althusser calls an "absent cause" because it is present only in and through the reciprocal effectivity of its elements, and Althusser uses Marx's term *Darstellung* (representation, *mise-en-scène*) to express this idea. Althusser describes the gradual development of a concept of causality by which Marx was able to break definitively with metaphors of interiority and exteriority, a concept of causality that designated the existence of a structure in its effects:

In every case, the ordinary distinctions between outside and inside disappear, along with the "intimate" links within the phenomena as opposed to their visible disorder: we find a different image, a new quasi-concept, definitely freed from the empiricist antinomies of phenomenal subjectivity and essential interiority; we find an objective system governed in its most con-

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crete determinations by laws of its *erection* (montage) and *machinery*, by the specifications of its concept. Now we can recall that highly symptomatic term "*Darstellung*," compare it with this "machinery" and take it literally, as the very existence of this machinery in its effects: the mode of existence of the stage direction (*mise en scène*) on the theater which is simultaneously its own stage, its own script, its own actors, the theater whose spectators can, on occasion, be spectators only because they are first of all forced to be its actors, caught by constraints of a script and parts whose authors they cannot be, since it is in essence an *authorless theater*. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 193)

Ben Brewster, Althusser's translator and compiler of the glossaries to *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, provides a helpful explanation of Althusser's analogy: "Empiricist ideologies, seeing the action on the stage, the effects, believe that they are seeing a faithful copy of reality, recognizing themselves and their preconceptions in the mirror held up to them by the play. . . . The Hegelian detects the hand of God or the Spirit writing the script and directing the play. For the Marxist, on the contrary, this is a theater, but one which reflects neither simple reality nor any transcendental truth, a theater without an author; the object of his science is the mechanism which produces the stage effects (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 310).

Structural causality conceptualizes the social whole as a parallelogram of forces each bearing within itself the imprint of its conditions of existence, the social whole. Althusser's insistence that the whole and the parts are inseparable and that the whole is present in the relation of its effects forces us to think causal relationships as complex rather than simple phenomena. In the first place, structural causality makes us think of causality as a relation. "What Althusser is trying to hammer home to us," Alex Callinicos points out, "is the shift from treating a cause as a thing, a substance, a distinct, separately identifiable entity to treating it as a relation, from something that can be immediately or ultimately pointed to, grasped hold of, to treating it as the displacements effected by the structure of a whole upon its elements. . . . [R]eality is not something underlying these appearances, it is the structured relation of these appearances" (Callinicos 1976, 52). More profoundly, the concept of structural causality forces us to recognize that social structures must be conceptualized along two dimensions, one that stresses the structured whole as the reciprocal effectivity of its elements, but also a second that investigates the structure of the elements themselves with the intention of discovering their particular

effectivity. These dimensions do not, of course, exist in isolation. Rather, they

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form a kind of dialectic that forces us to move ceaselessly from one level of analysis to another: from a given level of generality to a more specific one and from a given level of specificity to a more general one. Furthermore, as if things were not complicated enough, we must realize that we are as yet dealing with only a single theoretical moment, what Althusser calls a "conjuncture," and that we have yet to pose the problem of prior conjunctures and the problems of transition and periodization.

Before moving on, we might pause to consider once again the distance that separates Althusser's concept of structural causality from Spinoza's rationalist metaphysics. Spinoza envisages a kind of unified and complete science that would enable every natural change to be shown as a completely determined effect within a single system of causes; that is, everything would be adequately explicable within a single theory. Althusser would not disagree that such a conclusion follows logically from Spinoza's concept of God or Nature, which does not permit inadequacy or uneven development. Althusser might even accept this proposition as an ultimate conclusion of a realist and materialist position within philosophy. However, Althusser would insist that such a "speculative-rationalist" philosophical conclusion is of little use to scientific practice. Spinoza maintains that insofar as we reflect on our ideas—that is, insofar as we remain within the realm of pure logic—we participate in the same relationship of adequacy/certainty as God, although at an infinitely lower level. For Althusser, by contrast, we cannot be apodictically certain of even this degree of adequacy. For Althusser, as much as for Wittgenstein or Derrida, theoretical practice is internally marked by differential dislocations or gaps that cannot be eliminated precisely because human reason cannot meaningfully approximate the godlike relationship of adequacy/certainty that Spinoza believes to be attainable by means of deduction from self-evident or logically indubitable propositions.

Structure in Dominance and Determination in the Last Instance

Althusser's insistence on the relational nature of structural causality does not imply a structural twilight in which all determinations are equally grey. Althusser emphatically rejects the pluralist truism that "everything causes everything else" and insists on the importance of patterns of dominance and subordination within the unity of the social

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formation. If it is the case that all social phenomena exist relationally, it does not follow that all have identical or equal effectivities. The concept of the social formation implies an internal hierarchy, a precise and specifiable pattern of interrelationship between the elements within the whole. Social formations are always "structures in dominance" because there is always a hierarchy of effectivity and always one element which plays a dominant role. "While one element can displace another to assume the dominant role, such variations occur within a structure which is invariant to the extent that it always has a dominant element" (Althusser 1969, 179). Conversely, the fact that one element dominates the others presupposes that the complexity

in which it is inscribed is that of a structured unity.

Domination is not just an indifferent fact, it is a fact essential to the complexity itself. That is why complexity implies domination as one of its essentials: it is inscribed in its structure. So to claim that this unity is not and cannot be the unity of a simple, original and universal essence is not . . . to sacrifice unity on the altar of "pluralism." It is to claim something quite different: that the unity discussed by Marxism is the unity of the complexity itself, that the mode of organization and articulation of the complexity is precisely what constitutes its unity. It is to claim that the complex whole has the unity of a structure in dominance. (Althusser 1969, 201-2)

Structure in dominance should not be confused with the distinct but closely related term *determination in the last instance*, by which Althusser means the primacy of the economic instance or mode of production within any social formation. Althusser does employ the metaphorical notions of base and superstructure but not in a reflectionist sense: "the economy determines for the non-economic elements their respective degrees of autonomy/dependence in relation to itself and to one another, thus their differential degrees of specific effectivity. It can determine itself as dominant or not-dominant at any particular time, and in the latter case it determines which of the elements is to be dominant" (Althusser 1969, 255). Clearly, determination in the last instance is not intended as a unilateral relationship of causality. The mode of production is the "deep structure" or base of the social formation in the sense that it defines fully the economic instance even in social formations where the forces and relations of production are institutionally separated. Determination in the last instance by the economy means that its primacy establishes certain boundaries or limits to the autonomy of the political and ideological functions. The economy does not select particular political or ideological institutions; it excludes those

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institutions incompatible with the existing forces and relations of production. The primacy of the economy does not, in other words, explain the political and ideological instances in such a way that they can be simply read off or deduced from the structure of the mode of production. Economic determination in the last instance does not indicate that there ever was or ever will be some point (origin, goal) when the economy was or will be solely determinant with respect to the other instances. "The economic dialectic is never active in the pure state; in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc.—are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done, or when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes" (Althusser 1969, 113).

Althusser is not simply playing fast and loose with words in asserting determination in the last instance while insisting that "the last instance never comes." He is attempting to define an alternative position between two equally unacceptable versions of causality: transitive causality, which can think only in terms of an endless chain of cause and effect (X happened because of Y, Y because of Z, and so on to infinity), and expressive causality, which reduces the effectivity of the elements to reflections of an essence (X, Y, and Z are all really manifestations of A, the single, independent, and omnipresent variable). Althusser's position is a realist one: structural forces or laws are at work in social formations, but unlike the natural sciences, historical science can never experimentally isolate them from each other. The phrase "the last instance never comes" recognizes what Althusser calls the "ever givenness" (*toujours déjà donné*) of social structures. This means a social formation is "always already there" as the copresence of all its elements, their specific effectivities, and the relations of dominance and subordination that obtain between them. The primacy of the economy is always already there in the historical conditions of existence of the present conjuncture, yet the primacy of the economic function is exerted only in the context of a parallelogram of forces within which the economic itself is articulated.

Althusser's distinction between determinant and dominant structures allows us to amplify Marx's famous remark that "the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics." On the contrary, Marx insisted, "it was the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played

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the chief part" (Marx 1967, 82). Anthropologist Maurice Godelier (1977) provides a particularly helpful explication of the concept of economic determination in the last instance in the context of so-called primitive societies dominated by kinship structures. In "primitive" society, kinship, a non-economic relation, appears both determining and dominant, Godelier acknowledges, and this anomaly has often been used to discredit the Marxist idea of economic determination. However, Godelier argues that it is not the concept of economic determination that is at fault but rather the tendency of anthropologists and historians to confuse abstract *functional* distinctions (economic, political, kinship relations) with concrete *physical* institutions that are the bearers of these functions.

Social formations smaller and less complex than our own, Godelier explains, will obviously have fewer and less specialized institutions; these institutions will typically support a number of functions that will become institutionally separated in the course of historical development. For example, looking for a separate base and superstructure in "primitive" societies yields productive "forces" (hunting, fishing, breeding, and so on) but no "relations of production" other than kinship. Kinship determines the rights of an individual to land and its products, his or her obligations in relation to the productive activities of the community, and even authority in political and religious matters. Godelier contends that kinship relations are *both* infrastructure and superstructure in such societies, functioning not only as family relations but as relations of production, political relations, and ideological "socialization" as well. In other words, kinship is the dominant social structure, but is it determinant as well? Godelier says no. For Godelier, the dominant, multifunctional nature of kinship is in actuality "determined by the low level of productive forces, a low level of development which imposes the sexual division of labor and the cooperation of both sexes in order to subsist and reproduce their way of life" (Godelier 1977, 123). Godelier cautions against mistaking a "unity" of functions for a "confusion" of functions. Accepting the fact that a given structure may act as the support for a unity of several functions does not justify confusing the different structural effectivities of each function. Structural causality, therefore, should conceptualize a hierarchy of functional distinctions and structural causalities "without in any way prejudicing the *nature* of the structures, which in every case performs these functions (kinship, politics, religion . . .), nor the *number of functions* which a structure may support" (Godelier 1977, 2).

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If we wish to explain the evolution of primitive societies, Godelier goes on to say, we have to explain the appearance of *newincompatible* functions alongside the maintenance or reproduction of existing social structures. Suppose new techniques of production modify the place of residence or the nature of the cooperative labor process or introduce some other change that demands new relations of production. Beyond a certain limit, kinship relations no longer

correspond to new social conditions. Perhaps new political relations, based on centralized tribal power, appear in certain social formations. These political relations seemingly extend kinship—the authority of the chief is legitimized by the contention that he is the "father" of his people—but in fact kinship has been replaced. Kinship has not been mysteriously transmuted into an explicitly political structure, Godelier points out; rather, the political function formerly exercised by kinship relations is now being developed on the basis of a new structure with new relations of dominance and determination. The new structure in dominance, hereditary chiefdom, is dominant because the chief exercises economic ownership over the means of production, but the economic function remains determinant because the new labor processes and new relations of ownership are a unity on the basis of which all the political functions of the new chiefdom and all the ideological functions within the social formation (including family relations) are now reorganized. The economic function has been determinant throughout because it was the contradictory development of the previous mode of production which made possible the shift in dominance from family relations of kinship to centralized political authority. Dominance is determined by economic development, and the economy is primary even when control over the means of production resides in structures that are primarily non-economic in nature.

The epistemological significance of Althusser's efforts should also be noted. Althusser is defining and defending a theoretical space between the naive objectivism of reflection theory and the sophisticated relativism of positivist concepts such as Weber's notion of "elective affinity" and postmodern formulations such as Derrida's notion of *différance*. In this context as well, Althusser's concept of determination in the last instance appears as something of a realist manifesto: a declaration of faith that, on the other side of the aporias inherent in human language and even human reason, the real world exists and that we have valid knowledge of it. For Althusser, determination in the last instance provides, for historical science, that minimal level of theoretical coherence without which the very production of knowledge is inconceivable.

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Without a concept such as economic determination, history can be envisioned only as radical exteriority, a chaotic "war of every element against every other," or as radical interiority, every element being an epiphenomenon of a transcendent essence animating the whole through its elements.

The structure of the whole is articulated as the structure of an organic, hierarchized whole. The coexistence of limbs and their relations in the whole is governed by the order of a dominant structure which introduces a specific order into the articulation . . . of the limbs and their relations. . . . [T]his dominance of a structure . . . cannot be reduced to the primacy of a center, any more than the relation between the elements and the structure can be reduced to the expressive unity of the essence within its phenomena. This hierarchy only represents the hierarchy of effectivity that exists between different "levels" or instances of the social whole. Because each of the levels is itself structured, the hierarchy represents the degree and the index of effectivity existing between the different structured levels present in the whole: it is the hierarchy of effectivity of a structure dominant over subordinate structures and their elements. . . . [I]n order to conceive the "dominance" of a structure over other structures in the unity of a conjuncture it is necessary to refer to the principle of the "determination in the last instance" of the non-economic structures by the economic structure; . . . this "determination in the last instance" is an absolute precondition for the necessity and intelligibility of the displacements of the structures in the hierarchy of effectivity, or of the displacement of 'dominance' between the structured levels of the whole; only this 'determination in the last instance' makes it possible to escape the arbitrary relativism of observable displacements by giving these displacements the necessity of a function. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 98-99)

Hegel or Spinoza?

Althusser develops a concept of contradiction radically different from that of Hegel and those variants of Marxism that identify Marx's dialectic with Hegel's. Unfortunately, Althusser's rejection of the Hegelian dialectic is often interpreted as a rejection of the very idea of historical process or, even worse, as evidence of the inability of Structural Marxism to develop a satisfactory alternative to the Hegelian concept of contradiction. Althusser's Spinozism has served critics admirably in this regard, for as Althusser himself acknowledges, "whatever you do, you cannot find in Spinoza what Hegel gave to Marx: contradiction" (Althusser 1976, 139).

Spinoza lacks a concept of contradiction because he is unconcerned with historical development and social determination as opposed to logical propositions pertaining to the necessary existence

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and qualities of things. Spinoza's concept of structural causality is, in effect, identified with the laws of logic and thereby denied full theoretical development. From Spinoza's rationalist perspective, restricted as it is to the "eternity of the concept" (to use Althusser's apt characterization), physical and social change is dismissed as secondary and uninteresting, part of an infinite chain of cause and effect associated with an inadequate knowledge of the world. Time is an inadequate concept for Spinoza because it is associated with the subjectivity of the imagination, not the objectivity of reason. Spinoza does not simply subordinate temporal development and social determinations to the laws of nature, a materialist and realist move with which there can be little quarrel; he goes on to empty these concepts of all significance by subordinating the laws of nature to the laws of logic within the framework of a rationalist ontology.

Hegel, of course, takes the immobility of Spinoza's system as his starting point. Althusser acknowledges that Hegel introduces a developmental process within the absolute based on the dialectical logic of the negation of the negation, but no more than Spinoza can Hegel be said to have provided a concept of the differential effectivity of social structures of the type that Althusser finds in Marx. Furthermore, Althusser maintains that Hegel is able to "set Spinoza in motion" only by means of a philosophical regression, namely, by reintroducing expressive causality and the category of the subject into the concept of the absolute, a move that Spinoza's materialist concept of structural causality, its rationalism notwithstanding, had already discredited. Pierre Macherey (1979) goes so far as to argue that Hegel could transcend Spinoza only by failing to understand him in this regard. For Althusser and other Structural Marxist critics of Hegel such as Macherey and Godelier, Hegel's expressive or immanent causality cannot think social determination or contradiction except on the condition that they are ultimately emptied of all meaningful difference, that is, on the condition that they be conceptualized, in Godelier's words, expressively as an *identity of opposites* and not structurally as a *unity of differences* (Godelier 1972).⁶³ It is Althusser's position that Marx could not have developed his concept of economic determination by simply reversing Hegel's idealist dialectic and creating a materialist version with the same form. On the contrary, for Marx to have worked out a differential concept of structural causality, that is, Spinoza *with* a concept of contradiction, it was necessary to break completely with Hegel's expressive concept of dialectic.

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Historical development and social determination were introduced into social theory, according to Althusser, not by Hegel but by Montesquieu, who must also be credited with originating the materialist conception of history as "the concrete behavior of men in their relations with nature and with their past" (Althusser 1972, 59). In addition, Montesquieu was "*the first to propose a positive principle of universal explanation for history* ; a principle which is not just *static* : the totality explaining the diversity of the laws and institutions of a given government; but also *dynamic* : the law of the unity of nature and principle, a law making it possible to think the

development of institutions and their transformations in real history, too. In the depths of the countless laws which come and go, he thus discovered a *constant connection* uniting the nature of a government to its principle; and at the core of this constant connection, he stated the inner variation of the relation, which by the transitions of the unity from adequacy to inadequacy, from identity to contradiction, makes intelligible the changes and revolutions in the concrete totalities of history" (Althusser 1972, 50). Althusser also finds in Montesquieu a form of determination in the last instance that anticipates Marx; in Montesquieu, though, the concept is defined in terms of "manners and morals," a shortcoming stemming from the historically conditioned fact that Montesquieu is, in Althusser's view, "unable to seek in the conditions he is describing a deeper unity, which would presuppose a complete *political economy*" (Althusser 1972, 59).

According to Althusser, Spinoza reconciled existence and reason by means of a rationalist, but also a materialist, concept of the absolute. Hegel "rediscovers" the perspective of the absolute already developed by Spinoza (and with it the resolution of the pseudo-problem of subject/object dualism) and imbues it with a concept of historical process and social totality derived from Montesquieu. However, Althusser notes, the Hegelian synthesis comes at a high price—ruthlessly subordinating the materialism of both Spinoza and Montesquieu to an idealist teleology originating in the "pre-established harmony" of Leibniz and transmitted to Hegel by way of the ethical evolutionism of Kant's "hidden plan of nature." The Hegelian Idea is not simply Spinoza's God set in motion, according to Althusser; it is Spinoza's God embodied in the categories of a subject and a goal or, more precisely, in the concept of an immanent and expressive process of becoming-subject, or self-realization, which constitutes at once the subject and the goal of history. But, of course, this is not Spinoza at all. Althusser defends Spinoza's

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concept of the absolute, despite the imperturbability of its rationalist foundation, because it forces us to think determination in a materialist and "non-immanent" way, a way that reveals, in advance, "the secret alliance between Subject and Goal which 'mystifies' the Hegelian dialectic" (Althusser 1976, 136-37). For Althusser, the development of a scientific concept of contradiction requires not only that we abandon the metaphysical category of the absolute, the mark of Althusser's break with Spinozist rationalism as well as Hegelian idealism, but also that we discard the expressive concept of causality by which Hegel subjugates process to the absolute and by which Hegelian Marxism thinks the social formation as an expressive totality, not as a structured whole.

Contradiction, Uneven Development, and Overdetermination

The idea that the social formation is a complex whole structured in dominance clearly distinguishes what Althusser calls the Marxist concept of the "whole" from the expressive Hegelian concept of "totality." While he borrowed the word and idea of dialectic from Hegel, Althusser insists that Marx subjected Hegel's term to a materialist critique that eliminated all traces of expressive or immanent causality from it. The result was a new content, uneven development, by which Marx (and Althusser) affirm the reality as well as the materiality of difference within society. "Borrowing from Montesquieu the idea that in a historical totality all concrete determinations, whether economic, political, moral, even military, express one single principle, Hegel conceives history in terms of the category of the expressive totality. For Marx, differences are real, and they are not simply differences in spheres of activity, practices, and

objects: they are differences in *efficacy* " (Althusser 1976, 182).

For Hegel, history is made up of "circles within circles, spheres within spheres," wherein each sphere is a "total part, each expressing the internal unity of the totality which is only ever, in all its complexity, the objectification-alienation of a simple principle" (Althusser 1976, 182). According to Althusser, Marx's metaphor of a base and a superstructure differs from the "mediations" of Hegelian circles within circles in that Marx's framework requires that one make distinctions between structures, that these distinctions be real, irreducible, and that the order of determinations among the structures be unequal. In Hegel, "differences are always affirmed only to be denied and transcended in

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other differences, and this is possible because in each difference there is already present the in-itself of a future for-itself" (Althusser 1976, 182). There is no expressive unity, no single principle in Marx, Althusser insists: "this is why I did not talk [in *For Marx*] about a *totality* , because the Marxist whole is complex and uneven, and stamped with this unevenness by the determination in the last instance. It is this interplay, this unevenness, which allows us to understand that something real can happen in a social formation and that through the political class struggle it is possible to get a hold on real history" (Althusser 1976, 183).

By *contradiction* , Althusser understands the multiple levels of uneven development that define the social formation as a "structure of structures" and a "unity of differences." Contradiction implies not only the particularity and relative autonomy of social structures but also the fact that every social structure is itself a unity constituted by the effectivities of the unevenly developed structures that are its elements. Uneven development is thus the basic law of social formations for Althusser having "priority over [social formations] and able to account for them precisely insofar as it does not derive from their existence" (Althusser 1969, 213). In contrast to the Hegelian form of contradiction, uneven development is not the function of a totality, nor does it bear any trace of expressive immanence; it implies instead that each practice—emerging from its own history and possessing its own distinct mode of development with its own specific effects—has a relative autonomy with respect to other practices. Although the social formation is riven with multiple contradictions, the contradictions do not exist as a random flux but as a unity of differences. Because the uneven development of the social formation is internal to it, each manifestation of this unevenness—that is, each contradiction—bears within itself its historical conditions of existence, namely, the specific structure of unevenness of a complex whole articulated on the basis of a mode of production.

On the one hand, the ensemble of instances cannot be adequately understood without reference to individual contradictions and their uneven development: "If every contradiction is a contradiction in a complex whole . . . this complex whole cannot be envisaged without its contradictions, without their basically uneven relations. In other words, each contradiction, each essential articulation of the structure, and the general relation of the articulations in the structure . . . constitute so many conditions of the existence of the complex whole itself" (Althusser 1969, 205). On the other hand, individual contradictions and their

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uneven development cannot be adequately understood independently of the parallelogram of forces by which they are "overdetermined": "the contradiction is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal *conditions* of existence, and even from the instances it governs; it is radically *affected by them*, determining but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various levels and instances of the social formation it animates; it might be called overdetermined in its principle" (Althusser 1969, 101).

The concept of *overdetermination* is Althusser's way of expressing the historical effect of the ensemble of contradictions on each individual contradiction: "the reflection in contradiction itself of its conditions of existence, that is, of its situation in the structure in dominance of the complex whole" (Althusser 1969, 209). Overdetermination, in other words, is a variation on the Althusserian concept of structural causality and the dialectic of the social formation and its instances.⁶⁴ The ensemble of contradictions assigns a place and a function to individual practices, but the contradictions within each individual practice will exercise in turn an effect on the ensemble and hence back eventually on each individual practice and contradiction, including its own.

Overdetermination also expresses economic determination in the familiar Althusserian fashion. In precisely the same manner as he develops the concept of determination in the last instance by the economy in such a way as to avoid reflectionism without thereby falling into a "pluralism of instances," Althusser introduces the concept of a "general contradiction"—a "contradiction between the forces and relations of production, essentially embodied in the contradiction between two antagonistic classes" (Althusser 1969, 99)—to assert the primacy of class struggle within the field of contradictions. Because the effectivities of structures are actualized as social relations, Althusser is able to establish a parallel between the primacy of the economic determination in the field of structures and the primacy of class struggle in the field of social relations. Given his assertion that contradiction is the "motive force" in both fields, Althusser is fully justified in concluding that class struggle is the motor of history—a scandalous thesis that is not only consistent with his less controversial concept of economic determination in the last instance, but also identical to it.

Since contradiction is the fundamental law of social formations, the ensemble of contradictions articulated on the basis of the general contradiction defines the pattern of dominance and subordination, antag-

onism and non-antagonism that exists at any given historical moment or "conjuncture." However, because of the very nature of overdetermination, Althusser insists that we can never speak of the undifferentiated nature of the general contradiction, even at the moment of a revolutionary transformation of the social formation. The moment of revolutionary upheaval results in what Althusser calls a "ruptural unity." At such a moment, a "vast accumulation of contradictions comes into play in the same court, some of which are radically heterogeneous—of different origins, different senses, different levels and points of application—but which nevertheless 'merge' into a ruptural unity; we can no longer speak of the sole, unique power of the general contradiction. Of course, the basic contradiction dominating the period . . . is active in all these contradictions even in their fusion. But, strictly speaking, it cannot be claimed that these contradictions and their fusion are merely the pure phenomena of the general

contradiction" (Althusser 1969, 100).

Furthermore, parallel to his distinction between dominant and determinant structures, Althusser maintains that the general contradiction is not necessarily the "principal contradiction" dominant at a particular conjuncture. To insist on the identity of the principal and general contradiction is, in Althusser's view, to slip into a crude form of expressive thinking, which in its mechanistic Marxist form is called "economism."

It is economism . . . that sets up the hierarchy of instances once and for all, assigns each its essence and role and defines the universal meaning of these relations. . . . It is economism that identifies eternally in advance the determinant contradiction in the last instance with the role of the dominant contradiction, which forever assimilates such and such an "aspect" (forces of production, economy, practice) to the principal role, and such and such another "aspect" (relations of production, politics, ideology, theory) to the secondary role—whereas in real history determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy, politics, theory, etc. (Althusser 1969, 213)

The principal and secondary relationships between contradictions alluded to by Althusser are not given in advance. Social contradictions are instead thrown into relations of domination and subordination by modes of overdetermination that Althusser labels "displacement" and "condensation." Displacement is defined by Althusser as a relation of change governed by the structured whole; relations of domination and subordination develop and change but in a seemingly unrelated, independent fashion that is relatively "non-antagonistic." When the domi-

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nant mode of overdetermination is displacement, the possibility of revolutionary political activity is minimal: "there is always one principal contradiction and secondary ones, but they exchange their roles in the structure in dominance while the latter remains stable" (Althusser 1969, 211). The principal contradiction is produced by processes of displacement, but it becomes "antagonistic" or politically "decisive" only by a process of condensation that signifies the "fusion" of social contradictions into a "real unity" whose effectivity then becomes "the nodal strategic point for political practice" within which "is reflected the complex whole (economic, political, and ideological)" (Althusser 1969, 214). When condensation is the dominant mode of overdetermination, the social formation is characterized by instability rather than stability. The politically interesting outcome of the dialectic of displacement and condensation is a revolutionary explosion, a ruptural unity that induces the "dissolution of existing social relations and their global restructuring on a qualitatively new basis" (Althusser 1969, 216).

Displacement and condensation, non-antagonism and antagonism, are ceaselessly at work at all times regardless of which mode is predominant. Their organic interrelationship, Althusser maintains, constitutes the field of political practice as well as the complexity and specificity of the class struggle:

to say that contradiction is a motive force is to say that it implies a real struggle, real confrontations, precisely located within the structure of the complex whole; it is to say that the locus of confrontation may vary according to the relation of the contradictions in the structure in dominance in any given situation; it is to say that the *condensation* of the struggle in a strategic locus is inseparable from the displacement of the dominant among these contradictions, that the organic phenomena of condensation and displacement are the very existence of the "identity of opposites" until they produce the globally visible form of the mutation or qualitative leap that sanctions the revolutionary situation when the whole is recrystallized. (Althusser 1969, 215-16)

Overdetermination, displacement, and condensation explain the uneven development of contradictions without reducing it to the simplicity of an essentialist reflection or to the unstructured coexistence of a plurality of elements. These concepts also illuminate contradiction from a political as well as a scientific perspective and reflect Althusser's search for a relationship between Marxist theory and practice that avoids revolutionary voluntarism, pragmatic opportunism, and evolutionist passivity. For Althusser, the concept of overdetermination is

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both revolutionary and realistic: it focuses attention on the revolutionary possibilities materially

present in a given conjuncture without, however, losing touch with the material conditions and objective limits by which these possibilities are constituted. The pursuit of materially comprehended revolutionary possibilities avoids voluntarist, conspiratorial putschism as well as the frenzied but empty and directionless "resistance" of postmodern *gauchisme*—without thereby slipping into either passivity, faith in the collapse of capitalism according to its own laws of motion, or pragmatism, which begins as a "realistic" compromise with capitalism and ends as a betrayal of a socialist alternative to capitalist exploitation. Finally, Althusser's concepts of displacement, condensation, and revolutionary rupture reject an evolutionary reformist view of the transformation from one mode of production to another—what Fabians called "the inevitability of gradualness"—insisting instead that the accumulation of antagonistic contradictions will eventually exceed the capacity of a given mode of production to reform. For Althusser, in other words, there are structural limits to reform within a given mode of production beyond which its transformation must be revolutionary and not evolutionary.

Differential and Plenary Time

The genius of Althusser's concept of contradiction is that it respects both the complex diversity *and* the structured unity of social formations. At every conjuncture, a social formation is a whole whose unity permits a comparative analysis of the same social formation at different times (and thereby concepts of periodization and transformation) as well as cross-cultural comparisons between different social formations separated by time or space. However, each relatively autonomous structure within a social formation must be accorded its own relatively autonomous history, what Althusser calls its "differential history," marked by its own rhythms of development, its own continuities, and its own unevenly developed contradictions. The existence of differential histories implies that each structure has its own specific temporality, or "differential time," which in turn implies a break with the idea of a simple or homogeneous time common to all these histories and against which they can be measured. The concept of common time, what Althusser calls the "historical present," posits historical existence as a linear continuum "assumed to be such that all the elements of the whole always co-exist in one and the same time, one and the same present"

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(Althusser and Balibar 1970, 94). Althusser objects to the homogeneous continuity of the historical present because it is essentialist and because it obscures the real complexity of the social formation: the historical present is nothing more than "a reflection in existence of the continuity of the essentialist principle. . . . [T]he relation between the social totality and its historical existence is held to be a relation with an *immediate* existence . . . which, in turn, implies that this relation is itself *immediate* " (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 94).

The category of the historical present is basic to empiricist as well as essentialist forms of historicism. The difference between the empiricist and essentialist forms of the historical present is that where the empiricist sees a series of events deployed on the linear continuum of time, the essentialist sees so many moments or expressions of the evolution of the totality. Both of these approaches are unacceptable from the standpoint of structural causality and uneven development: "The ideology of a simple time falls with the ideology of a simple history, to be replaced by the notion of a complex historical time constituted by the 'differential times' of the different levels" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 104-5).

We can argue from the specific structure of the Marxist whole that it is no longer possible to think the process of development of the different levels of the whole *in the same historical time*. Each of these different "levels" does not have the same type of historical existence. On the contrary, we have to assign to each level a *peculiar time*, relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence on the "times" of the other levels. . . . Each of these peculiar histories is punctuated with peculiar rhythms and can only be known on condition that we have defined the *concept* of the specificity of its historical temporality and its punctuations. . . . The fact that each of these times and each of these histories is *relatively autonomous* does not make them so many domains which are *independent* of the whole: the specificity of each of these times and each of these histories—in other words, their relative autonomy and independence—is based on a certain type of articulation in the whole, and therefore on a certain type of *dependence* with respect to the whole. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 99-100)

Clearly, Althusser does not intend for us to infer from the idea of differential history—that is, from the irreducibility of the instances and their histories—any absolute independence of these practices and histories from each other. Their independence is relative, not absolute, and inseparable from the overdetermining structure of the social formation. "We cannot be satisfied, as the best historians so often are today, by observing the existence of different times and rhythms, without relating

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them to the concept of their differences; i.e., to the typical dependence which establishes them in the articulation of the levels of the whole" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 100). It is not enough, in other words, merely to note the existence of differential times; one must also be able to reconvene them within the "plenary time" of a given conjuncture, that is, the "complex combination" of these times "which constitutes the peculiar time of the [social formation's] development" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 104).

The plenary time of the conjuncture must not be confused with any form of absolute or common time: it is, like the structured whole itself, a concept rigorously opposed to any form of essentialist homogeneity. "There can be no question," Althusser insists, "of measuring the dislocation of different temporalities against the line of continuous reference time" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 105). Rather, the relationship between differential times and plenary time expresses yet again Althusser's dialectic between the historical effectivity of the social whole on each of its elements and the distinct, relatively autonomous, and simultaneous effectivities of each of the elements at a given conjuncture. As the structured whole exists only as the effect of its elements, plenary time exists only as a function of the differential times. However, as each element is marked by its absent cause—the complex whole that constitutes its historical matrix and that has assigned it a place and a function in relation to every other element—so each differential time is always already marked by the plenary time of the structured whole: "we must regard these differences in temporal structure as *and only as* so many objective indices of the mode of articulation of the different elements or structures of the whole. . . . [I]t is only in the specific unity of the complex structure of the whole that we can think the concept of these so-called backwardnesses, forwardnesses, survivals and unevennesses of development, which *co-exist* in the structure of the real historical present: the present of *conjuncture*" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 106).

History as a Process Without a Subject

Althusser steadfastly maintains that there can be no "Subject" of history or goal which history may be said to be moving toward or realizing. Nowhere within the concept of structural causality can uneven development be pinned down to a single, solitary cause or expressed in terms of origins and ends. Neither determination in the last instance by the economy nor the concept of a mode of production is intended as a

solution to metaphysical puzzles such as why humans exist or ethical dilemmas such as what we should do. This does not mean that history is accidental but simply that the human sciences cannot aspire to complete knowledge of it. The process by which European feudalism was succeeded by capitalism, for example, was determined, not contingent, but nothing in the concept of feudalism necessitates a logically inevitable transition to capitalism. The difference between determination and teleology is a subtle but important one. It turns on the difference between history conceived as a rationalist "science" of the type envisioned by Spinoza (but also by Hegel) and history conceived as a scientific, necessarily incomplete, research program. For Althusser, historical knowledge cannot be absolute, nor can history be written in the future anterior.

The absence of any trace of a subject or a teleology from the concept of structural causality brings us to an important corollary of Althusser's science of history and an important motif in both *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*—namely, a rejection of methodological individualism and voluntaristic categories, what Althusser calls "humanism," within the human sciences. Reacting strongly against the anthropocentric idealism of so-called Marxist humanism and Hegelian Marxism in Western Europe, as well as the political mystification of the self-proclaimed "socialist humanism" promulgated within the Soviet Union during the sixties, Althusser joined forces with French structuralists in fierce polemics against the explanatory value of the category of the human subject and in defense of an opposing position that Althusser provocatively labeled "theoretical anti-humanism."⁷ In *For Marx*, he went so far as to declare theoretical anti-humanism to be "an absolute (negative) precondition of the (positive) knowledge of the human world itself, and of its practical transformation," insisting that "it is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes" (Althusser 1969, 229).

Moreover, Althusser has consistently maintained this position throughout his later writings. Even as he began to emphasize class struggle over structural causality, using language that became increasingly populist as well as stridently political, Althusser adamantly refused to admit the primacy of the human agent in the process of history. Against British Communist Party member John Lewis's contention that "Man makes history," Althusser defended the thesis that "class struggle is the motor of history," a position that rejects not only the essentialist and voluntarist concept of "Man" but also the implication that classes

themselves are the "makers" or subjects of history. For Althusser, it is no longer a question of *who* makes history because history, properly understood, has no subject. "History is a process without a Subject or a Goal where the given circumstances in which 'men' act as subjects under the determination of social *relations* are the product of class struggles. History therefore does not have a Subject, in the philosophical sense of the term, but a *motor*: that very class struggle" (Althusser 1976, 99).

From Althusser's point of view, humanism—that is, the approach that takes the human being as the subject of history—is based on two erroneous postulates: "(1) that there is a universal essence of man; (2) that this essence is the attribute of 'each single individual' who is its real subject" (Althusser 1969, 228). The existence and unity of these two postulates presupposes

a world view that is, in Althusser's opinion, both empiricist and idealist: "If the essence of man is to be a universal attribute, it is essential that concrete subjects exist as absolute givens; this implies an empiricism of the subject. If these individuals are to be men, it is essential that each carries in himself the whole human essence, if not in fact, at least in principle; this implies an idealism of the essence" (Althusser 1969, 228).

As a social, ideological product, the phenomenon of "Man" undoubtedly and even necessarily exists. All social formations function by means of the constitution of human subjects who, within the realm of ideology—that is, within the apparently spontaneous but actually conditioned relation between their actual existence and their experienced or "lived" relation to the world—develop a "consciousness" of themselves as subjects. However, human individuals are not "free" and "constitutive" subjects in the philosophical sense of these terms. Individuals are social "agents" working in and through the "determinations of the forms of historical existence. . . . But that is not all, these agents can only be agents *if they are subjects*" (Althusser 1976, 95). No human individual "can be the agent of a practice if he does not have the form of a subject," Althusser acknowledges, yet it is the social formation and its "ideological social relations, which, in order to function, impose the subject-form on each agent-individual" (Althusser 1976, 95). Thus, for Althusser, "Men (plural), in the concrete sense, are necessarily subjects (plural) *in* history, because they act *in* history as subjects (plural). But there is no Subject (singular) *of* history" (Althusser 1976, 94).

Althusser maintains that the notion of "Man" is a myth of bourgeois ideology that has insinuated itself into theory. "Far be it from me to

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denigrate this great humanist tradition whose historical merit was to have struggled against feudalism, against the Church, and against their ideologists, and to have given man a status and dignity. But far be it from us, I think, to deny the fact that this humanist ideology which produced great works and great thinkers, is inseparably linked to the rising bourgeoisie, whose aspirations it expressed" (Althusser 1976, 198). History cannot start from "Man" because such a move inevitably produces an ethical distortion; subjects as they are and history as it is are ineluctably transformed into subjects as they could or should be and history as it is supposed to be.

For when you begin with man, you cannot avoid the idealist temptation of believing in the omnipotence of liberty or of creative labor: that is you simply submit in all "freedom" to the omnipotence of the ruling bourgeois ideology, whose function is to mask and to impose, in the illusory shape of man's power of freedom, another power, much more real and much more powerful, that of capitalism. If Marx does not start with man, if he refuses to derive society and history theoretically from the concept of man, it is in order to break with this mystification which man expresses, an ideological relation of force, based on the capitalist production relation. Marx therefore starts out from the structural cause producing the effect of bourgeois ideology which maintains the illusion that you should start with man. (Althusser 1976, 205)

Rather than starting from "Man," Althusser insists that historical practice begin with the "economically given social period": "At the end of analysis, when it 'arrives,' *it may find real men*. These men are thus the *point of arrival* of an analysis which starts from the social relations of the existing mode of production, from class relations, and from the class struggle. These men are quite different men from the 'man' of bourgeois ideology" (Althusser 1976, 52-53). To start from the proposition that "man makes history" no longer serves, as it once did, to oppose a conception of history as Providence or as submission to God's will, nor does it serve everyone without distinction insofar as they are all men. Rather, it "serves *those* whose interest it is to talk about 'man' *and not* about the masses, about 'man' *and not* about classes and the class struggle. It serves the bourgeoisie, above all; and it also serves the petty bourgeoisie" (Althusser 1976, 63). As Säuil Karsz explains, history from the point of view of "Man" implies that "the subject . . . is

only concrete and real in as much as it manifests a general human essence in a particular form. . . . [T]heoretically, this means that men are

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always something other than they are, and that to understand them, it is necessary to envisage not what they do and what they are at a concrete conjuncture, but the human essence they are supposed to manifest. Politically, it signifies that the material economic, political and ideological struggles are secondary to a primary, eternal struggle: man in general against material conditions in general" (Karsz 1974, 261). The political effect, Althusser insists, is to reinforce the status quo: "If the workers are told that 'it is men who make history,' you do not have to be a great thinker to see that, sooner or later, that helps to disorient or disarm them. It tends to make them think that they are all powerful as men, whereas in fact they are disarmed as workers in face of the power which is really in command: that of the bourgeoisie, which controls the material conditions (the means of production) and the political conditions (the state) determining history" (Althusser 1976, 63-64).

Within the problematic of Structural Marxism, the real protagonists of history are the social relations of economic, political, and ideological practice that constitute the contradictory places assigned to human protagonists within the complex and unevenly developed structure of the social formation. The concept of social relations and that of a philosophical subject are mutually exclusive, for human individuals are "subjects" only to the extent that they are the bearers or supports of socially defined places and functions. Speaking specifically of economic practice, Althusser argues in *Reading Capital* that

the structure of the relations determines the places and functions occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, insofar as they are "supports" (*Träger*) of these functions. The true "subjects" (in the sense of constitutive subjects of the process) are therefore not these occupants or functionaries, are not, despite all anthropology, "concrete individuals," "real men"—but the definition and distribution of these places and functions. The true "subjects" are these definers and distributors: the relations of production (and political and ideological social relations). But since these are "relations" they cannot be thought within the category *subject*. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 198)

Two important points must be made here. First, Althusser's attack on the philosophical category of the subject and his argument that social relations rather than real men are the "subjects" of historical processes does not empty human practice of either its complexity or its capacity to transform society. As we shall see, Althusser's concept of *interpellation*, that is, the process by which individuals become social

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subjects, is both complex and contradictory. Interpellation does not imply a functionalist equilibrium; rather, as Göran Therborn's work amply demonstrates, it allows us to conceptualize the contradictions between the different ways we all are interpellated as members of society as well as the tensions between the forces of submission, inherent in our conformity to the roles which we are assigned by society, and the enabling power that comes from our qualification as social subjects through these same roles. In the hands of Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of a social agent does not define human beings as mindless robots but rather as decision-making players within a rule-bound yet open-ended, interactive system of dispositions, discourses, and interests that Bourdieu calls the "habitus." The habitus, in other words, is a historically specific and class-biased "generating-enabling" structure whose complexity cannot be reduced either to the free will of "Man" or to a mechanistic reflection of the relations of production.

The second point pertains to the relationship between Althusser's attack on the category of

the subject and his thesis that class struggle is the motor of history. We have already seen how the idea that "man makes history" serves to render classes and class antagonism invisible. Althusser opposes to this view the thesis that "it is the masses which make history." Arguing that it is impossible to give any substance to the term "make" in the case of "Man" without an impossibly simplistic reduction of social diversity to the unity of a "species being," Althusser insists on the term *masses* in order to move as far as possible from the category of a single subject. The idea of the masses is complex: "The masses are actually *several* social classes, social strata and social categories, grouped *together* in a way which is both complex and *changing* And we are dealing with huge numbers: in France or Britain . . . with tens of millions of people, in China with hundreds of millions: can we still talk about a 'subject' identifiable by the *unity* of its 'personality'?" (Althusser 1976, 48). The only coherent way to think of the masses as a "subject" is to transpose the latter category onto the field of social classes and their structured relations: the class struggle as the motor of history. Conceiving things in terms of a "motor" rather than a "subject" eliminates the question of *who* makes history and foregrounds the idea of class struggle, a concept whose adequacy has yet to be demonstrated, but one that at least forces us to speak in terms of process (classes do not precede class struggle but are the outcome of class struggle) and the material basis of that process (class struggle exists only within determinant structures, values, and institutions).

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The Economism/Humanism Couplet

Whatever reservations one might have regarding Althusser's uncompromising thesis that class struggle is the motor of history, it is difficult to deny his contention that the absence of such struggle is fundamental to both humanist and economist political ideologies. The absence of class struggle in both humanist and economist accounts of history leads Althusser to make the seemingly outrageous assertion that in reality the two are "spiritual" complements: an ideological couplet, *economism/humanism*, is "born spontaneously, that is to say necessarily, of the bourgeois practices of production and exploitation, *and at the same time* of the legal practices of bourgeois law and its ideology, which provide a sanction for the capitalist relations of production and exploitation and their reproduction" (Althusser 1976, 86).

Economism and humanism, Althusser insists, are always paired, if not as complements, then as oppositions. They are found in capitalist and so-called communist societies alike and, moreover, serve the same hegemonic function in both cases: to legitimize existing social relations without mentioning their class character. In fulfilling this function, it matters little whether they are taken as oppositions or as complements, as elements of the dominant ideology or in opposition to it. Within the dominant ideology, economism and humanism are always complementary, combining technological determinism with ethical voluntarism in a Faustian affirmation of the status quo. In capitalist societies an "economistic" concern for developing the techniques of extorting surplus value from producers is passed off as the extension of consumer freedom, while private ownership of the means of production by a tiny oligarchy is labeled a "humanistic" manifestation of individual liberty or even democracy. While capitalist social formations are the initial breeding ground of the economism/humanism couplet, humanism has also had a dominant influence within European socialism and the Soviet Union. Under Stalin,

socialism was "economistically" equated with the development of the forces of production, while the Soviet constitution of 1936 contained the ringing "humanist" slogan "Man, the most precious capital." By this same constitution, the bureaucratically controlled expansion of the forces of production was axiomatically declared to be the end of class struggle and class exploitation, while under Khrushchev the era of "socialist humanism" was announced.

Even when economism and humanism are set in relations of opposition, Althusser insists that they remain organically connected. In this

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case their apparent opposition is a false one since they continue to share the same common premise, the human subject (who no longer controls technology but is instead oppressed by it), and the same principle of exclusion, "the elimination of something which never figures in economism or humanism, *the elimination of the relations of production and of the class struggle*" (Althusser 1976, 88). This is hardly accidental or surprising since it follows directly from the bourgeois point of view, specifically from the concept of the atomized individual and his natural freedom, which is as much the foundation of neo-liberal dissidence as it is of liberal conservatism. What is particularly bothersome for the Marxist Althusser is not that dissident liberalism employs the rhetoric of economism and humanism but that socialist parties since the Second International, and even so-called communist regimes such as the USSR, "keep silent (or semi-silent) about the relations of production, the class struggle, and their concrete forms, while exalting *both* the Productive Forces and Man" (Althusser 1976, 88).

It is not necessary to overlook the weaknesses of Althusser's argument, namely, his use of sweeping generalizations that obscure obvious and significant differences between the modes of production dominant in the United States and the Soviet Union, in order to acknowledge that he is making an important point that cuts across the moralistic critiques of both regimes: the use of the category "Man" depicted either as the victim of technology or as its beneficiary remains an obfuscation. In and of itself, technology has neither victims nor beneficiaries. Western "technology" and Soviet "productive forces," liberal democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat, share a common ideological problematic that is designed to mask the existence of a minority class controlling the means of production and exploiting a working-class majority. The symbiotic relationship between economism and humanism makes possible both the complementary combination of economism/humanism (the freedom of labor/"Man, the most precious capital") and their pseudoliberal opposition ("one-dimensional society"/"totalitarianism"). If the complementary combination of the two terms is ideologically dominant, their binary opposition is theoretically impoverished. For Althusser, only a materialist analysis, an analysis based on economic determination and class struggle, can cut through the distortions of economism/humanism and provide adequate knowledge not only of the political and economic relationships that economism/humanism purports to explain but also of the social basis and ideological function of the economism/humanism couplet itself.

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Althusser explains Stalinism in terms of a "deviation" from the revolutionary ideal of the dictatorship of the proletariat—a vanguard party wielding state power with the support of the

masses in order to "smash" exploitive economic and political structures and replace them with new egalitarian and participatory institutions.²³ Stalin, by committing the Soviet Union to an "economist/humanist" policy of rapid industrialization, militarization, and centralized planning, is accused by Althusser of theoretically and politically ignoring the newly emerging class struggle between administrators controlling the means of production and the working masses separated from both the means of production and state power. This critique is more fully developed in Charles Bettelheim's multivolume *Class Struggle in the USSR* (1976, 1978, 1982, 1984) which views the new Soviet regime not as a socialist society, but rather as a transitional articulation of antagonistic capitalist (wage labor and wage differentials) and communist (state ownership of the means of production) tendencies. Struggles between peasants, workers, and Party administrators during the period of the NEP resulted in the traumatic industrial revolution of the thirties and a new "state capitalist" mode of production. Class exploitation within state capitalism is defined by Bettelheim in terms of wage labor and wage differentials coupled with collective possession of the means of production by an administrative class or "state bourgeoisie" exercising de facto economic ownership of "state property" by excluding the masses from control of the state apparatus.

Despite its commendable interpretation of Stalinism in terms of class struggle, the Althusserian critique remains dangerously inadequate and incomplete. First, the concept of a "Stalinian deviation" accepts the premise of an authoritarian vanguard party that, even in its most populist, Maoist form, substitutes an amorphous "solidarity" of cadres and masses (enforced only by the threat of popular upheaval) for participatory democracy and the accountability of party leaders to the masses. Such a view willfully ignores the fact that it is the absence of popular control over the Party, not the Party's "economism," that permits the emergence of a post-revolutionary ruling class. Second, the applicability of the term "state capitalism" to a mode of production lacking profit motives, market prices, consumer choices, and a reserve pool of unemployed workers is, at best, dubious. The concept of "state capitalism" derives more from the teleological concept of a "transitional articulation" of capitalist and communist tendencies than from an analysis of the mature Soviet mode of production itself. Having identified Stalinism

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as an exploitive class system, Bettelheim is forced to designate it as either "capitalist" or "communist," and he seems to have chosen the former term more for ideological than for theoretical reasons.

Finally, the Althusserian critique devalues the forces of production and ignores the laws of motion and contradictions that constitute the class struggle in mature Soviet-type modes of production. To explain the collapse of Stalinism (Gorbachev) and Maoism (Deng Xiaoping), it is necessary to acknowledge the resource-constrained nature of the forces of production in command economies and their systemic tendency toward underproduction (in contrast to the demand-constrained forces and overproductive tendencies of capitalism). Whereas the relations of production limit the exploitive capacity of the administrative class to perquisites and higher salaries, the forces of production limit the standard of living of the entire population. Therefore the attempt to increase productivity by decentralizing the labor process and introducing money and prices to distribute resources stems not from the survival of "capitalist tendencies" but from the inefficiencies of central planning itself. Of course, the administrative class is antagonistic to the social security of the masses and resentful of the restriction of its exploitive capacities.

Although dispossessed from control over the state apparatus, and thus from control over the means and results of production, the masses have nevertheless achieved from the revolution certain guarantees and benefits which cannot be easily eliminated as long as the economy is obviously controlled by the state. They can, however, be destroyed rapidly and completely by the impersonal tyranny of the marketplace. Thus the ruling class turns naturally enough to capitalism, but they are only able to "sell" such a transformation by exploiting the deep political and economic discontents of the masses. Hence the class struggle: the masses, striving for political power and a higher standard of living, are acquiring instead a new ruling class and the relentless subsumption of their labor and lifestyle to the cash nexus and the exigencies of capitalist accumulation.

History as a Process Without a Goal

Implicit in Althusser's rejection of all philosophies of the subject, whether the *deus ex machina* of economism or the humanist-voluntarist "drama of Man," is a rejection of all teleological philosophies of history. For Althusser not only is history a process without a subject, but

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it is also a process without a goal. Althusser finds the anticipation of such an idea in Montesquieu's work, but the full-blown concept he attributes to the outcome of Marx's critique of Hegel. We have already discussed Althusser's criticism of the expressive or essentialist character of the Hegelian dialectic, which makes it impossible to think the concept of uneven development within the framework of Hegelian totality. For Althusser, not only is it impossible to escape the baleful effects of essentialist causality by "inverting" Hegel—that is, by replacing the Hegelian Idea with "materialist" categories such as the economy or Man—but it is equally impossible to retain any trace of the Hegelian dialectic—that is, the negation of the negation—without retaining elements of an essentialist teleology along with it:

To criticize the Hegelian philosophy of history because it is teleological, because from its origins it is in pursuit of a goal (the realization of Absolute Knowledge), hence to reject the teleology in the philosophy of history, but to return to the Hegelian dialectic as such at the same time, is to fall into a strange contradiction: for the Hegelian dialectic, too, is teleological in its *structures*, since the key structure of the Hegelian dialectic is the negation of the negation, the "*Aufhebung*," which is teleology itself, within the dialectic. (Althusser 1972, 181)

Attempts by Hegelian Marxists to replace the Hegelian Idea with a problematic of Man and human alienation invariably encounter two problems, according to Althusser. In the first place, within Hegel's system the dialectic is always outside and prior to the limits of human history. Thus any problematic of alienation must account for the fact that "from the point of view of human history the process of alienation is thought [by Hegel] as a process of alienation without a subject or a dialectical process without a subject" (Althusser 1972, 182). In order to conceptualize the dialectic in terms of human history (and human alienation), it is necessary to subordinate the dialectic to human history; there must be some human essence posited *outside* human history that is to be realized *inside* human history. The first problem of any Hegelian humanism, then, is establishing Man as an immanent subject of all process, natural and human (as is the Hegelian Idea), while at the same time dealing with the inescapable fact that (unlike the Idea) such an essence is necessarily restricted to the purely human.

These difficulties reveal a second, even more profound problem, namely, that the Hegelian Idea and the Hegelian dialectic are inseparable; as a result, it is impossible to eliminate the expressive teleology

of the Idea without eliminating the negation of the negation at the same time. In other words, there is a subject in Hegel's philosophy, but it is, in Althusser's view, a "strange" subject; the only subject of the process of alienation is the process itself in its teleology. "I well know, there is in Hegel a subject for the process of alienation without a subject. But it is a very strange subject . . . the subject is the very *teleology* of the process, it is the *Idea*, in the process of self-alienation which constitutes it as the Idea" (Althusser 1972, 183).

The Idea is an essence never embodied in any particular entity; it exists only in the process of its self-realization, in the dialectic itself. At the same time, the culmination of the dialectic lies in the recognition of reality as the creation by the sole subject of the process, this very same Idea. The Absolute's being does not consist in any identifiable individuality; it consists in the very structure of the process, the succession of circles whose point of arrival and departure is the same—the identity of thought and being in the Absolute. This is the paradox of Hegel, according to Althusser: history is a process without a subject at the same time that its process, the negation of the negation, is teleological in its structure. The end is already in the beginning, but it is immediately denied from the moment it is affirmed, and this denial permits the process of alienation to be a process without a subject: "The beginning of the *Logic* is the theory of the non-primordial nature of the origin. Hegel's *Logic* is the Origin affirmed and denied; the first form of a concept Derrida has introduced into philosophical reflection, erasure" (Althusser 1972, 184).

According to Althusser, the notions of process without a subject and negation of the negation exist in an uneasy tension in Hegel's thought. Any attempt to invert Hegel while at the same time retaining his dialectic will merely add to the problem of origin the unbearable strain of an immanent historical subject. However, all that is required to open up history to scientific knowledge is to "break with the irreconcilable" and transform the very structure of the dialectic by removing its "strange" subject—that is, the self-realization of the process—by abolishing the negation of the negation, the category whose function it was to realize that subject in that process.

It is in teleology that there lies the true Hegelian Subject. Take away the teleology, there remains the philosophical category of a process without a subject. But to speak of a process without a subject implies that the notion of a subject is an ideological notion. Whereas if: the concept of process is scientific and the category of the subject is ideological; then: (1) a revolution

in the sciences, the science of history becomes possible and (2) a revolution in philosophy becomes possible, for all classical philosophy depends on the categories of subject and object. (Althusser 1972, 184-85)

In defending Althusser's position, Karsz argues that in Hegelian philosophy process without a subject is less the explanation of a process than the transitory expression of a process. Hegel dissolves everything into process rather than explaining the position of everything at the heart of process, Karsz maintains, whereas Marx sees things in a fundamentally different way: "[In *Capital*] the process (of the capitalist mode of production) implies the analysis of the economic, political, and ideological relations through which and within which the process takes place, and therefore, the irreducibility of these relations into one another. They are not so much the expression of the capitalist mode of production as its material foundation, the condition of its existence" (Karsz 1974, 116). Once freed from the teleology of the negation of the negation, which suppresses the specificity of each level of structural effectivity, the notion of process without a subject may serve to open up the analysis of the specific articulation of contradictions,

that is, the uneven development, which constitutes a given structure.

Marxism as a General Not a Total History

It is appropriate to conclude the present chapter by returning once again to the creative tension in Althusser's thought between the structured whole and the uneven development of its component structures. In *For Marx*, Althusser clearly states the problem that, more than any other, dominates all his work: "Marx has at least given us the 'two ends of the chain,' and has told us to find out what goes on between them: on the one hand, *determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production*; on the other, *the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity*" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 111). In attempting to connect the two ends of the chain, Althusser proceeds by means of a penetrating critique of transitive and expressive causality and by means of concepts developed in the course of a searching dialogue with materialist thought from Spinoza through Montesquieu to Marx. The result of the process is a conceptual synthesis of startling originality, a powerful attempt to rethink the idea of historical causality in terms of the matrix effect of a structured whole on its elements and the irreducible particularity of the elements whose distinct and unequal effectivities are simultaneously at work in a given conjunc-

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ture. Althusser, we have seen, asserts the principle of economic determination in an indirect rather than a direct manner. Economic determination, the primacy of the economic function within the social whole, is always already there within each and every element and its relative autonomy because the social whole is the historical matrix of each and every element and has thus assigned to each and every element its place and function.

We will return to the problem of economic determination in relation to the relative autonomies of the economic, ideological, and political instances in the course of later chapters. Here I want to call attention to another aspect of Althusser's problematic, the introduction of epistemological limits and discontinuities within the production of historical knowledge itself, that is, within the science of history and the concepts of social structure and historical process. In challenging the explanatory power of historical discourses based on either expressive or transitive causalities—and by replacing them with differential history, a more complex and more powerful historical discourse based on structural causality—Althusser has abandoned all claims for a science of history that is or can ever be finished or complete. Michel Foucault, a former student of Althusser, aptly captures the significance of Althusser's move in terms of a contrast between "total" and "general" history in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1972).

Total history, according to Foucault, "seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the material or spiritual principle, the significance common to all the phenomena of a period, the law that accounts for their cohesion" (Foucault 1972, 9). In a straightforward essentialist manner, total history implies that the same form of historicity operates on economic, social, political, and religious beliefs and practices, subjecting them to essentially the same type of transformations. In contrast, general history (Foucault's appropriation of Althusser's concept of differential history) speaks of series, segmentations, limits, differences of level, time lags, anachronistic survivals, and different possible types of relations. Whereas a total history tends to draw all phenomena around a single center, a general history attempts to determine what forms of relation may be

made between them.

The problem that now presents itself—and which defines the task of general history—is to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series; what vertical systems are they capable of forming; what interplay of correlation and dominance exist between them; what may be the effects of shifts, different temporalities, and various rehan-

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dlings; in what distinct totalities certain elements may figure simultaneously; in short, not only what series, but also what "series of series" . . . it is possible to draw up. (Foucault 1972, 10)

It is, of course, misleading to extend further the parallels between the ideas of Foucault and those of Althusser. In defending the principles of economic determination, class struggle, and scientific realism, Althusser is defending a totalizing movement within historical knowledge unacceptable to Foucault. Foucault, as we shall see, will move from his concept of general history toward a postmodernist position characterized by a playful, relativistic "fictionalizing" of history and by ever more fragmentary and rigidly circumscribed "micro-analyses" of social structures. Ultimately, Foucault will deny the very possibility of a concept of a structured whole capable of situating the concepts of particular structures in a meaningful relation to each other—a position that amounts to an arbitrary denial of our ability to know the interconnections of things and an equally arbitrary restriction of scientific knowledge to the classification, arrangement, and summarizing of the coexistence and sequence of phenomena. This positivist conception soon links up with a kind of instrumentalist pragmatism: science conceived as arbitrarily chosen formulas that, by some mysterious means, allow people to handle phenomena effectively in practice.

Althusser, by contrast, remains committed to a modernist concept of general history: he insists on our capacity to produce knowledge of the complex unity of social formations as well as the diversity and autonomy of particular social structures and our ability to do so within a framework that remains realist despite its complexity. According to Althusser, we can think backwardness, forwardness, survivals, and uneven development only in the specific unity of the complex structure of the whole—as co-existence in the real historical present of the conjuncture. Obviously the concept of a general history—a history adequate in relation to the conjuncture—cannot be realized simply as a juxtaposition of independent histories—economic, political, and so on—or simply as a search for suggestive analogies or correspondences between them. A Marxist and modernist concept of general history, in other words, must be capable of totalization as well as de-totalization.

As a modernist general history, Structural Marxism is conscious of the real complexity of history: "the truth of history," Althusser points out, "cannot be read in its manifest discourse, because the text of history is not a text in which a voice (the Logos) speaks, but the inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures" (Al-

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thusser and Balibar 1970, 17). Moreover, it is conscious also of the internal limits to our conceptual knowledge of that complexity. The point I wish to make with respect to these latter, internal limits is that in elaborating concepts of the two ends of the chain—a concept of the social whole and concepts of the economic, political, and ideological instances—Althusser has discovered that within the theoretical field of the concepts themselves, the metaphor of a chain is inadequate and must be discarded. As we attempt to move conceptually from either end of this chain toward the other, we find that links are missing, that in fact there are distinct chains that

cannot be forged into a single, continuous concatenation. Instead, we are forced to confront the irreducible presence of multiple levels of analysis, structures of structures, whose vertical and horizontal displacements cannot be eliminated or reconciled at any one level. For any given structural whole, the question of its specific effectivity—that is, its place within a larger structure—always poses a "higher" or englobing level of conceptualization, while the question of the specific effectivities of its unevenly developed elements necessarily poses a "lower" or regional level of analysis.

Bounded by the reality of the world about which knowledge is being produced and limited by concepts never perfectly adequate to the reality about which they provide knowledge, historical science is also overdetermined by a restless dialectical movement from one level of analysis to another—from one structure (and its relative autonomy) to the interrelationships between this and other structures (and the effectivities generated at these levels and by these interrelationships). Structural causality and relative autonomy are not concepts of continuity across a homogeneous theoretical space because, while the theoretical spaces coexist, they do not ever meet. The true complexity of the Structural Marxist dialectic does not exist simply as a category of concrete history; it also exists as a category of our knowledge of that history. Within the domain of its own theoretical practice, Structural Marxism functions as the effect or outcome of an open-ended interrelationship between coherent, meaningful, yet distinct levels of explanation whose necessary reciprocity is, paradoxically, guaranteed by the ultimate impossibility of their convergence.

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Chapter **2** **Modes of Production and Historical Development**

1. The Concept of a Mode of Production

Structural Marxism develops the principle of economic determination by means of the concept of a mode of production, the latter serving as both the principle of "articulation" of a given conjuncture, that is, the structure that determines the interrelationships between the various instances within a social formation, and as the principle of "periodization," that is, the concept on which the historical succession of conjunctures is organized. "Marx's construction of the central concept of the mode of production," Etienne Balibar insists, "has the function of an epistemological break with respect to the whole tradition of the philosophy of history. . . . The concept of the mode of production and the concepts immediately related to it thus appear as the first abstract concepts whose validity is not as such limited to a given period or type of society, but one on which, on the contrary, the concrete knowledge of this period and type depends" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 201). In his important contribution to *Reading Capital*, "The Basic

Concepts of Historical Materialism," Balibar elaborates on Marx's central insight, that "it is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers . . . which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure" (Marx, quoted in Althusser and Balibar 1970, 221).

Balibar's goal, and the goal of the various anthropologists, historians, and sociologists whose work we will take up in this chapter, is a

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concept of a mode of production applicable to different degrees of generality and levels of abstraction—from social formations "in general" (in the sense that all social formations contain a determinant economic structure), through societies dominated by distinct modes of production (lineage, "Asiatic," simple property, slave, feudal, capitalist, and so on), to historically specific conjunctures (France in 1789, England during the Industrial Revolution, and so on). The problem is not primarily one of classification; Structural Marxists are uninterested in developing a finite number of pigeonholes into which empirical descriptions of all known societies may be forced, nor are they interested in arranging modes of production into an evolutionary series of historical stages mechanically following one after the other in accordance with some ultimate goal or originary essence. The problem addressed by the concept of a mode of production is one of producing knowledge rather than classifying data. One looks at societies from the standpoint of a mode of production and from a certain level of abstraction, but this is not to say that additional specificity, that is, knowledge at a more historically determinate level, is produced deductively or reductively from general concepts. In relation to the potential dangers of deduction and reduction, it must be emphasized that the elaboration of distinct modes of production is an open-ended, heuristic process. Against the opinions of most of its critics, I would argue that Structural Marxism is especially sensitive to the tension, within scientific discourse, between the "proliferation" of descriptive accounts of historically determinate modes of production and the "reduction" of historically determinate modes of production to a restricted number of general forms.¹⁰

Etienne Balibar: The Forces and Relations of Production

Taking Marx's discussion of the social form of production in volume 2 of *Capital* as his point of departure, Balibar defines a mode of production, at its highest level of generality, simply as a manner of producing a socially useful product. All modes of production, he maintains, are constituted by certain functional elements which are formally invariant but which in fact exist only in their "combination," that is, in their historically specific content and interrelationship. These invariant functional elements are (1) the laborer or direct producer, that is, labor power; (2) the means of production, that is, the object and the means

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of labor; (3) the nonlaborer who appropriates surplus labor, that is, the social product (see Althusser and Balibar 1970, 212).

These three elements are always structured as a double relation along two axes or "connections" whose specific combination constitutes, for Balibar, the historical uniqueness of a

mode of production: (1) A *relation of real appropriation* designates the structure of the labor process, that is, the relation of the laborer to the means of production by which the transformation of nature is undertaken. This relation constitutes the "technical division of labor" or the *forces of production*. (2) A *property relation* designates the mode of appropriation of the social product. This relation, the "social division of labor" or *relations of production*, implies the intervention of an individual or a collectivity, who, by the exercise of economic ownership, controls access to the means of production and the reproduction of the productive forces. Thus, within a given mode, it is the relations of production that are dominant. (See Althusser and Balibar 1970, 212-13.)

Unlike Marx's concept of the capitalist mode of production, Balibar's more general concept presupposes neither nonlaborers beyond infants, the elderly, and the infirm nor the existence of surplus labor beyond that minimum surplus necessary to reproduce the means of subsistence. The same individual can be both laborer and owner, the property relation may have a greater or lesser impact on the labor process, and the ownership function may be institutionally united or separate from the labor process. Moreover, the function of economic ownership should not be identified with any particular form of social control over labor and the means of production, no more than Balibar's use of the term property relation should be associated with any particular form of individual or collective ownership. It is also important to note that the terms property and ownership apply strictly to the realm of economic relations and should not be confused with juridical forms ("laws of property"), which are not, strictly speaking, expressions of production relations but rather of political and ideological relations not necessarily economic in nature. Property relations can take extremely varied forms, but all property relations imply social control over access to the means of production and the distribution of the social product. The necessary existence of a property relation therefore implies the possibility of economic classes and exploitation, although the universality of classes and exploitation remains controversial. For example, in so-called primitive societies operating at a subsistence level within an economy structured by kinship, the existence of exploitation in any form

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(by men over women, by elders over juniors), much less class exploitation, is hotly contested even within the camp of Structural Marxist anthropology.

In the case of lineage-based societies, one must distinguish irregular appropriations of the social product such as raiding, which are merely forms of extortion external to a social formation, from institutionalized appropriation, which internally organizes the production of material existence within a social formation. Only the latter may be termed a mode of production in the strict sense. One must also distinguish a cooperative division of labor characterized by reciprocal exchanges of labor or product determined by necessity or utility, from an exploitive division of labor wherein labor power and economic surplus are appropriated by certain social classes without corresponding obligations or limitations. Of course this distinction is often difficult to specify in practice, not least because dominant classes always develop an ideological justification for their power and privileges couched in terms of historical necessity, social utility, or both. Balibar's formulation is particularly useful because it focuses analytical attention on the structural nexus of class exploitation, namely, access to the means of production and distribution of the social product, rather than on the ideological structures through which social subjects explain, justify, resist, and adapt to the forces and relations of production. If and when unequal

distribution of the social product within a social formation serves to reproduce the conditions of that unequal distribution, then we are in the presence of class struggle and exploitation. It is sufficient—indeed, necessary—to speak of exploitation whenever direct producers are unable to determine either the volume or the appropriation of their own surplus labor.

According to Balibar, the forces and relations of production exist only in their "unity" as "simultaneous yet distinct" relations among laborers, the means of production, and nonlaborers. Not only is each of these elements related to the others, but it is also related to them in two different dimensions: "This double function is an index of what I shall call the double nature of the division of labor in production (the 'technical' division of labor and the 'social' division of labor); at the same time, it is an index of the interdependence or intersection of these two divisions . . . the fact that the two connections . . . both belong to a single '*Verbindung*' . . . to the structure of a single mode of production" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 214). By emphasizing the unity of the forces and relations of production, Balibar neatly resolves a longstanding Marxist debate as to whether technological development or class struggle is the motive force of history. For Balibar, such a debate

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turns on a misleading identification of the productive forces with technological determinism and the property relation with class struggle.²³ In actuality, because technological development never exists apart from class struggle, nor class struggle apart from a specific level and organization of technology, any attempt to separate them is meaningless.²⁴ Only between rival modes of production (that is, rival unities of forces and relations) is the level of technological development decisive.

While Balibar insists that the relations of production are dominant within a given mode of production (because the ownership function controls the reproduction of the productive forces), this relation of dominance is neither reducible to a voluntaristic concept of class struggle nor open to criticism for having ignored the level of technological development. The dominance of the property relation implies the dominance of the class exercising the ownership function, but this is not to say that the dominant class can do anything it wishes nor that its dominance results from ownership alone. For Balibar, it is not a question of the "primacy" of the relations or the forces, in the sense of relations being somehow in advance of the forces; rather, it is a question of class struggle within both the forces and the relations. The class struggle is determined by the unity of a mode of production: the level of economic development defines the universe of class interests and powers, but economic development is nothing but the manifestation of the interests and powers of social classes. The primary contradiction between the forces and relations of production does not turn on the "primacy" of one or the other—economism or voluntarism—but rather on the antagonistic class interests and powers produced by both. Ultimately, class struggles within a given mode of production as well as those between classes of rival modes are settled in favor of the class most capable of developing the productive forces at a given time.

In both capitalist and non-capitalist societies the combination of economic ownership (relations of production) and a labor process (forces of production) specifies the determinant economic function or instance of the social formation. Defining a mode of production in this way differentiates the general functional term economic from historically specific economic terms such as market economies, private property, and so on, which have been frequently employed with the unfortunate result of reading capitalist characteristics into other modes of

production.⁴³ The Structural Marxist concept of a mode of production attempts to reveal the historical specificity of economic determination within different social formations, not to eliminate or distort it. The economic instance in feudal society, for example, is determinant in the last in-

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stance even though the relations of property and the labor processes constituting the feudal mode of production are defined by neither market values nor private property (even where market mechanisms and private property exist). The subordination (*subsumption* in Balibar's terminology) of the social and technical divisions of labor to market mechanisms and private property is the characteristic feature of a capitalist mode of production, not a universal or necessary form of economic determination in all social formations. Economic ownership and the labor processes may reside in different social structures and institutional apparatuses, and within these structures and apparatuses they may coexist with a variety of non-economic functions. As we have seen, this is the basis of Althusser's distinction between the concepts of dominance and determination: the term *structure in dominance* always denotes the structure exercising the function of economic ownership (whether or not this structure is the site of actual production), whereas the term *determination in the last instance* always denotes the primacy of the economic function, that is, the deep structure of the mode of production (whether or not the structures that exercise the functions of ownership and production are primarily political or ideological).

Balibar argues that the juxtaposition of three elements and two relations gives a high degree of theoretical precision to the concept of a mode of production: "By varying the combination of these elements according to the two connections which are part of the structure of every mode of production, we can reconstitute the various modes of production, i.e., we can set out the 'presuppositions' for the theoretical knowledge of them, which are quite simply the concepts of the conditions of their historical existence. . . . The final result would be a *comparative table of the forms* of different modes of production which all combine the same 'factors' " (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 216). However, Balibar also insists that the "invariant formal characteristics" of his general concept not be mistaken for a denial of the historically specific character of every concrete mode of production. Balibar is especially concerned that the development of concepts be appropriate to distinct determinate levels of generality and specificity and not restricted to any single level. He cites approvingly Marx's observation that the general concept of the capitalist mode of production, which deals with properties common to every capitalist system, "does not prevent the same economic basis—the same form from the standpoint of its main conditions—due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influ-

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ences, etc. from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained *only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances* " (Marx, quoted in Althusser and Balibar 1970, 256).

In defending the need for concepts pitched at different levels of generality as well as the validity of such concepts, Balibar rejects the extremes of empiricist nominalism and essential

forms. Denial of the historical specificity of its constituent elements, Balibar maintains, would reduce the concept of a mode of production to a Structuralist "combinatory" (*combinatoire*) as opposed to a Structural Marxist "combination." For Balibar, the former term refers to the tendency of many Structuralist theorists to itemize elements of a social system as a formal pattern of relations and arbitrarily occupied places that appear and reappear throughout "history" in such a way that, while the *places* of the elements and their relations may change, their *nature* remains constant, indifferent to the effect of changes within the structure as a whole. As a result, by means of a combinatory, it is possible to bypass the historically specific elements and proceed directly to an a priori knowledge of all possible articulations of the structure. A combination, by contrast, insists on the fact that the nature of the elements themselves is altered by their historically specific structure. With a combination, Balibar insists, "we do not find the same concrete elements when we move from one variant to the next. Nor is their particularity defined by mere place, but rather as an effect of the structure, differing every time; i.e., an *effect* of the combination which constitutes the mode of production" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 241).

Balibar's contrast between the Structural Marxist concept of combination and the Structuralist combinatory is not entirely satisfactory.¹⁵ Although certain Structuralists, Lévi-Strauss for example, may be justly criticized for imposing a combinatory consisting of ahistorical elements on each and every social formation, many others are willing to concede, even to insist on, the fact that individual elements derive their character from the system within which they exist: this is, after all, a fundamental property of the linguistic sign according to Saussure and a basic axiom of semiology. Balibar's combinatory/combination opposition therefore misses the central weakness of Structuralism, which is not its inability to see the individual element as determined by the structure of the whole but rather the fact that it has no theory of the *transformation* of the structure, no concept of contradiction, and no concept of dominance and subordination. For Structuralism, it is certainly conceivable for elements to be seen in interaction with each other, but this interac-

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tion, like that of functionalist sociology, is static; the system adjusts but it never changes, its movement circumscribed by invariable relationships or at least relationships whose variation cannot be theoretically accounted for by the structure itself.

The weakness of Balibar's attempt to distinguish the Structural Marxist concept of a combination from a Structuralist combinatory stems from the fact that his own analysis of the problems of periodization and articulation is deeply flawed by a rationalist and essentialist attempt to theorize both problems in terms of the Structuralist opposition of synchrony and diachrony instead of the Structural Marxist concept of contradiction. Therefore, before moving on to the important positive advances realized by Balibar's concept of a mode of production and the subsequent deployment of this concept by anthropologists and historians, it is useful to examine carefully Balibar's attempt to work out the implications of the Althusserian problematic with respect to the problem of historical process. Readers less patient with theoretical detours may wish to skip the next two sections.

Reproduction and the Problem of Periodization

For Structural Marxism, modes of production are the principles of variation by which the unbroken continuity of real history is analytically differentiated into periods or, more accurately, into a discontinuous succession of structures. Because variation, not continuity, defines change, our understanding of historical transformation is always differential, derived from a comparison of different unevenly developed conjunctures, not from the reconstruction of the evolutionary trajectory of an homogeneous essence. In the language of differential history, there is always a gap or dislocation between different conjunctures, as, for example, between the social formations of France in 1788 and 1815. We attempt to *explain* the gap between France in 1788 and 1815 by means of successive analyses of intermediate conjunctures—1789, 1792, 1795, 1799, and so on—and each successive conjuncture in terms of its own structural integrity. At the same time, we are also impelled by the dialectic of differential analysis to construct concepts of structural integrity across different conjunctures—for instance, the concept of the French Revolution as the period 1788 to 1815, which in turn exists in a differential relation to other periods, the ancien régime, the Restoration, and so on. Knowledge of historical transformation, for Structural

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Marxism at any rate, is always a matter of an irreducible tension between the discontinuity of a succession of structures on the one hand and the structural integrity between two conjunctures on the other. Social formations, we must not forget, are unevenly developed structures; therefore, our knowledge of their development can never be reduced to the evolution or realization of an expressive totality. However, they are also structured wholes, and therefore their emergence and dissolution cannot be explained simply by constructing genealogies of their individual elements.

In *Reading Capital*, Balibar makes a bold initial attempt to elaborate this differential approach to historical development, without, unfortunately, managing to avoid certain pitfalls (whose notoriety has, unfortunately, precluded critical recognition of the nature of his project). Taking as his example Marx's analysis of the "primitive accumulation of capital," Balibar notes that there is a "different world" at the origin of capital where "knowledge of the laws of the development of capitalism is useless . . . because this is a completely different process, not subject to the same conditions" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 278). The study of primitive accumulation

takes as its guiding thread precisely the elements which were distinguished by the analysis of the capitalist structure: these elements are grouped together here under the heading of the "radical separation of the laborer from the means of production." The analysis is therefore retrospective, not insofar as it projects backwards the capitalist structure itself, presupposing precisely what had to be explained, but insofar as it depends on knowledge of the *result* of the movement. On this condition it escapes empiricism, the listing of the events which merely precede the development of capitalism: it escapes vulgar description by starting from the connections essential to a structure, but this structure is the "current" [capitalist] structure. . . . The analysis of primitive accumulation is therefore, strictly speaking, merely the *genealogy of the elements which constitute the structure of the capitalist mode of production* For this reason, the analysis of primitive accumulation is a fragmentary analysis: the genealogy is not traced on the basis of a global result, but distributively element by element. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 279)

"In Marx's analyses," Balibar notes, "we are never dealing with anything other than the combination itself and its forms. . . . [T]he subject of development is nothing but what is defined by the succession of the forms of organization of labor and the displacements that it achieves" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 247). Thus analysis of primitive accumulation does not and cannot coincide with the history of the previous

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mode of production as known from its structure, but it does present us with the question of this structure, its tendencies and contradictions, which is precisely the question of a gap or displacement between two successive structured wholes or combinations. We cannot bridge the

gap by means of the continuity of an evolution, because such a transition is thinkable only at the level of elements, not the level of structures. For Balibar, we can think a true history only on the basis of the mutual dependence of elements with respect to a structure, that is, as a structured combination, but similar elements inscribed within different social-historical combinations will be differentiated precisely by these distinct structural causalities. One important consequence of this theoretical impasse is the rejection of any evolutionary necessity linking the concepts of different modes of production—that the final triumph of capitalism, for example, is pre-ordained by the concept of feudalism. In opposition to such forms of deductive necessity, Balibar asserts the "relative independence of the formation of the different elements of the capitalist structure, and the *diversity of the historical roads* to this formation"—in other words, the fact that "the elements combined by the capitalist structure have different and independent origins" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 280).

Unfortunately, Balibar's insights into the differential nature of our concepts of historical development are presented in terms of a Structuralist opposition between synchrony and diachrony, an opposition that ultimately makes it impossible to preserve the primacy of uneven development (contradiction) within the framework of structural causality. Balibar is driven by the logic of the synchrony/diachrony distinction toward an *essentialism* of the concept of a mode of production; he progressively transforms contradictions within a mode of production (the uneven development of the forces and relations of production) into "tendencies" of a mode of production conceptualized as a unified, evenly developed synchronic system. This essentialism collapses the relative autonomy of the elements into a monolithic and homogeneous totality. It is accompanied by a tendency toward philosophical *rationalism* with respect to the articulation of the elements; Balibar progressively eliminates the gaps between different levels of analysis (the whole and each of the elements) in order to derive the specific effectivity of each element from the totality viewed as a logical universal, the absolute ground of all contingent attributes.

Balibar's problems begin with his attempt to develop a scientific concept of periodization based on the concept of *reproduction*. His central

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concern is to avoid the pitfalls of "simple" history, which has always conceptualized historical process and periodization within a problematic of continuity and linear time. For Balibar, it is not a question of finding the "right breaks" or "best periods," those artificial (but not arbitrary) cuts into linear time that traditionally emphasize either the primacy of the historical event (a "single criterion of brevity") or distinctions between the "long term" and the "short term" (a distinction based on the "insertion of the latter into the movement of the former"); it is rather a question of finding a "principle of variation" that will constitute history as a comparative science of discontinuous combinations determined by modes of production. Balibar finds this principle of variation in Marx's analysis of the extended reproduction of capital: "reproduction appears to be the general form of permanence of the general conditions of production, which in the last analysis englobe the whole social structure" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 259). Balibar interprets Marx's method as one of englobing the isolated and seemingly contradictory activities within a capitalist mode of production within a synchronic system capable of reproducing its own conditions of existence: "To move from the isolated act, from the immediate production process, to *therepetition*, to the *ensemble* of social capital, to the *result* of the production process, is to install oneself in a fictive contemporaneity of all the movements, or, to put it more accurately . . .

in a fictive *planar space*, in which all the movements have been suppressed, in which all the moments of the production process appear in projection side by side with their connections of dependence" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 264). Reproduction is thus the synchronic essence of articulation circumscribing all the contradictions of capitalist circulation: "In a single movement reproduction replaces and transforms the things, but retains the *relations* indefinitely. . . . The relations . . . comprehend the hitherto disjointed 'moments' (production, circulation, distribution, consumption) in a necessary and complete unity" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 268-69).

Balibar's intentions are legitimate enough. He wants only to define the criteria by which to distinguish "successive" combinations, and he argues, with considerable justification, that this definition should be done by differentiating between different principles of structural integrity or modes of production. However, by attempting to conceptualize structural integrity in terms of reproduction, Balibar lapses into a form of essentialist thinking fundamentally at odds with Althusser's concept of structural causality. Structural causality conceives the structural in-

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tegrity of the complex whole in terms of its elements, or, more precisely, in terms of the place and function assigned to each element by its conditions of existence, the complex whole. Thus there is a certain tendency to reproduce the structural integrity of the complex whole since each element bears within itself the trace of its conditions of existence. However, there is a countervailing tendency—contradiction or uneven development—stemming from the relative autonomy each element possesses by virtue of its independent nature and structural integrity, which cannot be reduced to the place and function assigned to it by the complex whole.

There is, in short, an irreducible tension between the *reproduction* of the existing complex whole, a tendency imprinted in the structured interrelationships of the elements, and the *production* of new relations inherent in their relative autonomy and uneven development. For Althusser, history is a necessarily limited and incomplete science. Structural causality provides knowledge of the relation of forces at a given conjuncture, but it can have no concept of the necessity of any particular outcome. Possessing no teleology, structural causality cannot grasp change as an essence or the essence of change. Change can be grasped only comparatively, in terms of greater and lesser degrees of discontinuity between two conjunctures. Balibar, of course, is not unaware of all of this. Indeed, he attempts to develop a non-teleological approach to the problem of periodization with his concepts of *correspondence* and *non-correspondence* between the forces and relations of production. However, as we shall see, he makes a fatal mistake by inscribing these relations within a false either/or of synchrony (reproduction) versus diachrony (production). Predictably, once the distinction between synchrony and diachrony is introduced, it raises the pseudo-problem of their reconciliation, and it is this pseudo-problem that sends Balibar down the slippery slope of rationalism and essentialism.

Balibar begins by defining periodization as a "non-linear diachrony" that "replaces historical continuity with a discontinuity, a succession of temporarily invariant states of structure" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 204). Balibar attempts to explain what a "temporarily invariant" structure might be by introducing the concept of a "transitional mode of production," taking as his example handicraft or labor-intensive manufacture. Balibar argues that manufacture, as a transitional structure between feudal and capitalist modes of production, cannot be understood under categories of either feudal or capitalist modes of production, that it is itself "a completely different mode of production" (Al-

thusser and Balibar 1970, 278). This must be so, he contends, since the period of transition between feudalism and capitalism cannot very well be conceived as a hiatus within which a social formation ceases to exist as a structured whole. Because all social formations must be structured, this transitional period must be conceived as a mode of production in its own right. To account for the difference between a "synchronic" mode of production, such as feudalism or capitalism, and a "diachronic" or transitional mode of production, such as manufacture, Balibar next introduces the concepts of "correspondence" and "non-correspondence" between the relations of production and the forces of production. When in correspondence, the forces and relations of production are in a relationship of "reciprocal limitation" such that the social formation reproduces both relations essentially unchanged. In the case of non-correspondence, by contrast, the reproduction of the relations of production induces a progressive transformation of the productive forces and, eventually, a displacement of the instances within the social formation.

Setting aside Balibar's claim regarding the primacy of the relations of production (a problem to which I will return later), the concepts of correspondence and non-correspondence appear to be expressions of uneven development within the mode of production itself. The problem, however, is that Balibar can never really integrate uneven development into his notion of a transitional mode of production because he has already committed himself to conceptualizing modes of production in synchronic terms of reproduction. Assuming for the moment that Balibar might be able to distinguish clearly between synchronic modes of production and diachronic transitional modes of production, it is still necessary to explain the shift from correspondence to non-correspondence. Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, whose argument I am following here, point out the impossibility of reconciling the synchronic "eternity" of Balibar's idea of structural determination (the functioning of the structure to reproduce the conditions of its existence) with its diachronic "finitude" (the production of the dissolution of these conditions as structural effects): "any theory of transition from one mode of production to another requires a concept of correlative movement from non-transition to transition, from eternity to finitude. It is precisely this movement that is unthinkable in Balibar's problematic" (Hindess and Hirst 1975, 274-75).

Given that a shift to a transitional mode of production has somehow taken place, it is immediately subjected to inexorable synchronic ten-

dencies because of Balibar's insistence that any mode of production, including a transitional one, is a unified system reproducing its own conditions of existence and therefore incapable of internal dissolution: "the transition from one mode of production to another . . . cannot consist of the transformation of the structure by its functioning itself, i.e., of any transition of quantity into quality" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 274). By positing the transitional period as a distinct social formation with a distinct mode of production, Balibar has emptied non-correspondence of its antagonistic quality until it has become its opposite, a static process of reproduction devoid of internal contradiction and transformation: "what we have recognized as distinct in essence [the

transitional mode of production] shall not become a single process [a stage in the evolution of the succeeding mode of production]. . . . [T]he concept of transition (from one mode of production to another) can never be the transition of the concept (to one other-than-itself by internal differentiation)" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 274).

Balibar has completely abandoned differential history for philosophical rationalism—a problematic wherein uneven development cannot exist except as an illusion of "inadequate" knowledge. Grasped "adequately," that is, from the standpoint of the now thoroughly essentialist totality of a mode of production, contradictions are simply "tendencies," internal temporalities and rhythms of a synchronic structure. For Balibar, "the development of the structure according to a tendency, i.e., a law which does not only (mechanically) include the production of effects, but also the production of effects according to a specific rhythm, therefore means that *the definition of the specific internal temporality* of the structure is part of the analysis of the structure itself. . . . It is now clear what is 'contradictory' about tendency. . . . Marx defines the terms between which there is a contradiction as *the contradictory effects of a single cause*" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 288). Contradiction is simply the "*unity of two contradictory terms*" grounded in the "nature of the structure . . . as a *law of production* of the effects themselves" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 289). Such a definition implies the subordination of contradiction to structure: "there is only a contradiction between the effects, the cause (the structure) is not divided against itself, it cannot be analyzed in antagonistic terms. Contradiction is therefore not original, but derivative" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 290). Because the cause that produces the contradiction is not itself contradictory, the result of the contradiction is always a certain equilibrium: "contradiction has a status analogous to that of competition in

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the movement of the structure: it determines neither its tendency nor its limits, rather it is a local, derivative phenomenon, whose effects are pre-determined in the structure itself. . . . [T]he only result of the contradiction, which is completely immanent to the economic structure, does not tend toward the supersession of the contradiction, but to the perpetuation of its conditions" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 290-91).

Balibar's obsession with reproduction results in a systematic expansion of synchrony at the expense of diachrony. If contradictions within a mode of production are a function of synchronic processes, they cannot appear as determinations in the separate field of diachronic process. Therefore, in order to break this "correspondence," another structure is needed, one whose delimitation is "absolutely absent" from the existing mode of production. The movement implied by the term *non-correspondence* must be sought elsewhere, in the "system of interventions . . . of one practice in another" whose result "is to *transform and fix* the limits of the mode of production" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 306). This move simply throws the entire problem onto the level of the social formation, where dislocations between different practices and modes of production become, in their turn, mere tendencies of this higher synchronic structure. In the end Balibar embraces this outcome, as if the problem of diachrony had never actually existed in the first place: "the problems of diachrony . . . must be thought within the problematic of a theoretical 'synchrony': the problems of the transition and of the forms of transition from one mode of production to another are problems of a more general synchrony than that of the mode of production itself, englobing several systems and their relations" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 307).

Balibar's attempt to reconcile synchrony and diachrony by means of philosophical rationalism finally ends in a crude essentialist caricature of Spinoza's substance. Indeed, Balibar's analysis is a most graphic example of what Althusser calls "theoreticism." Balibar has since criticized the Spinozist conception of tendency he put forward in *Reading Capital* :

Behind the argument there is an old philosophical representation, and it is no accident that throughout this work I was guided approximately by certain reminiscences of Spinozist formulae. There is the idea that identity with itself, persistence (including in the form of the persistences of *relations* implied in a cyclical process), needs no explanation *since it explains itself by itself*, needs no cause (or production) *since it is its own cause*. Only "change" as "real" change, i.e., abolition-transformation of the essence.

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could need a cause and an explanation. Let me say that this is a survival of the "principle of inertia," of substance and the ontology argument. (Balibar 1973, 65)

But if the problem of reconciling synchrony and diachrony produced a rationalist and essentialist response, it was the initial deployment of the Structuralist opposition of synchrony and diachrony that created the problem in the first place. The final triumph of synchrony—the common ground of both Spinoza and Structuralism—resulted from an essentialist attempt to privilege the reproduction of the whole over the uneven development of the elements. Structural causality—which views the complex whole as an "absent cause" manifested only as the simultaneous effectivities of its elements, and each element as possessing a nature and effectivity that cannot be deduced from the place and function assigned to it by the complex whole—cannot permit such an essentialist reduction. Althusser acknowledges the mistake in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, where he insists on a much more rigorous distinction between Structural Marxism and Structuralism than the one put forward in *Reading Capital*: "Marxism is not a structuralism, not because it affirms the primacy of the process over the structure (although formally this is not false) but because it affirms the primacy of contradiction over the process" (Althusser 1976, 130).

Furthermore, Structural Marxism rejects the identity of concepts and things and therefore the rationalist notion that social structures are of the same nature and obey the same logic as the concepts by which we have knowledge of them. Social contradictions, therefore, are not a function of the differential dislocations and epistemological limits within scientific discourse; rather, social contradictions are the concept of something objectively real and outside discourse, namely, the social practices of human beings who have become class subjects by virtue of the class and class-biased structures that constitute their habitus. The primacy of the mode of production within the field of social structures is manifested as the primacy of class struggle within the field of social practices, yet neither the result of economic determination nor the outcome of class struggle is guaranteed by the concept of their origin. Balibar makes this realist position clear in *Cinq études du matérialisme historique* :^[6]

There is only a real historical dialectic with the transformation of the concrete social formation, a process which implies the real interdependence of the different social practices (by giving them the form of being internally overdetermined by the processes of transformation of each social practice).

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However, social formations are not simply the "concrete" place (or the milieu) in which an abstract, general dialectic realizes itself. Rather social formations are themselves transformed and are self-transforming because they themselves consist of the history of class struggle. This point is decisive. (Balibar 1974, 229)

Hindess and Hirst and the "Post-Althusserian" Negation of History

If Balibar may be said to have taken the concept of a mode of production in an essentialist and rationalist direction, British sociologists Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst have used Balibar's error as a pretext for pushing Structural Marxism beyond rationalism into a realm of "discourse"

where no correspondence between concepts and reality, no matter how attenuated, can be (or need be) maintained, and beyond essentialism to an absolute rejection of all concepts of structural determination. In successive elaborations of their position, beginning with *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (1975), followed by the auto-critique *Mode of Production and Social Formation* (1977), and culminating in a weighty two-volume work (coauthored with Antony Cutler and Athar Hussain), *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today* (1977, 1978), Hindess and Hirst have come to defend a self-styled "post-Althusserian" post-Marxism based on the absolute autonomy of discourse from all material processes and historical conditions and a radical "anti-epistemology" that rejects any claim as to the reality of objects. Hindess and Hirst take an extreme anti-realist and anti-materialist philosophical position. They argue that all forms of realism are ultimately either empiricist or rationalist and, furthermore, always tautological. Hindess and Hirst proceed to reject not only the project of any epistemological guarantee for scientific discourse, a position taken by Althusser himself, but also Althusser's materialist thesis of the primacy of the real over thought about the real, a position that defends realism while acknowledging the fact that it can never be proven (or disproven) apodictically. For Hindess and Hirst, the failure of epistemology implies nothing less than the collapse of realism and materialism: "There is no question here of whether *objects of discourse* exist independently of the discourses which specify them. Objects of discourse do not exist at all in that sense: they are constituted in and through the discourse which refers to them" (Cutler, Hindess, Hirst, and Hussain 1977, 216-17).

According to Hindess and Hirst, Althusser's project for a differential

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history is problematic because, after all is said and done, it remains a history—that is, a discourse premised on the existence of an intransitive world that circumscribes the play of discourse:

Althusser fails to break with the notion of history at the very moment of splitting from it. . . . Althusser does not say that there is no real object "history," that the notion of a real concrete history is an illusion. . . . [Although] he differentiates the thought object from the real object . . . the distinction of the objects [continues to pose] the question of the mode of their correspondence, for both are held to exist, the concrete existing prior to and independently of thought, and thought being the form in which the concrete is known. . . . The continued and uncriticized existence of the real object allows a shadow "history" to emerge parallel to the theoretical history, a shadow which reproduces the outlines of the history which Althusser has criticized. The very notion of a real object, history, the object theory appropriates, is an index of this reprise. (Hindess and Hirst 1975, 318)

Althusser insists on the distinction of the theoretical from the real object and rejects any philosophical guarantee of their correspondence, yet he does admit the necessity of historical facts (while denying their self-evident nature) and the legitimacy of historical determination as a theoretical problem (while maintaining that history has no subject or goal). These positions, scandalous as they are to many historians, do not go far enough for Hindess and Hirst, who categorically "reject the notion of history as a coherent and worthwhile object of study" in favor of a hermetic, strictly internal analysis of the logical preconditions and consequences of concepts and conceptual discourse (Hindess and Hirst 1975, 321). In their view, the acceptance of historical facts, however qualified, condemns history to empiricism since such facts introduce into the theoretical object determinations that are, properly speaking, epiphenomena. "Far from working on the *past*, the ostensible object of history, historical knowledge works on a body of *texts* . . . this or that body of representations with the status of a record. . . . The writing of history is the production of texts which interpret these texts" (Hindess and Hirst 1975, 311).

The existence of historical facts makes history a "potentially infinite text" in contrast to what Hindess and Hirst call the "analysis of the current situation," which may be "rigorously conceptualized" on the basis of "the conditions of existence of present social relations" (Hindess and Hirst 1975, 312). The idea that the current conjuncture can be more rigorously

conceptualized than the past (that it is somehow *really* there) would seem to be untenable within the terms of their own

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anti-epistemology, and Hindess and Hirst never present any explicit arguments in defense of the epistemologically privileged status of the contemporary over the historical. At bottom the logic of their position is political, not theoretical. In *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, Hindess and Hirst reject Balibar's rationalism in favor of what Gregory Elliott (1986) has accurately, if polemically, described as "Maoist theoreticism."²⁴ Balibar's concept of a mode of production (an articulated combination of relations and forces of production requiring the securing and reproduction of certain conditions of existence) is still acceptable, and following the lines of Balibar's own self-criticism, Hindess and Hirst insist that class struggle is the agency by which the conditions of existence of a mode of production are altered. However, moving well beyond Althusser and Balibar's vague but still historical conception of class struggle, Hindess and Hirst are completely unwilling to discuss the class struggle except as a free-floating and autonomous force—a "class voluntarism of the Cultural Revolution variety," to quote Elliott again. The epistemological rejection of history is thus a necessary step in the "liberation" of political practice from all structural and historical determination. The pursuit of political voluntarism dictates first an equation of history and teleology—"there can be no history without a philosophy of history" (Hindess and Hirst 1975, 311)—and second an escape from history by the expulsion of causality from the discursive analysis of social relations: "Causal doctrines are not necessary for specific discursive analysis. Dispensing with them also dispenses with debates and problems created solely by their presence" (Cutler, Hindess, Hirst, and Hussain 1977, 131).

What takes the place of history for Hindess and Hirst then is politics or, more precisely, political *intentionality*, which confers on the current situation whatever meaning it has. "The current situation must not be conceived as an object given in the real social reality at a given moment in time. . . . [T]he current situation does not exist independently of the political practice which constitutes it as an object" (Hindess and Hirst 1975, 322). Political practice dictates the choice of concepts, and their elaboration requires only the adumbration of their logical conditions of existence and the working out of their internal effects; both processes are completely independent of any consideration of the objective reality of these conditions of existence (which are theoretically emptied of any causal effectivity) or any correspondence between the logical deduction of such effects and any empirical reality. Strictly speaking, theoretical discourse entails nothing more than "the construction of problems for

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analysis and solutions to them by means of concepts. Concepts are deployed in ordered successions to produce these effects. This order is the order created by the practice of theoretical work itself: it is guaranteed by no necessary 'logic' or 'dialectic' nor by any necessary mechanism of correspondence with the real itself" (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 7).

Within the terms of such a radical separation of discursive practice from reality and such an uncompromising rejection of the theoretical legitimacy of causality, there is obviously no place for a social formation in the Althusserian sense of the term, that is, an unevenly developed

structured whole. Hindess and Hirst move rapidly from the antirealist voluntarism of *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* to a systematic rejection of any theoretical expression of structural interrelationships in *Mode of Production and Social Formation* and *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*. In the latter works, the concept of social structure is ruthlessly simplified by dissolving the Structural Marxist concept of *relative* autonomy into an infinity of *absolute* autonomies. There can no longer be, as there is for Structural Marxism, distinct theoretical levels ranging from the concepts of distinct structured elements to the complex whole of a "structure of structures" because, according to Hindess and Hirst, there is "no necessary form in which these concepts must be articulated into the concept of the essential structure of a social formation" (Cutler, Hindess, Hirst, and Hussain 1977, 229). While the conditions of existence of specific relations—for example, economic relations—may be logically deduced, the other social relations and practices that provide these conditions of existence cannot: "the form in which the conditions of existence of determinate relations of production are secured cannot be conceived either as empirically given to theory or as derivable in principle from the relations of production whose conditions of existence they secure" (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 25-26).

Balibar's concept of a mode of production, his concepts of correspondence and non-correspondence of the forces and relations of production, and indeed the very idea of forces and relations of production themselves are all finally dismissed by Hindess and Hirst as aberrations that follow from insisting that the conditions of existence of a mode of production be derived from its effects. This latter view, they argue, is conditioned in turn by the belief that a rational, unified concept of a social whole is necessary in order to account for the historical "fact" of transformation. For Hindess and Hirst, by contrast, "once the conception of social formation as a determinate unity of being, existence corresponding to its concept, is abandoned, then the problems of empirical

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contingency on the one hand and of determination in the last instance on the other must vanish" (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 48). Hindess and Hirst reverse the terms of Balibar's rationalist essentialism, not in order to acknowledge irreducible discontinuities between concepts pitched at the level of the complex whole (the social formation) and those pitched at the level of the relatively autonomous elements (the economic, political, and ideological instances), but in order to eliminate the complexity of the social formation altogether and reduce it to "a single structure of social relations" (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 5).

Hindess and Hirst propose a concept of the social formation "conceived as a determinate form of economic class relations, their conditions of existence and the forms in which these conditions are secured" (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 50). They arrive at this concept by rejecting Balibar's distinction between the forces and relations and collapsing the former into the latter. Since the concept of a mode of production is now identical to that of the relations of production, it is superfluous and can be eliminated.

If relations of production are conceived as involving the social distribution of means-conditions of production between classes, that is, the distribution of possession of and separation from the means of production among different social categories of economic agents, then the specification of determinate relations of production necessarily involves an explicit or implicit reference to determinate means and processes of production, that is to determinate "forces of production." The "forces of production" provide certain of the conditions of existence of the relations of production in question. The specification of determinate "forces of production" must therefore be included in the specification of the forms in which the conditions of existence of a determinate set of relations of production are secured. Thus, if mode of production is not conceived in rationalist form as a necessary combination of distinct objects, then the concept "mode of production" is entirely redundant. (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 54-56)

All that remains of Balibar's concept of a mode of production is the concept of economic forms and their conditions of existence. Anything more than this, Hindess and Hirst contend, introduces the specter of "rationalist" causality:

Either the articulation of relations and forces of production is conceived in terms of the connection between social relations and the forms in which their conditions of existence are realized or it must be conceived in terms of some kind of necessity in which the character of one object of discourse, the "relations" or the "forces," is deducible from the concept of the other. The first alternative means there is no reason to posit "modes of production" as distinctive objects of analysis . . . while the second leads directly to the quagmire of rationalized conceptualizations. (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 55)

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Hindess and Hirst's "new" conception of a social formation is actually nothing more than the concept of the social whole from the perspective of one of its instances, the economy, a nominalist move that suppresses the effectivities of the social whole and the non-economic practices. Hindess and Hirst are, in effect, privileging economic relations, but there is no reason for this privilege or any reason why it could not or should not be extended to any of the other practices (yielding commensurately different definitions of social formation). Having eliminated any objective reality outside discourse (including Althusser's materialist thesis) and all concepts of determination inside discourse (differential yet interrelated levels of analysis), Hindess and Hirst can produce no defense of the discursive primacy of the economy; any attempt to do so would simply restore the complexity of structural causality. Hindess and Hirst acknowledge a certain "discursive" effectivity: the specification of economic relations "involves the explicit or implicit reference to the *effects* of other social relations and of social practices other than economic production" (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 25), and the conditions of existence of those relations gives "certain abstract and general conditions which must be satisfied by political, legal, and cultural forms" (Cutler, Hindess, Hirst, and Hussain 1977, 127). However, in the face of their rejection of any concept of the articulation of the instances, it is difficult to see what difference this qualification makes.

Their nominalist reversal of Balibar's essentialist concept of a mode of production forces Hindess and Hirst to eliminate uneven development just as surely as Balibar does, but with even more regressive implications. If Balibar's rationalism hungers to eliminate contradiction in order to achieve unified and certain knowledge (the old rationalist desire to be God by participating in his logic), Hindess and Hirst simply reject knowledge altogether. The curse of the finite as opposed to the infinite intelligence—the distinction between concepts and things, the irreducible dislocations and aporias within discourse, and so on—is taken by Hindess and Hirst as a pretext for reducing theory to a cognitive epiphenomenon of political will: if Man cannot become God through knowledge, he can become a little God by subjugating knowledge to practice. In place of a scientific justification for the primacy of economic relations, Hindess and Hirst substitute the pragmatic justification of politics. "Problems created by politics . . . constitute the objects of theorisation and problematisation in Marxist discourse. . . . The political objectives of a socialist transformation of economic class relations pose the problem of the relations of production and their po-

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litical and cultural conditions of existence as primary objects of theorisation" (Cutler, Hindess, Hirst, and Hussain 1977, 230). Once again we are witness to an underlying equivalence between the nominalism of the concept and the voluntarism of the will that is the essence of Hindess and Hirst's post-Althusserian post-Marxism. Ultimately class voluntarism lurks behind the false either/or of "essentialism or nominalism" by which Hindess and Hirst eliminate first the concept of the forces of production and then the concept of a mode of production itself from Marxist

theory. These concepts must be eliminated not because they are theoretically superfluous (as Hindess and Hirst maintain) but because their existence constitutes a limitation, if only within theory, on political practice, a (theoretical) denial of the power of the political will over its (objectively real) conditions of existence.

Hindess and Hirst fuse the most abstract theoreticism with the most uncompromising political voluntarism. Political "calculation" (as they call it) is no longer a function of historical knowledge or indeed any knowledge at all except in the pragmatist sense of an explicitly formulated political interest. The complexity of a historically determinate social formation and the material relations of determination and subordination that create the space of the political subject are vitiated by a concept of the political class struggle as a free-floating process: "There are no 'socialist' issues and areas of struggle *per se*, assigned as 'socialist' by class interest and experience. Socialism is a political ideology. The basis for support for socialist politics is whatever issues and struggles from which it can be made" (Cutler, Hindess, Hirst, and Hussain 1978, 258-59). Political calculation creates the concept of the present situation and a concept of the future to be realized; political action destroys the former and calls into being the latter. By reducing politics to will to power unencumbered by knowledge, and social theory to a nominalism of concepts unencumbered by reality, Hindess and Hirst have moved not only "beyond" Althusser but "beyond" Marxism as well. Unable to provide either a compelling critique or a theoretically interesting alternative to structural causality and the concept of a mode of production, their particular current of post-Marxism flows smoothly into the larger stream of postmodernism.

Balibar and Wolpe: Articulation as a Concept of Transformation

In the course of his discussion of the labor process within the manufacturing mode of production (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 233-43), Bali-

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bar provides a suggestive, if flawed, discussion of the "articulation," or structured interrelationship, between the forces of production (the relation of "real appropriation" that constitutes the labor process) and the relations of production (the property relation that determines access to the means of production and distribution of the social product). Balibar argues that the development of capitalism (and the dissolution of feudalism) involves two processes: first a shift in dominance within the social formation from feudal to capitalist relations of production, a movement Balibar calls the "formal subsumption" of labor to capital, and second a transformation of the labor process from the "unity" of handicraft production (in which there is a unity between human labor power and the means of labor insofar as tools are adapted to the individual laborer) to the "unity" of machine production (in which the unity is between the means of labor and the object of labor, and human labor power is forced to adapt to machines), what he calls the "real subsumption" of labor to capital. For Balibar, "manufacture," as an independent mode of production, marks an intermediate stage between feudal handicraft and capitalist machine production, a labor process in which the increasing division of labor and the de-skilling of labor are dissolving handicraft methods and creating the preconditions for machine processes. Balibar contends that the dominance of capitalist property relations over the labor process accounts for this transformation and that such a development is not possible until labor is

separated not only from economic ownership of the means of production but from effective control over the labor process as well. The inalienable rights of the peasant community to the land and the artisan community to a trade are finally overthrown by alienable private property, at which point control of the labor process passes to economic owners who ruthlessly restructure, to use the contemporary euphemism, the labor process in the interest of capital accumulation.

Balibar's analysis nicely illustrates the strengths of his concept of the "double articulation" of labor, means of production, and ownership into forces and relations of production. First, it introduces power into the labor process, thereby vitiating "technicism," the idea that the labor process is neutral or that the development of productivity is independent of class struggle. If relations of property are exploitive, Balibar insists, the labor process cannot be simply a matter of technical cooperation. Second, because Balibar is dealing with structured relationships, that is, the social forces acting on human agents and not the human agents themselves, he avoids the false problem of classifying

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individuals: Can a capitalist have an aristocratic title? Can a holder of seigniorial rights be a member of the bourgeoisie? Such questions are obfuscatory; they tend to obscure precisely what is decisive for explaining the nature of class struggle and historical transformation, namely, the forces and relations of production.

There is, however, an obvious weakness in Balibar's argument. As stated, it implies that capitalist relations of production spring into existence *ex nihilo* and then, alone, without the support of any capitalist forces of production, proceed to "dominate" feudal relations of production and to "subsume" feudal labor processes. How is it possible, given the double relation that Balibar insists defines every mode of production, for capitalist relations of production to come into existence without corresponding capitalist forces of production? The answer, of course, is that they cannot and did not. Balibar has simply telescoped the dissolution of feudalism and the development of capitalism by factoring out the coexistence and interrelationship of both a capitalist and a feudal mode of production. Balibar is not unaware of the difficulty; indeed, he even points out this alternative solution in the "very schematic suggestions" at the end of his long essay. Ultimately Balibar admits that an adequate conception of relations of correspondence and non-correspondence within a social formation "is only ever possible by a *double reference* to the structure of two modes of production" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 307). Periods of transition (such as the age of manufacture) are determined by the "coexistence of several modes of production," and therefore they are "never *one* mode of production." Instead, their "unity is the coexistence and hierarchy of two modes of production. . . . Thus it seems that the *dislocation* between the connections and the instances in transition periods merely reflects *the coexistence of two (or more) modes of production in a single 'simultaneity,' and the dominance of one of them over the other*" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 307).

Balibar thus introduces a new and powerful way of thinking about historical transformation in terms of the uneven development and shifting relations of domination and subordination between two (or more) modes of production. The fact that he envelops his concept of an articulation of modes of production in an essentialist-rationalist framework does not diminish his achievement. To realize the explanatory potential of the concept of articulation, however, it is necessary to eliminate its essentialist and rationalist connotations, in particular Balibar's notion

that the structure of such an articulation is simply "a more general

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synchrony englobing several systems and their relations" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 307). What Balibar calls a manufacturing mode of production must be redefined as a capitalist mode of production within a social formation characterized by an articulation of feudalism and capitalism. The transition from feudalism to capitalism must be conceptualized in terms of a double, not a unitary, process—the dissolution of feudalism as well as the development of capitalism. Viewing the transformation in terms of an articulation of two modes of production eliminates the need for an essentialist concept of feudalism that bears within it the *necessary* development of capitalism. At the same time, the concept of articulation facilitates—within the framework of the uneven development and contradictions of feudalism itself—the *possibility* of the emergence of capitalism as well as the conditions of existence for its development from a subordinate to a dominant position. Obversely, articulation provides a concept of capitalism that neither assumes feudalism as its necessary precondition nor precludes the possibility of conceptualizing a feudal-capitalist articulation within which feudalism might occupy first a dominant and then a subordinate position.

The articulation of multiple modes of production suppresses neither the individual effectivities of each individual mode nor their structured interrelationship as an economic system, the economic instance of the social formation. To speak of articulation is to speak of uneven development, of the primacy of contradiction over reproduction, and of the dissolution of one mode of production and the development of another, but not in such a way that the internal logic of one process becomes, by some mysterious process of transubstantiation, the internal logic of the other. For each individual mode of production we may distinguish between phases of *development* (wherein the forces and relations are in a state of what Balibar calls "correspondence" such that the subsumption of the forces to the relations contributes to the reproduction of the existing relations of production) and phases of *dissolution* (wherein changes in productivity, technology, or the organization of production make the reproduction of existing property relations increasingly difficult—what Balibar calls "non-correspondence"). Because it is precisely the contradictions of their uneven development that are being reproduced, the reproduction of the forces and relations of production is a process neither of simple repetition nor of linear perpetuation. It is rather a process, on the one hand, of accumulating and creating contradictions ("condensation" in Althusser's terminology) and, on the other hand, of adapting, with increasing difficulty, to the ongoing conse-

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quences of uneven development ("displacement" for Althusser). Eventually the non-correspondence between the forces and relations of production may become so great that their structured relationships are dissolved, frequently by means of violence (what Althusser calls a "revolutionary rupture"), and relations of ownership and labor are transformed, that is, reorganized on the basis of a new mode of production. This process, open-ended but not unbounded, constitutes what we might call the *internal* logic of a mode of production.

Of course, articulation implies more than the simultaneous existence of otherwise isolated

modes of production. It also implies their structured interrelationship and the dominance of one over the other. The dominant mode is dominant precisely insofar as it forces the subordinate mode to adapt, within the limits of the latter's own structures, to the requirements of the development and reproduction of the dominant mode. The effects of dominance and subordination are undoubtedly felt within both modes of production—within the dominant mode as "super-appropriation" and dominance for owners and relative prosperity for producers and within the subordinate mode as dependency for owners and "super-exploitation" for producers. Thus articulation constitutes something like an *external* logic of the articulated modes of production. Articulation materially alters the respective conditions of existence of each mode, thereby influencing the internal rhythms of their respective development and dissolution, decisively in the case of the subordinate mode, which may or may not be allowed to expand, and more or less significantly in the case of the dominant mode.

Harold Wolpe, a British anthropologist and historian of South Africa, has considerably clarified the concepts of articulation and dominance by means of a distinction drawn between "restricted" and "extended" concepts of a mode of production (Wolpe 1980). A restricted concept, Wolpe argues, pertains to the specification of possible relations between agents and the means of production within individual economic enterprises or production units. Such a conceptualization is "restricted" in the sense that it says nothing about the "laws of motion" of the mode of production, that is, how economic enterprises are related to each other and the processes by which the forces and relations of production are reproduced. The concept of the laws of motion or reproductive mechanisms, when added to the restricted concept of the forces and relations, yields an "extended" concept of a mode of production. Wolpe goes on to define the articulation of two modes of production in terms of a dominant mode defined "extensively" (forces and

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relations plus the structures necessary for their reproduction) and articulated with a subordinate mode defined "restrictively" (in terms simply of the forces and relations of production). Thus, for Wolpe, the unity of a social formation is ultimately constituted by the laws of motion or mechanisms of reproduction of the dominant mode of production. Economic enterprises organized according to a subordinate mode depend on the dominant mode for their own reproduction. The dominant mode therefore becomes essential to the subordinate mode, and this relation of dependency constitutes the essence of domination.

Despite his mechanistic reference to the "laws of motion" of a mode of production, Wolpe has significantly extended and enriched Balibar's concept of articulation. To make Wolpe's concepts compatible with structural causality it is necessary only to understand the terms *laws of motion* and *reproductive mechanisms* as referring to the place and function assigned to the instances by the complex whole; to understand the distinction Wolpe draws between restricted and extended concepts of a mode of production as referring to, respectively, the economic function and the existing relations of domination and subordination through which the primacy of the economic function is manifested in the political and ideological instances; and finally, to understand the dominance of one mode of production over another within an articulation as the primacy of its function manifested in the political and ideological instances to the exclusion of the subordinate economic function.

Wolpe's framework adds significantly to the explanatory potential of the concept of

articulation with regard to the problem of the transition from feudalism to capitalism (as we shall see, it helps clarify the problem of imperialism as well). It makes it possible to conceptualize the development of capitalism within a social formation in which the laws of motion of a feudal mode of production are dominant, but in which the laws of motion of a capitalist mode might displace feudal laws of motion without thereby destroying the feudal character of a particular economic enterprise. There is no necessary connection, Wolpe explains, between the reproduction of the relations and forces of a subordinate mode, at the level of the enterprise, and the self-generating reproduction of the laws of motion of that subordinate mode, nor do the laws of motion of a dominant mode preclude the reproduction of relations and forces of a subordinate mode. However, the laws of motion of a dominant mode are not without their effect on all the enterprises of the social formation regardless of their particular organization. The effect will vary with the nature of the enterprise: under the laws of motion of

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a dominant capitalist mode of production, capitalist enterprises will be conditioned by the processes of the formation of the average rate of profit and its effects on capitalist calculation; for enterprises organized according to feudal forces and relations, however, the laws of motion of capitalism will affect a host of conditions (the level of feudal profit, organization of the labor process, amount of rent, and so on) but not necessarily the feudal forces and relations of production themselves or the forms of economic calculation based on them.

2. The Concept of a Lineage Mode of Production

During the early sixties, primarily because of the efforts of Claude Meillassoux and Maurice Godelier, Marxist anthropology in France began to extricate itself from the Stalinist dogma of the unilinear "five stages" of history and develop a formidable challenge to Structuralism, British functionalism, and other approaches to cultural and economic anthropology.¹⁹ Particularly noteworthy in terms of our present discussion were two works by Meillassoux: "The Economy in Agricultural Self-Sustaining Societies: A Preliminary Analysis," a 1960 essay (English translation, 1978) that interpreted kinship relations and the power of elders in terms of relations of production (communal subsistence agriculture) and reproduction (the control of women by elders by means of special "elite" goods used solely for the exchange of women, not for subsistence); and *Anthropologie économique des Guro de Côte d'Ivoire*, a detailed monograph on the Guro of the Ivory Coast published in 1964, which provided a thorough description of the means and social organization of production and reproduction of a lineage-based, subsistence agricultural society and its transformation first by trade and then by the colonial system.²⁰ The independent but overlapping work of Althusser and Godelier in the early sixties created a rigorous theoretical structure for the more descriptive and empirical studies of Meillassoux. From 1965 onward, a number of young anthropologists influenced by Althusser, most notably Emmanuel Terray and Pierre-Philippe Rey, began to apply the Structural Marxist concept of a mode of production to Meillassoux's work in order to create a framework for their own field research, and Meillassoux's subsequent development has been significantly influenced by their efforts. Taken together, the efforts of Meillassoux, Terray, and Rey have made a distinctively Structural Marxist contribution to the study of subsistence societies.

There can be no question of a comprehensive discussion of Structural

Marxist anthropology here. In the following three sections, I will take up only a few key problems and concepts most pertinent to the applicability of the concept of a mode of production to subsistence social formations organized by kinship. For purposes of exposition, I begin with the early work of Terray, which emphasizes the primacy of labor process and the forces of production; next I discuss Rey's assertion of the primacy of class struggle and the relations of production; and finally I turn to Meillassoux's later work, which, in my opinion, restores a proper balance between the forces and relations of production while simultaneously moving from a restricted to an extended concept of primitive modes of production.

Terray: The Primacy of the Labor Process

In *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies*, published in 1969 (English translation, 1972), Emmanuel Terray attempts to clarify the structural relationships of Guro society as described by Meillassoux. While fully acknowledging the importance of Meillassoux's work, Terray contends that Meillassoux's "general description" of the economic system of kinship or lineage communities is incomplete and too general. Meillassoux describes "self-sustaining" societies in terms of "cultivation of the soil, self-subsistence, the use of very short-term production techniques, and of human energy as the main source of power" (Meillassoux, quoted in Terray 1972, 97). For Terray, such a general concept, while in some ways adequate, suffers because it offers no "principle of variation" or structural characteristic whose historical specification would render the broad range of different kinship societies both comparable and comprehensible. To accomplish this latter task, Terray argues, it is necessary to recognize the existence of multiple modes of production within primitive social formations and to conceptualize the nature of their articulation and the social relations that "realize" or "represent" them. The key to the discovery of the dominant factor or factors in primitive societies is the study of their various "instruments of labor" from which hypotheses regarding the nature of their mode or modes of production might be derived. "It would then be possible," Terray concludes, "to analyze the concrete social formations . . . and to begin to reconstruct the relations of production of which these structures are one realization" (Terray 1972, 104).

Terray proceeds to reinterpret Meillassoux's findings by means of a detailed "inventory" of various economic activities described by the

latter (hunting, crop cultivation, animal husbandry, food gathering, and handicrafts) in order to ascertain the various functional-technical relations or "modes of cooperation" operative within each activity. These activities are then classified into two general forms of cooperation, "complex cooperation" (defined by use of a collective work implement—for instance, the net) and "simple cooperation" (teams of individuals, including the "production community" itself, performing identical or analogous labor). There are also solitary activities, such as hunting with a bow. From these labor processes Terray deduces two modes of production: a "tribal-village system" and a "lineage system." The former "realizes" relations of complex cooperation in the collective hunt and is characterized by voluntary cooperation, the availability of the means of production (nets and territory) to all, an egalitarian power structure (rotation of leadership of the hunt), equal distribution of the product after the hunt, and the dependence of non-producers

(children and elders) on the producers. The lineage system, "realized" primarily in extended cooperation in agriculture, is characterized by the control of the means of production (the exercise of use rights in cultivated land, control over livestock, appropriation of necessary knowledge) and distribution of the social product by elders of the lineage.

While he insists on the articulation of both modes of production, Terray does not specify any relation of dominance and subordination between them; rather, he speaks of their mutual interrelationship or "cross-dominance." In a later self-criticism, Terray acknowledges that the tribal-village system would have been better understood as subordinate to the dominant lineage system. The elders of the lineage, having recourse to ritual, are able to "isolate hunting from other sectors of activity and thus neutralize its effects" and "control hunting, to the extent of making the hunting net a sacred object, a symbol of lineage continuity and thus under their control and surveillance" (Terray 1979, 32).¹⁰⁰ The tribal-village system, Rey admits, is therefore marginal, and the reproduction of the lineage mode of production determines the limited place of the tribal-village system in hunting and in war.

For Terray, as for Meillassoux, the kinship system of the Guro is economically determined by production insofar as the former adapts to the exigencies of the latter (biological families being modified into social families to keep production units intact). Terray, however, is concerned to avoid the idea that kinship is derived directly from the economy as well as the opposite notion that it is independent of the modes of production:

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I am not saying . . . that kinship relations are class relations, . . . I am saying that both are the complex result of the interplay of the economic, juridico-political, and ideological phases of the mode of production. . . . [A]nalysis . . . should distinguish:

—An economic aspect or level in which all the following are "realized": the division of the labor force . . . into kinship groups . . . corresponding to . . . production units; the division of the means of production between these units; the organization of consumption units; the structures of direction and control of production.

—A juridico-political level in which the following are "realized": the determination of the personal status of individuals; the regulations governing property and inheritance; relations of authority and their effects on the formation of those organizations . . . which ensure the smooth running of social life in general.

—An ideological aspect or level in which the ideological conditions for the functioning of the system are "realized." (Terray 1972, 144-45)

Terray relies here on a vulgar pluralist interpretation of the concept of overdetermination to avoid both economism and politicism: "concrete kinship relations must be seen as the *product* of a three-fold causality [economic, juridico-political, ideological] operating upon a given substratum [Meillassoux's "genealogical base"], as the combined *effect* upon it of the action of the three phases of the mode of production" (Terray 1972, 143). While Terray is correct to defer determination in the present to the matrix effect of the previously existing determinations of the complex whole, his explanation is inadequate to the extent that he fails to acknowledge a hierarchy among determining effectivities in either the past or the present. Terray also rejects Godelier's claim that kinship may function as a relation of production seemingly unaware of the theoretical advantages of Godelier's distinction between the function of economic ownership and the apparently non-economic character of the institution that exercises it. Godelier's framework, as we have seen, allows us to formulate a hierarchy of determinations within the framework of overdetermination. Terray's use of the term overdetermination, by contrast, cannot move beyond the unhelpful truism that everything causes everything else. Terray's methodology, admirable both for its insistence on the specificity of concrete labor processes and for its demonstration of the relevance of Marxist concepts to lineage-based, agrarian societies, cannot fully escape the charge that it has analytically separated the forces and relations of production at the expense of a satisfactory account of their articulation as a mode of production.

Terray considers the control over the means of production and the distribution of the social product exercised by elders to be cooperative

rather than exploitive. The relations of production, or property ownership, are interpreted as egalitarian, with elders having little or no power beyond the necessary administrative task of coordinating production and distribution. According to Terray, power is "vested" in the elder as a "representative of the productive community." Similarly, Terray interprets the elder's control over elite goods—goods such as gold, loincloths, ivory, and guns, which serve as a medium of exchange for nubile women—in terms of functional-cooperative responsibility rather than exploitive power. Finally, Terray views the elder's control over the distribution of women as functionally subordinated to their control over production: because elders control production, it logically follows that they would be granted control over reproduction as well. These positions place Terray at considerable variance with Meillassoux, who grants elders real power and locates it in their determinant place in reproduction rather than production. According to Meillassoux, the low level of productivity and the overwhelming importance of human energy in self-sustaining agriculture mean that human beings and the physical reproduction of the production unit are the axis of the entire production process. Control of the economy by the elders is objectively real, Meillassoux insists, but it operates indirectly, through control of the producer rather than the means of production, and is achieved via control over eligible women rather than over the producers themselves. While Meillassoux refrains from labelling the elders' power over women exploitive, he does view this power as the fundamental contradiction within "self-sustaining" societies and the source from which class relations might eventually develop. Terray concedes that elders possess a limited amount of power—they can delay the moment when the junior can have a wife and enter the lineage system—but because they cannot refuse it altogether, and because juniors eventually achieve independence, Terray insists that the elders' control over women is ultimately cooperative.

Rey: *The Primacy of Class Struggle*

Pierre-Philippe Rey (1971; 1975) rejects what he calls the "technicism" of *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies*, that is, Terray's reflectionist interpretation of relations within the primitive economy and his emphasis on the reciprocal nature of life-cycle relations in both economic production and the circulation of women. According to Rey, Terray's methodology masks the existence of power within lineage-based societies;

power is rendered invisible because Terray privileges relations of cooperation (the technical division of labor) over relations of exploitation (the social division of labor). Because of his emphasis on relations of cooperation, Terray's concepts of tribal-village and lineage modes of production are static rather than dynamic in outlook and unable to specify the contradictions within primitive societies or the internal logic of their development. On the basis of his own fieldwork in the Republic of the Congo, Rey strongly asserts the primacy of the relations over the forces of production within a lineage mode of production and the exploitive, rather than reciprocal, nature of the relationship between elders and juniors.

Rey agrees with Meillassoux that elders control the means of production by controlling the

means of reproduction (and in the case of Rey's particular social formation, slaves), but unlike Meillassoux, Rey insists that this power constitutes class power. For Rey, elders form a ruling class not simply because they control surplus production without providing any corresponding productive labor but also because they use that surplus, or at least a large proportion of it, to insure their appropriation of future surpluses. This condition, Rey argues, can only be understood as exploitation: "Exploitation exists when the use of the surplus product by a group (or an aggregate) which has not contributed the corresponding surplus of labor reproduces the conditions of a new extortion of surplus labor from the producers" (Dupré and Rey 1980, 149). Elders, as a class extending across the exchange networks of several lineages, control the destiny of all juniors, as a class, by controlling the timing of their access to wives and, among the peoples studied by Rey, by imposing a constant threat of slavery should juniors violate existing social rules (transgressions by juniors must be "redeemed" in elite goods controlled by elders, who can always refuse to advance them and thereby reduce the transgressing junior to slavery).

Terray (1979) has come to accept Rey's position on the class nature of lineage modes of production, contending, however, that women and juniors are classes "in themselves" not classes "for themselves." Terray argues that the "naturalness" of the exploitation of women and juniors (strengthened by its apparent derivation from life cycles and biological distinctions), the low level of exploitation in "self-sustaining" societies (which produce so little surplus), and the strength of the "vertical" solidarity of a lineage (*vis-à-vis* other lineages) over the "horizontal" solidarity of class positions (within a lineage) all combine to prevent either women or juniors from ever acting as a class. Meillassoux (1981), by

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contrast, continues to reject Rey's designation of the powers of men over women and elders over juniors as class power because these powers are based on stages of the life cycle, not on distinctions of social status. Older women and widows, Meillassoux points out, acquire a status more like a male, while juniors will become elders themselves with the passage of time. According to Meillassoux, the elder-junior relationship is better understood as a patron-client relationship of domination between individuals rather than as a class relationship of exploitation between groups of individuals.

To Meillassoux's objections, Rey simply responds that the question of class exploitation turns on structures and not persons—on the institutional existence of economic exploitation and not on the basis of such exploitation in age, gender, or status. Rey also emphasizes that the forms of exploitation in question are based on factors that extend beyond the life cycle: few men and no women will become elders, while an initial delay in obtaining a wife constitutes a permanent, not a temporary, limitation of future status. The fact that he defines exploitation in terms of its structured existence and not in terms of particular agents, genders, or phases of the life cycle would seem to give Rey the best of the argument. If all men and women of a certain age became elders and if the existing body of elders was unable to control "succession" by controlling the future status of juniors, Meillassoux would perhaps have a stronger case, but then, of course, Rey's definition of exploitation would no longer apply.

Rey also strongly asserts the primacy of the relations of production over the forces of production or, as he puts it, the primacy of "relations of exploitation" over "relations of cooperation." He insists, against Terray's initial view of relations of cooperation as both dominant and neutral, that "relations of production are social relations of production. As such

they include both relations between the direct producers and their exploiters and the relations between the direct producers themselves: on the one hand relations of exploitation and on the other relations of cooperation. . . . Within the relations of production, the relations of exploitation determine the relations of cooperation because . . . class struggle does not only involve the struggle of the exploited against exploitation [but] also involves the struggle against relations of cooperation which are themselves dominated by the relations of exploitation" (Rey 1979, 42). Rey goes on to distinguish the "labor process" from the "valorization process": "the process of production is . . . the unity of the labor process and the valorization process, in other words,

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the unity of the labor process and the creation of surplus value. The creation of surplus value, or the valorization process, determines the labor process" (Rey 1979, 43).

While Rey is correct to assert the primacy of the relations over the forces of production, his defense of this position is unacceptable from the perspective of Balibar's mode of production analysis. As we have seen, Balibar maintains that the forces and relations of production are a unity—a double connection (a property relation and a labor process) of the same three elements (laborer, non-laborer, and the means of production)—that defines the class struggle (class interests and powers). Rey, however, isolates the relations of production (laborers and owners) from the forces (laborers and other laborers) and then identifies the relations with class struggle (relations of exploitation) and the forces with mere technical organization (relations of cooperation). By refusing to recognize class struggle as constituted by *both* the forces and the relations of production, Rey slips back into a false opposition of economism and class struggle and transforms Balibar's concept of the primacy of the relations of production into a voluntarist assertion of the primacy of class struggle. Rey empties the forces of production of all significance, reifies class struggle, and lapses into a teleological voluntarism wherein class struggle is always somehow in advance of the productive forces. "Since the labor process itself . . . is the bearer of relations of production . . . to which they are adapted, as are all the relations of cooperation," Rey explains, "the labor process . . . cannot . . . be in advance of the relations of production. . . . Within a given mode of production the labor process and the productive forces are always slower to evolve than relations of exploitation, in other words than the class struggle" (Rey 1979, 43-44).

For Rey, the dominance of relations of exploitation over relations of cooperation is purely external. Because the relations of production have no structural significance for the labor process, the class struggle is reduced to a voluntaristic struggle for liberty. By contrast, Balibar defines exploitation as the internal effect of the unity of the forces and relations of production and the subsumption of the labor process to the reproduction of the relations. For Balibar, the dominance of the property relation is embedded in the very structure of the forces of production and the class struggle is inseparable from the uneven development of *both* the forces and relations and their relative correspondence or non-correspondence (the extent to which developing productivity facilitates or undermines the reproduction of the existing property relation). To

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imply, as Rey does, that class struggle is independent of the productive forces, or worse, that it is always in advance of it, makes no sense at all. The object of revolutionary class struggle is not to liberate existing relations of cooperation from the tyranny of relations of exploitation; its object is to transform them both, that is, to transform the mode of production itself.

Meillassoux: Toward an Extended Concept of Lineage Modes of Production

In addition to their disagreements over the presence or absence of exploitation in lineage-based modes of production, Terray and Rey differ as to the source of the elders' control over eligible women. Terray, at least in *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies*, argues that elders' control over eligible women stems from their role as coordinators of production and distribution: because they are representatives of the lineages within the economy, elders are entrusted with responsibility for the distribution of wives and allowed to monopolize elite goods. Rey, by contrast, maintains that it is because elders have control over the circulation of women that they are able to exercise control over direct producers and extract economic tribute from them in the form of elite goods. Terray appears to be defending a form of "economism" in which economic control determines political control (although such control is understood to be non-exploitive), while Rey appears to take a more "politicist" position asserting the primacy of political control over economic control (and that such control is, in fact, exploitive). The entire opposition, however, stems from a mistaken assumption, shared by both Terray and Rey, that the concept of a mode of production is restricted to its labor processes and property relations, thereby excluding those political and ideological relations that provide for their reproduction. Omitting the structures of reproduction from the concept of a mode of production leads only to confusion regarding the nature of economic determination and class struggle. The correct approach, which we have already defended at the theoretical level, is to develop an extended concept of a lineage mode of production.

Claude Meillassoux achieves something very close to such a concept in his 1975 book, *Maidens, Meal, and Money* (English translation, 1981). Where Terray and Rey separate the economic-productive and political-reproductive powers of the elders in order to initiate a misleading debate over the primacy of one or the other, Meillassoux steers

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the discussion onto the more fruitful ground of their interrelationship. For Meillassoux, as for Engels, "the determining factor in history is, in the last analysis, the production *and the reproduction* of the immediate essentials of life" (Engels, quoted in Meillassoux 1981, xi; my italics). Although he does not use the term, Meillassoux develops what amounts to an extended concept of a "domestic" mode of production composed of (1) the forces and relations of production: a labor process of "self-sustaining" agricultural "productive cells" whose collective "ownership" of land and tools is organized by patrimonial relations of kinship; and (2) a "domestic community" of productive cells organized, under the political control of the elders of each cell, into an exchange network involving elite goods and nubile women, a system established for and maintained by "the ordered manipulation of the living means of reproduction, that is: women" (Meillassoux 1981, xiii).

The restricted concept of such lineage-based societies, the forces and relations of production proper to "self-sustaining" agriculture, defines the given historical level of economic development. But precisely because of the low level of productivity, almost exclusively

dependent on the unaided strength of the human individual, the number of people in each productive cell is always lower than the minimum required to ensure endogamous reproduction. Therefore, the problem of providing for sufficient availability and exchange of nubile women between individual production cells assumes paramount economic significance, according to Meillassoux. The relationship between labor process and property relations in the domestic mode of production is thus *determined* by the low level of productivity but *dominated* by the importance of reproducing human labor power. In the context of low productivity, Meillassoux concludes, the "clustering of [production] cells and the alliances between them depend less on requirements of production and exchange than on the imperatives of reproduction. . . . If there is a mode of production it is here, in this gathering of productive units, organized for reproduction" (Meillassoux 1981, 14).

Every mode of production, Meillassoux maintains, has its own "laws of population" not to be considered apart from the forces and relations of production. The growth of population is governed by constraints other than the fertility of women. Meillassoux distinguishes between two "primitive" modes of production: hunter-gatherer bands and agricultural communities. For hunter-gatherer bands, land is the "subject" of labor, and productive activity consists of taking from the soil what is naturally there. Relations of production and distribution

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are more or less continuous but require little permanent or integrated social activity. Society is constituted and reconstituted around the free movement of adults between bands, and the positions of individuals within the band are voluntary, unstable, and reversible, what Meillassoux calls relations of "adhesion." The low level of investment and short duration of productive activity mean that social relations tend to be defined in terms of present participation in the common activities of production and consumption. As a result, kinship relations are not very significant, and terms such as *brothers*, *sisters*, and *fathers* refer to men of the same age, all nubile women, and men who can no longer hunt—not to lineage or kinship. Mating is loosely organized, but there is little concern for "filiation," the elaboration of social "relations of dependence" following from marriage and children.

In agricultural communities, by contrast, land is the "object," not the "subject," of labor. Labor must be invested in the soil in a continuous chain of successive tasks that keeps the producers together throughout the agricultural cycle and requires, among other things, sufficient surplus to support producers until the harvest. In contrast to hunter-gatherer bands, agricultural communities are characterized by relations of "filiation" rather than adhesion, a difference Meillassoux explains in terms of their radically different ways of exploiting the land. Agriculture encourages the formation of permanent and indefinitely renewed social ties and the circulation of goods between generations, whereas the solidarity created by agriculture arouses concerns linked to the physical and structural reproduction of the group. Meillassoux contrasts two possibilities for satisfying the new reproductive requirements: "gynostatic" societies, in which women stay with their communities and men come to join and procreate, and "gyneco-mobile" societies, in which women are exchanged between allied communities. In the former, the reproduction of the group rests entirely on the reproductive capacities of the women born within the group; in the latter, reproduction depends on the political capacities of the communities to negotiate an adequate number of women at all times. Meillassoux points out that gynostatic and gyneco-mobile relations tend to be mutually exclusive, the former associated with matriliney (a woman's

brother having authority over children) and the latter with patriliney (a woman's husband having this control).

Meillassoux advances the hypothesis that the distinction between matriliney and patriliney corresponds to the relation of dominance that obtains between hunter-gatherer and agricultural modes of production

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within societies characterized by an articulation of both. Agricultural production requires the continuous presence of producers but relatively few people; thus with the development of agriculture, the household acquires a social and functional existence. However, where hunting-gathering dominates agriculture, households remain small and gather through the mediation of the hunters of each household. These societies are relatively unstable, but their instability is between households, not independent individuals. Matrimonial relations tend to be gynostatic but require occasional abduction and warfare. Abduction, Meillassoux adds, "encapsulates all the elements of the enterprise of inferiorisation of women and anticipates all the others" (Meillassoux 1981, 29). It involves, paradoxically, a dependence on men as fighters not simply because of their superiority as fighters but also because of their inferiority as reproducers: men are more expendable. War is also, of course, the means by which adult men affirm and reproduce their superiority over women. Political activity, however, continues to lack cohesion, and continuous coercive authority does not extend beyond the household.

When agriculture is dominant—that is, when a sufficient agricultural surplus exists to support the community during the entire year with only limited need for supplementary hunting and gathering—one tends to find a corresponding difference within the sphere of reproduction and political authority. Agriculture is dominant, Meillassoux contends, not only because it receives most of the producer's energy but also because it determines the general social organization to which other economic, social, and political activities are subordinate. Other activities (war, hunting, and so on) predominate only as long as they last and then only within their own field of action. Men are needed in the fields, and therefore there is pressure toward non-violent marriage regulation. Relations between communities are more conciliatory and less predatory. Marriage relations tend toward patriliney and gyneco-mobility because adjustments to demographic and productive needs are more difficult under matrilineal-gynostatic systems. Thanks to the mobility of women, the group's reproductive capacity no longer depends on the number of women born within the group but on the political capacity of the leaders to negotiate them into the group.

With the existence of agriculture and patriliney there develops a stable and continuous lineage-based system of political authority of male elders over male juniors and of men over women. Meillassoux argues that because constraints on productivity are constant over time, reproduction acquires a dominant position within the social formation.

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Gradually, political authority comes to dominate economic authority as the agrarian tendency to gerontocracy—stemming from the indebtedness of younger generations to those who came before—merges with the expansion of patriliney and the elders' control over women. Women are

doubly exploited by these developments: it is through women that elders maintain authority over juniors, but it is also through women that juniors emancipate themselves. Pubescent women are exploited in both their production (which is turned over to the husband) and their reproduction (progeny are always controlled by men). Meillassoux not only provides a provocative explanation of the origins of patriarchy but also successfully links social reproduction and political authority to the forces and relations of production on which they rest. From his analysis of a lineage mode of production, Meillassoux shows that "controls over social reproduction are variable, they depend upon built-in political capacities of the society, on the strengthening civil power [the state]"; he also shows how the control over social reproduction "is based on the relations of production it seeks to maintain" (Meillassoux 1981, 33).

Despite the formidable obstacles to economic development in lineage-based societies, it would be a mistake to see them as without internal contradictions. For both Meillassoux and Rey, the general contradiction of a lineage mode of production is expressed in the tension between economic development and population growth on the one hand and the accumulation of power in the hands of lineage elders on the other. Leaving aside their differences over the class nature of the control exercised by the elders, there is general agreement between Meillassoux and Rey regarding the significance of the contradiction between the expansion of the elders' power and the development of the domestic community to the point that it is sufficiently large and prosperous to reproduce itself from within. New technologies, crops, relations of cooperation, and so on not only improve the economic and demographic situation of lineage societies but also introduce a threat to the elders' power if the functional utility of that power in production or reproduction is brought into question. Rey (1979) gives a firsthand account of how elders among the Gagam attempt to control innovation (such as the introduction of yam and pea cultivation) and subordinate it to the existing social division of labor (in the production of millet, which is controlled by elders) while juniors or women struggle to preserve and expand the cultivation of such crops and bypass the intervention of the elders.

Meillassoux advances the hypothesis that increased production and

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population growth create the potential for an internal dissolution of a lineage mode of production and the emergence of "seigneurial" lineages possessing "real" class power over "dependent" lineages: that is, "the dominance of entire, organically constituted communities which endow *all their members*, irrespective of age or sex, with prerogatives and privileges over *all* the members of the dominated communities" (Meillassoux 1981, 81). Meillassoux acknowledges that we have no historical example of the evolution from a subsistence-kinship society to a tributary, feudal, or slave mode of production. He recognizes that the possibility of internal development is limited by the small surplus produced in kinship societies, and he admits that the known cases of transformation of lineage societies have been the result of articulations established by conquest, migration, or trade between lineage modes of production and other modes. However, Meillassoux contends that it is at least plausible that a domestic community might develop to the point that the power of the elders over women and juniors is threatened, in which case it is also plausible that such authority might be successfully maintained by coercion and thus gradually transformed into hereditary authority of one distinct branch of an elder's lineage organized by primogeniture. Segmentation of the community, the traditional means of resolving the contradiction between demographic expansion and politically enforced endogamy, might

produce a similar outcome, Meillassoux suggests, if the centralized control of the original elder's lineage is not segmented also.

Such a hypothesis regarding the transformation of a lineage mode of production presupposes considerable "primitive accumulation" of wealth and power into the hands of the elder and his clients. Without conceding the class character of this accumulation, Meillassoux speculates that it might originate in the circulation of elite goods (goods exchanged for women) and in the elder's control over the production and possession of such goods. Elite goods should not, of course, have any exchange value outside of the circulation of women, but the entry of material and durable goods into marriage transactions—objects that continue to exist after women are "consumed" and that may be accumulated independently of any "woman standard"—introduces another contradiction within the system and the potential for change. Bridewealth is at least physically capable of entering into other exchange circuits besides that of marriage. If elite goods become the means to free oneself from other obligations, that is, if they come to acquire some degree of general exchange value, the possibility for domination by pro-

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ducers or "owners" of such goods over non-producers and non-owners exists. Class domination, Meillassoux concludes, might result from monopoly control over the production and circulation of bridewealth goods by one lineage, the accumulation of exchange value and power in the hands of this lineage, and its subsequent use of force to strengthen its control over marriages and women and to protect itself against the possibility that its particular form of bridewealth "currency" might be "bypassed" by a new medium of exchange.

Imperialism as an Articulation of Capitalist and Lineage Modes of Production

An extended concept of a lineage mode of production provides a viable, historical materialist explanation of "self-sustaining" agrarian social formations organized by kinship that are often considered beyond the purview of Marxist analysis. In this section I will demonstrate that the concept of an articulation of two modes of production, defined extensively and restrictively in terms of dominance and subordination, provides an equally useful explanation of the transformation of lineage societies by capitalism. I will confine my discussion to the analysis of imperialism in Africa advanced by Rey and Meillassoux. Rey is of particular interest in this regard because of his comparative analysis of the transition to capitalism in West-Central Africa (from the era of the slave trade to the post-World War II era) and in Western Europe (the original transition from feudalism to capitalism from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century). Rey's argument, put forward in the massive monograph *Colonialisme, néo-colonialisme et transition au capitalisme* (1971) and the more speculative essay *Les alliances de classes* (1973), turns first on the structural differences between exploitation and exchange in feudal and lineage modes of production and the possible articulations of each of these modes with capitalism and second on the relations of dominance and subordination that obtain at a given conjuncture—specifically, the relative degree of development and thus the relative power of capitalism.¹⁴

In contrast to Rey's work, Meillassoux's reflections on the articulation of capitalism and pre-capitalist modes of production pertain more to the contemporary global economy and to debates over the nature of "underdevelopment" in the Third World. In contrast to "dependency theory," which conceptualizes capitalist imperialism in terms of impersonal market relations between unevenly developed but nevertheless

capitalist sectors (metropole and periphery) of a global economy, Meillassoux views the global economy as a structured whole composed of distinct yet integrated modes of production dominated by capitalism. According to Meillassoux, the domination of capitalism results not from unequal exchange mechanisms stemming from differences in regional productivity (although these become increasingly significant as pre-capitalist modes of production are eliminated from the periphery) but from specific modes of domination and "super-exploitation" that can be fully understood only when the indigenous pre-capitalist mode of production as well as the complex structure of its articulation with capitalism are clearly identified.^[12]

Rey's argument may be briefly summarized. He contends that lineage modes of production, in contrast to feudal societies, are based on indirect rather than direct exploitation. For Rey, the primacy of marriage or elite goods in lineage societies—the fact that the class power of the elders is maintained by exchange mechanisms one degree removed from the forces and relations of production—creates a fundamental obstacle for capitalism as the latter attempts to integrate lineage societies (and the labor power and materials they supply) into its global system of commodity exchange. Lineage elders have relatively little interest in expanding the production of subsistence goods, Rey points out, and relatively weak mechanisms for accomplishing such expansion should they desire to do so. However, Rey argues that when capitalism (1) desires a greater degree of productivity than the lineage mode of production can or will provide and (2) attains the technological capacity to impose its will on the lineage mode, then capitalist relations will be "implanted," usually by violence, and forcibly articulated with the indigenous pre-capitalist mode of production in such a way as to destroy the autonomy of the latter and subordinate its reproduction to the reproduction of capital.

In *Colonialisme, néo-colonialisme et transition au capitalisme*, Rey charts the course of the articulation of capitalist and lineage modes of production in the Congo-Brazzaville region (now the Republic of the Congo). According to Rey, the exchange of slaves for manufactured goods characteristic of the pre-colonial period actually reinforced the lineage mode of production since it operated through the elders' traditional control over the double circulation of juniors (as slaves) and women (as brides). Chains of exchange between chiefs produced a flow of slaves from the interior to the coast and a counterflow of European "elite goods" from the coast to the interior. At the coastal end of the

chain, population and wealth became concentrated, while at the interior end, social formations lacking sufficient lineage organization and military power to become part of the chain of exchange became its victims and suffered steady depopulation and immiseration. All along the chain, chiefs and their lineages accumulated women and European goods and passed along "superfluous" males toward the coastal kingdoms of Ngoyo, Kakongo, and Loango, which controlled the three major slave ports. This type of exchange between "mercantile capitalism" (which I call "feudal commerce" for reasons made clear later in this chapter) and a lineage mode of production is characteristic of what Rey calls the "trade era" of imperialism. The case at hand did not really involve an articulation at all, he argues, since both modes of production remained

largely autonomous: exchange took place within the framework of normal circulation for each mode, and the relations of production and reproduction were not structurally modified in either case. The total volume of exchange, however, was limited by the fact that lineage societies exchange only to satisfy the elders' needs for elite goods.

As the needs of capitalism increase (along with its power to impose its will), relations of "reciprocal exchange" between autonomous modes of production become increasingly unacceptable from the capitalist point of view. According to Rey, in West Africa the lineage mode of production supplied slaves efficiently enough, but when the European capitalists began to desire other products, such as gum, palm oil, india rubber, groundnuts, and so on, and to desire them in ever greater quantities, an impasse quickly developed. From the point of view of the elders, demands for economic rather than elite goods meant a significant increase in productivity, which in turn not only threatened to provoke crises of lineage segmentation and territorial control but also constituted a potential threat to their erstwhile monopoly over European-made goods. If not rigorously controlled, such economic "development" threatened to undermine the class power of the elders and the integrity of the lineage system itself. In addition, Rey notes the significance of the European processing plants that began to proliferate along the West African coast during the 1890s and break up the great kingdoms that had monopolized the three slave trading ports. The extension of European power dissolved these kingdoms into competing lineages with different chiefs "protecting" different plants (and their supply routes to the interior) while raiding those plants (and supply routes) protected by rival chiefs. The tension between the multiplication of trading ports and the needs of each for security from raiding,

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coupled with the disappointing quantities of raw materials finding their way to the coastal plants from the interior, produced a change in strategy on the part of the Europeans and inaugurated what Rey calls the "colonial era" of the early decades of the twentieth century.

Unlike the trade era that preceded it or the "neo-colonial" era that succeeded it, the colonial period was characterized by coercion rather than exchange. Colonialism, according to Rey, is a political-military despotism designed to "implant" capitalist relations of production by force—building the necessary infrastructure, establishing plantations as well as market production by the indigenous population, creating a labor market for capitalist enterprises, and destroying the autonomy of the lineage mode of production. The military power and economic resources of a developed capitalist state standing behind the local coercive apparatus is required, Rey argues, to create and maintain a hierarchy of chiefs who will control land and collect taxes under the orders of a European commandant, conscript the initial labor force required to build roads and railroads and work the plantations, reorganize land distribution and property rights to appropriate land for the plantations and weaken the "self-sustaining" power of communal agriculture, and introduce money taxes and monetize bridewealth in order to compel wage labor and market production. Rey demonstrates how these policies were pursued with relentless brutality in the Congo-Brazzaville region from 1912 into the early 1920s (when military conquest was achieved), culminating with the hecatomb associated with the construction of the Congo-Ocean railway from 1925 to 1934.

The colonial period was necessary for capitalism, Rey maintains, even though it was initially unprofitable. It was the only way to "civilize" lineage-based societies, that is, to "implant" capitalism on foreign soil and establish conditions necessary for its autonomous

development and reproduction—conditions that the lineage mode of production, unlike European feudalism, did not provide. After 1934 and down to the present day, in a stage that Rey calls neo-colonialism, the "free" sale of labor power and the growing sale of commodities became self-generating. As a result of the massive application of force during the colonial period, the "unity" of producers and consumers in a relatively self-sufficient subsistence economy was finally broken. Workers and products no longer have to be obtained for capitalism by force; conscripted workers who initially had money forced on them became wage earners and commodity buyers, while the men and women who remained in the villages became sellers of provisions supplying the new

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labor force. Colonial despotism was relaxed to the extent that capitalism began to function according to its own laws, and the separation of the economy and the state characteristic of capitalism began to take place. By the fifties, Rey concludes, the economy of Congo-Brazzaville had been "restructured." Lineage modes of production continued to exist, but their reproduction had been subordinated to the needs of foreign-owned industry. Whatever integrity remained in the lineage forces and relations of production was preserved in order to subsidize the cost of labor power for capital and to support the "surplus" population for which capitalism as yet had no use.

The persistence of "tribalist" politics and lineage modes of production remains a "technical" obstacle to the internal economic development (the production of more use values for the local population) of the Republic of the Congo, as Rey notes at the end of *Colonialisme*, but one completely explicable in terms of the logic of exchange values within the global capitalist system: global capitalism is concerned primarily with the extraction of surplus value from the Congo and not with its economic development. In *Maidens, Meal, and Money*, Meillassoux extends Rey's analysis and argues that contemporary capitalism actually attempts to preserve lineage and other domestic modes of production in the Third World (as well as their attenuated survival in the form of the nuclear family in the First World) in order to insure a cheap supply of labor. From the "tribal reserve" system in South Africa, to migrant labor forces in the United States and Western Europe, to the unpaid labor of wage-earning parents everywhere, capitalism always seeks to exclude the cost of "indirect" wages (the cost of reproducing the worker) from the wage contract, thereby restricting it to "direct" wages paid to the worker on the basis of hours worked. Workers, however, fiercely resist this tendency, and in the First World they have some ability to do so. Despite the fact that indirect wages in the First World are heavily biased in favor of capital (they are paid for by taxes—forced savings on the part of wage earners—as well as by indirect wages from capital and are payable to workers only through the labor-regulating state), they remain unpalatable to capitalists. In addition, Meillassoux maintains that indirect wages tend to increase as the long-term logic of capitalist development breaks down the family's economic structure and forces family members out of the home and onto the labor market in order to preserve their household's standard of living. This process raises the cost of reproducing labor power and thus wages, since goods and services associated with the reproduction of labor power, previ-

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ously provided by the family cheaply or for free, must now be purchased.

For these reasons, Meillassoux contends that capital is impelled by its own logic to search for cheaper labor outside the capitalist metropole: capital does not simply "react" to conditions of "unequal exchange" but seeks to *create* and *maintains* such conditions; therefore, the existence of these conditions can be understood only in terms of a globalized class struggle. For Meillassoux, the articulation of capitalism with modes of production based on subsistence agriculture and lineage relations of production means that capital pays little or nothing for the reproduction of the Third World worker. The absence of indirect wages in the Third World constitutes "super-exploitation" of labor power, a windfall labor "rent" for the capitalist equal to the difference between the cost of wage labor in the First World and the cost of Third World labor subsidized by subsistence production (less costs of political compulsion, salaries to pre-capitalist elites, costs of feeding and housing labor transported over long distances for extended periods, and costs necessary to cover the losses to the subsistence mode where the loss of manpower threatens its very existence). According to Meillassoux, the capitalist benefits from super-exploitation as long as the worker remains connected to the domestic economy, and this connection is preserved by the creation of a "double labor market" consisting of an "integrated" working class, reproduced within the capitalist mode of production and receiving indirect wages, and a "migrant" working class, which only partially reproduces itself within the capitalist sector and which receives wages so low that no integrated worker could afford to work for them. Finally, political mechanisms providing for the rotating movement of migrant labor plus discriminatory legal codes and ideological systems (racism) serve to restrict migrant access to other economic opportunities and keep the migrant worker from establishing communal ties and acquiring basic human rights.

The problem for capital, Meillassoux points out, is that the reproduction of the lineage mode of production is continually undermined under such conditions of articulation. The introduction of money into the domestic economy and the unequal productivity of the two modes of production serve as incentives for workers to emigrate. The wages brought back to the domestic mode of production are insufficient to compensate for the losses sustained by the accelerated drain of manpower, losses that can be made up only by purchases from the capitalist sector or the "largess" of the capitalists themselves. The grim outcome

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of this process of dissolution of the lineage mode of production is "absolute proletarianization," a situation depicted by Meillassoux as a form of barbarism comparable to the Nazi concentration camps, which provided virtually free labor for I. G. Farben, Krupp, Thyssen, and other large (and still respectable) capitalist enterprises. *Arbeit macht frei* .

3. Feudalism and the Transition to Capitalism

European feudalism is the only mode of production known to have spontaneously produced capitalism and to have promoted the expansion of capitalist forces and relations of production. It is therefore not at all surprising to find that feudal social formations and the transition from feudalism to capitalism have generated a vast historical literature that cannot be reviewed here.¹⁰³ I will only outline, in a schematic fashion, how the Structural Marxist concept of a mode of production has contributed to our understanding of these phenomena. For purposes of logical organization and economy of exposition, I will present a synthetic interpretation constructed on

the basis of certain themes introduced by Rey and developed, with more or less continuity, by European historians Guy Bois, Peter Kriedte, and Perry Anderson. The reader should bear in mind that in contrast to the preceding discussion of lineage modes of production, my purpose in the following pages is more synthetic than critical. I will make no attempt to review theoretical controversies or to follow the chronological development of concepts and theoretical positions. A comprehensive review would not only be prohibitively long but would also be repetitive, given the fact that differing concepts and opposing positions so closely parallel those we have already encountered. Having introduced and defended my own position, I will now simply apply it by means of a selective exposition of the theoretical frameworks to which we may now turn.

Rey: The "Class Alliance" Between Seigneurs and Capitalists

In *Les alliances de classes* (1973), Rey conceptualizes the transition from feudalism to capitalism in terms of the articulation of the two modes.¹⁴ According to Rey, the central characteristic of the articulation of feudalism and capitalism in early modern Europe is "the reproduction on an extended scale of the fundamental [feudal] relation of pro-

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duction, ground rent, which creates the conditions for the development of the capitalist mode of production" (Rey 1973, 55). Taking as his point of departure Marx's analysis of differential and absolute rent (in volume 3 of *Capital*), Rey argues that ground rent is something of an anomaly in capitalist societies both because land itself is not created by human labor power and because ground rent accrues not to the appropriators of surplus value, that is, capitalists, but rather to "parasitic" landlords, who in fact appropriate it from the total fund of surplus value accumulated within the capitalist sector. According to Rey, Marx was correct to insist (1) that all differential rent, the windfall income falling to owners of the most productive land as less productive land was brought under cultivation, should accrue to the capitalist farmer such that the differential rent on the least fertile land would be zero and (2) that the existence of "absolute" rent, that is, the difference between the market price for land and the cost of production on the least fertile soil, could exist only because of the monopolistic activity of private landlords who withdraw land from the market until it can be utilized for a surplus. However, Rey maintains that Marx, like Ricardo before him, failed to appreciate the fact that land ownership is not a "natural" market phenomenon but rather an artificial one: ground rent precedes capitalist relations and is in fact inconsistent with the logic of capitalist relations of production, which are otherwise based on commodity production. As a result of this failure, Rey concludes, Marx failed to grasp the concept of the articulation of feudal and capitalist modes of production and the real developmental mechanisms of the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

For Rey, the central process of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, namely, the conversion of feudal rents and obligations to money rents, was based on feudal property relations external to capitalism. However, this feudal relation was nonetheless vital for the emerging capitalist mode of production since it was this still-feudal form of coercion that permitted the expropriation of peasants from their holdings, the development of market production, and the supply of labor required by an urban capitalist sector as yet unable to expand under its own power. What was created by the birth of urban capitalist manufacturing, according to Rey, was a *structural* "class alliance" between landed feudal elites and urban capitalists—an *articulation* of two modes of production that differed significantly from the feudal relationship of simple

exchange between town (merchant and artisan guilds) and countryside (the manorial economy). Following Marx, Rey, like

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Balibar, calls this initial phase or stage of articulation between capitalism and feudalism the "manufacturing stage." In the manufacturing stage, capitalist relations of production had come into existence in the towns but remained subordinated to the feudal mode of production and the still dominant agricultural sector. Because capitalist manufacture did not yet possess the means to displace the existing agricultural labor force without feudal domination, feudal property relations remained historically necessary conditions for the continued development of capitalist production. As the feudal lords began to monetize peasant obligations in order to purchase manufactured goods and weapons, production for the market was encouraged and inefficient peasants began to lose their land, which the lords then leased to larger, more efficient, and market-oriented farmers. The larger the numbers of peasants expropriated, the greater the labor force available in the cities and the lower the wages it was paid. The greater the urban labor force, the greater the demand for agricultural products and the higher the rent that accrued to the feudal landlord.

In other words, Rey argues that during the initial stage of the articulation of feudalism and capitalism the economic interests of the feudal and capitalist elites roughly coincided. "The transitional phase appears as the phase of a double necessity: a necessity of capitalist development for landed proprietors, since it is this development that assures the development of their rents; a necessity to maintain landed property ownership (under a new form, specific to the transition to capitalism) for capitalists since only this ensures the provision of labor power on the one hand and commodities (of agricultural origin) on the other" (Rey 1973, 56). It was precisely the possibility of this type of class alliance, which does not exist within lineage modes of production, that allowed feudalism, but not lineage-based social formations, to evolve "peacefully" into capitalism. For Rey, capitalism emerges and develops within feudalism without the need of violence or a bourgeois revolution: what emerges is the bourgeoisie, and with the growth of this class, the possibility of political and ideological contradictions from which a bourgeois revolution might ensue. With or without a bourgeois revolution, however, capitalist relations of production increasingly undermined their feudal counterparts until the crucial point was reached at which the landed classes accepted, willingly or unwillingly, the existence of private property, market rents, and wage labor.

In the second phase of the articulation of feudalism and capitalism, the "industrial stage," relations of domination shifted decisively in fa-

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vor of capitalism. During the industrial stage, rural artisanal production was rapidly destroyed by capitalist competition, and the remaining landed peasantry came to rely more and more on commodity exchange in order to acquire the means of production and consumption. However, large landowners, or "notables," still occupied a distinct and relatively privileged class position during this stage; whether their ascribed status was aristocratic or bourgeois is relatively unimportant since property rights were by this time de facto, if not de jure, capitalist. The

notables and their latifundia exercised considerable power over the rural countryside, power that remained essential to the expanded reproduction of capital as long as subsistence agriculture continued to exist and as long as a "return to the land" remained an attractive alternative for the urban working class. Large-scale land ownership, in other words, continued to guarantee the ongoing processes of urbanization and industrialization by excluding the lower classes from the land, while the dominance of capitalist relations in the countryside accelerated the process of expropriating small holders. Capitalism henceforth dominated the countryside, to be sure, but land had not yet been reduced to the status of one factor of production among others. It was only in the third and final stage, which Rey calls "agrarian capitalism," that the last vestiges of feudalism disappeared altogether. At this stage of development (Rey cites the example of the United States), farming is simply one of several forms of capitalist enterprise and land ownership no longer brings with it any distinctive political or ideological power. Once capitalism has penetrated the countryside completely, subsistence agriculture no longer exists as an attractive or even a viable option for the lower classes.

Rey's outline of the transformation of feudal Europe to capitalism can be accepted only as the bare beginnings of a comprehensive interpretation. His framework, let us not forget, is intended as an explanation of the difference between the relatively peaceful evolution of capitalism within feudal Europe and its relatively violent, imperialist implantation in the lineage mode of production of West-Central Africa. While most useful as a point of departure for a comparative analysis of capitalist imperialism, particularly because of its pioneering efforts in explaining this phenomenon in terms of the articulation of distinct modes of production, Rey's work has severe limitations. His account provides no analysis of the feudal mode of production and feudal exchange comparable to his concept of lineage-based modes; indeed, he fails to discriminate at all between feudal commerce and manufacture

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and their corresponding capitalist forms. Furthermore, he provides no discussion of the feudal origins of urban capitalism and no discussion of the complexity and variation of feudal-capitalist articulations in different social formations. Any persuasive Structural Marxist account of the transformation from feudalism to capitalism will have to specify not only the internal dynamic and contradictions of European feudalism but also the effects of uneven and combined development within feudal Europe itself. Rey's account gives inordinate emphasis to property relations, as well as the seemingly uncontested power of the dominant classes, while paying surprisingly little attention to structured relations of political power—either within the "class alliance" of seigneurial and capitalist elites or between the ruling and exploited classes—and no attention to the varying economic and political options available to different social classes located in different regions of the European "global" economy. To pursue these important questions, it is necessary to turn to the more detailed analyses of Bois, Kriedte, and Anderson.

Bois: The Structure of European Feudalism

Guy Bois's exhaustive study of the Norman "heartland" of feudalism during the great crisis of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, *The Crisis of Feudalism* (1976; English translation, 1984), combines a detailed macro-economic analysis of long-term movements of population, prices and wages, and production with a careful micro-analysis of lords and peasants as economic subjects.¹¹⁹ His work is useful here primarily for its discussion of the rhythms of growth,

stagnation, and contraction inherent in the feudal mode of production and for its elaboration of the long-term consequences of the general contradiction between the feudal forces and relations of production, namely, the contradiction between the basic production unit, the "small-scale" peasant family holding, and the seigneurial levy to which this holding was subjected because of the "large-scale" sovereignty of the lord of the manor.

According to Bois, the feudal economy must be recognized as a rational system, but rational in its own specific, non-capitalist sense. Peasants were oriented toward the preservation of their holdings, ensuring the continuation of their land and subsistence for their families; lords were concerned, above all else, with the maintenance of their caste status. Feudal societies were never autarchic, but only a small percentage of the harvest was commercialized and the market sector was completely subordinate to the natural economy. Neither lords nor peasants

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were oriented toward the ideas of increasing productivity or profit-directed investment; rather, both were concerned, albeit in antagonistic ways, with reproducing the existing economic situation. Bois also emphasizes the primacy of petty production within the feudal mode of production, the overwhelming predominance of the peasant family plot over the manor that emerged with the iron plow during the great expansion of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. For Bois, the plow team worked by the "skilled laborers" of the village, husbandmen who owned a plow and a team to pull it, constituted the most efficient unit of production and accounted for virtually all production on the manor, including the cultivation of the lord's demesne, which was little more than an agglomeration of such units. The feudal labor process also required considerable "unskilled labor," but this labor was provided by smallholders who assisted the husbandmen (as wage laborers) and cultivated their own small subsistence plots with spades. While units larger than those defined by the plow team were viable only under rare conditions, the plow team unit rendered serfdom less and less necessary. Lords began to abandon serfdom and appropriated an increasing share of their surplus in kind or in the form of money dues. Technological improvement was slow, and economic growth in the feudal mode of production was overwhelmingly extensive in character; population increases and increases in cultivatable land were the determining factors of expansion.

Although small-scale production was the axis of the system, Bois rejects the notion that the forces of production can be understood independently of the relations of production, the seigneurial levy to which peasant holdings were subjected. However, Bois insists that given the nature of the feudal forces of production—peasant possession of their own plots and plows and peasant control over the actual process of production—the long-term tendency of the feudal levy was constant decline. The resistance of peasants to surplus labor on the demesne and their struggle to devote labor to the family plot and to keep as much as possible of the product of that labor are inherent characteristics of the class struggle under feudalism. The development of the peasant community as the coordinating center of peasant family plots—and as bulwarks against outside intervention by feudal lords—eroded seigneurial power, especially where aristocratic political organization was weak. The constant struggles of the petty producers over time, aided by the lord's own ideology of perpetual tenures and service, were successful in eroding feudal levies and having them converted to fixed "customary"

amounts, often in the form of written charters modeled on those of the towns.

The only countervailing tendencies to the decline in the rate of customary feudal levies were reactive and extra-economic actions on the part of the lords: (1) the introduction of new forms of levy (*banalités*, such as fees for use of the lord's mill, oven, wine press, and so on) to augment declining forms; (2) recourse to the battlefield in an attempt to redistribute incomes by war (new lands, ransoms, and booty obtained by pillaging the countryside); or (3) a "political rearrangement of exploitation" (ultimately a strengthening of the central state, what Bois calls "centralized feudalism"—in the case of Normandy, the growth of absolutism and royal taxation, which found its way back into aristocratic coffers through civil and military service). However, given the dynamics of the feudal mode of production, Bois maintains that none of these seigneurial reactions could succeed in the long term. To comprehend Bois's argument regarding the "law of the declining rate of the feudal levy," we must therefore situate it within his discussion of the cyclical logic of feudal development.

Bois's achievement is to have successfully integrated neo-Malthusian demographic analysis into a mode of production analysis of feudalism. He demonstrates, by means of painstaking empirical research that can only be summarized here, the existence of alternating phases of expansion, stagnation, and contraction, each regulated by the unique characteristics of the feudal forces and relations of production. Phases of expansion began when a preceding phase of decline had "bottomed out": when the increasing rate of peasant productivity (caused by the withdrawal of a declining peasant population to the best, most fertile land and increases in pasture, animal husbandry, fertilizer, and so on) finally exceeded the rate of the feudal levy (which had "peaked out" after a cycle of warfare and political reorganization). Extensive economic growth developed as population began to increase once again (after the shocks of war, disease, and famine characteristic of the phase of decline were absorbed). As new lands were brought back into cultivation, total production increased. However, these increases in land, population, and production were accompanied by a decline in productivity (caused by diminishing returns on newer, less fertile lands, declines in pasturage, stock breeding, fertilizer, and so forth). Thus, Bois argues, during phases of feudal expansion the *rate* of the feudal levy declined with the declining rate of productivity. Peasant productivity constituted an absolute limit on the feudal levy because, in the context

of the feudal land market, only subsistence peasants wanted land, and because they could not pay more than they produced, the rate of the levy had to follow the decline in their productivity. Without a declining rate of levy, Bois concludes, continued long-term demographic and economic expansion in the face of falling productivity would have been incomprehensible.

A falling rate of productivity, however, meant rising agricultural prices relative to urban prices for manufactured goods. This price scissors was favorable to the market sector of the rural economy—the lord's demesne and the husbandmen's plots—but also meant falling wages and growing pauperization for smallholders. Economic conditions during expansionary phases favored the feudal accumulation of land, that is, the expansion of the demesne and the leasing of more land by husbandmen (and increasing use of wage labor by both lords and husbandmen), which further contributed to the morselization of the smallholders' plots (a process already set in

motion with population growth). The expansion of the husbandmen's holdings and the immiseration of wage-earning smallholders promote social differentiation within the peasant community as well as providing at least the potential for a growing commercial sector in the countryside. The economic position of the lords was further augmented by the fact that during waves of expansion the total volume of the feudal levy increased as the volume of income generated from the creation of new tenures offset the declining rate of the feudal levy.

Feudal expansion, however, created the conditions for its own reversal. A brief period of stagnation, or "stagflation," ensued wherein population pressure continued to build and prices remained high, but total production leveled off and even declined as all cultivatable land was occupied and declining productivity accelerated. When the volume of the feudal levy showed signs of decreasing, that is, when no new land was available to counteract the declining rate of levy, the seigneurial class then had to attempt to increase the rate of the levy in order to offset its declining economic position. This *political* action, Bois maintains, was responsible for "turning the page" on the cycle of expansion-stagflation and initiating a phase of contraction. Of course, some lords might have attempted to revolutionize production rather than turn the feudal screws on the peasantry, but this was a possible (or increasingly unavoidable) option only for seigneurial landlords under certain historical conditions, namely, as we shall see, when the feudal economy was articulated with a capitalist mode of production developed to the point where feudal relations of production were no longer viable.

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Feudal contraction, Bois contends, was not simply the mirror image of expansion, because unlike the latter, it tended to escalate until it became a violent, all-encompassing "crisis of society." Demographic limits prepared the ground for famine and disease, but attempts by lords to increase the rate of the feudal levy intensified the demographic crisis and pushed the peasantry beyond the limit of endurance. The result was a succession of catastrophes—famines resulting from the pressure of population on the harvest, the ravages of disease resulting from the malnutrition of the population, peasant rebellions against increasing seigneurial levies, wars by lords attempting to recoup their fortunes at the expense of other lords. Further increases in taxation to pay for wars, coupled with the devastating effects of the carnage on the countryside, precipitated a free-falling downward spiral of the feudal economy. These catastrophes might have been separated by periods of partial recovery, but Bois insists on their underlying continuity and cumulative nature: feudalism systematically produced the three scourges of famine, disease, and war; these were not external intrusions into the feudal system but inherent tendencies of the feudal mode of production.

Population decline is a key to recovery, of course, but Bois differs from the neo-Malthusian school in accentuating the primacy of the mode of production within which population growth and decline is inscribed. For Bois, as for Meillassoux, each mode of production has its own particular demographic laws, and within a feudal mode of production, demographic collapse, in and of itself, does not reverse the social crisis any more than population growth alone may be said to have caused it. Population movements can be understood, Bois maintains, only within the unique context of a feudal mode of production and its complementary tendential socio-economic laws: the law of the downward trend in the rate of the feudal levy (linked to the contradiction between seigneurial appropriation of the land and surplus and the individual character of peasant cultivation) and the law of declining productivity (linked to small-scale production and constant

technology, allowing only extensive growth).

The outcome of famine, disease, and the ravages of the remorseless cycle of war-taxation-war was a fall in population and a contraction of the arable land under cultivation. This contraction, however, meant rising productivity (withdrawal to the best lands, increases in pasture, stockbreeding, fertilizer, and so on) and therefore a downward trend in agricultural prices and a relative increase in industrial wages. This price scissors meant rising real wages and therefore worked against the commercialized sector of the agrarian economy, the lords and husbandmen,

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while raising the standard of living for smallholders (once the economic and military storms had passed). The total volume of the feudal levy, however, declined as the decline in the volume of holdings and the competition of lords for scarce tenants overwhelmed whatever increases in the feudal levy the lords may have attained by extra-economic means. Thus, although cumulative, the process of decline found a self-regulating limiting mechanism in the evolution of productivity: decline was halted when productivity reached the point where the peasant holding was able to support seigneurial charges and begin to carry out expanded reproduction. Thus the socio-economic conditions for another phase of expansion were assembled.

From the end of the expansion of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, through the crisis of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and into the onset of expansion in the sixteenth century, Bois demonstrates, seigneurial incomes scarcely ceased to decline. As we have seen, the key to this decline was the effective possession and control of the means of production by the peasantry and its corollary, the extra-economic nature of seigneurial power. During periods of expansion, the lords could not counteract the effects of falling peasant productivity on the rate of the levy, while at the moment of saturation their attempts to raise the levy or create new obligations simply exacerbated the problems of the peasantry and precipitated a crisis whose ultimate outcome, declining population, further undermined seigneurial revenues. Warfare was worse than counterproductive, yet the other, ultimately inescapable alternative, political reorganization, did nothing to alter the forces of production or improve agricultural productivity and furthermore created a powerful rival to seigneurial authority. Absolutism certainly created a more efficient mechanism for extracting the surplus from the countryside, but it did so by undermining the basic feudal relation of production, the private sovereignty of the lord of the manor. Political reorganization of the seigneurial class into estates or parliaments, as in Poland or England, reinforced traditional seigneurial rights and powers, but because such political institutions no more altered the mode of production than absolutism did, their success in reversing the long-term decline in feudal levies could be only temporary. Centralized feudalism, insofar as it succeeded in squeezing fiscal blood from peasant stones, necessarily succeeded in lowering the ceiling of economic expansion. If such policies had been completely successful, a situation difficult to conceive in the context of a feudal mode of production, they would have contracted the feudal economy to a static state of unrelieved pov-

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erty with no surplus whatsoever. Since, as we know, this was not the outcome of European

feudalism, the question to be answered is simply why not.

The real index of the change within feudalism, Bois maintains, was not the political reorganization of the seigneurial class but the penetration of capitalism into the feudal sector. Rent and profit became inextricably mixed by the sixteenth century: new economic patterns began to take root as the diminution of feudal rents and the expansion of money taxes weakened seigneurial authority and strengthened peasant independence. Lords were no longer interested in keeping peasants to the letter of their tenures but rather in expropriating them; the urban bourgeoisie began to penetrate the land market; social differentiation between husbandmen and cottagers within the peasant community increased as successful peasants accumulated at the expense of smallholders. In the sixteenth century these tendencies were not yet dominant, Bois admits, but the trend of their cumulative development was unmistakable. Each wave of feudal expansion, he notes, moved lords and husbandmen to accumulate and commercialize. Each wave was broken by feudal obstacles to accumulation (the productivity of the family unit and plow team, the ideology of self-sufficiency rather than profitability, the rural solidarity of the peasant community, and so forth) and an ebb of decline took over. But because the feudal levy declined over time and seigneurial authority weakened with each crisis, each wave of accumulation broke further (in the twelfth, thirteenth, sixteenth, and eighteenth centuries) since the thrust of previous accumulations broke down feudal resistance to later waves. As long as the principal impulses behind each wave of expansion remained feudal, that is, as long as the feudal mode of production remained dominant, the process of accumulation remained discontinuous. However, the role of commercial capitalist impulses grew with the monetization of the rural countryside, the pauperization of smallholders, and the decline of the feudal levy in relation to the market value of land. When commercial rents exceeded declining seigneurial charges, the main barrier of feudal relations of production to capitalist expansion was irreversibly broken. By the sixteenth century, feudal development had reached the point where landlord interests and behavior were beginning to approximate the pattern described by Rey.

Bois's time period and his focus on Normandy obviously preclude an exploration of the uneven and combined development of the global feudal economy and the regional differentiation that became increas-

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ingly evident as the sixteenth century progressed. His interest in the dynamics of the forces and relations of production in the countryside, the overwhelmingly dominant sector of the feudal economy, leads Bois away from important questions regarding the role of urbanization, regional trade, and the development of rural manufacturing within the structure of the feudal mode of production. Although he notes the emergence of proto-industrialization, international trade, and a commercial land market by the sixteenth century, urban developments and the "birth of capitalism" remain largely beyond his chosen limits. In order to situate the place of the town within the feudal mode of production and locate the origins of capitalist relations of production and their articulated development within the logic of feudal dissolution, we must look to Kriedte and Anderson for assistance. Finally, Bois's focus on the primacy of the productive forces leads to a certain lack of interest in political developments and state building. Bois certainly recognizes political centralization as an almost lawlike tendency of feudal development, but his analysis breaks off with absolutism merely "on the horizon." We need to explore the concept of the absolutist state as "centralized feudalism" in more depth as well as its specific effectivity within

the context of the transition to capitalism. Perry Anderson admirably addresses these deficiencies and provides us with another essential component of our general synthesis.

Kriedte: Capitalism and the Dissolution of Feudalism

Peter Kriedte's *Peasants, Landlords, and Merchant Capitalists* (1983) is a wide-ranging survey of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe from 1500 to 1800. It is of particular value here because Kriedte attempts to explain the transition in terms of Bois's conception of feudal accumulation in agriculture supplemented by an analysis of commerce and manufacturing centered around his own concept of "proto-industrialization." Taking up the process of feudal development approximately where Bois had left it, Kriedte examines the expansion of the sixteenth, the crisis of the seventeenth, and the last feudal up-swing of the eighteenth centuries and demonstrates the continued predominance of feudal agriculture as well as the weakening of feudal relations of production caused by feudal accumulation in both urban and rural sectors—processes that not only created an expanding interregional and international feudal economy and centralized feudal states

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but also established the conditions of existence for the birth and growth of capitalist relations of production. Before proceeding with this argument, however, it is necessary to specify the place of manufacture and commerce within the feudal mode of production; that is, we must review Kriedte's position with respect to the classic controversy over the primacy of towns or countryside in the transition from feudalism to capitalism.¹⁰⁹

Kriedte begins by emphasizing the fact that the feudal countryside, while relatively self-sufficient, was by no means autarchic. Beginning with the agrarian expansion of the twelfth century, towns emerged and proliferated, serving as sites of artisanal manufacture and merchant commerce for the surrounding countryside. The origins of urban communities varied with time and place—some emerging as a result of growing population in the countryside, others as merchant *entrepôts* along trade routes—but all were feudal, not capitalist, entities. European feudalism developed a significant division of labor between town and country as well as considerable regional specialization in trade and manufacture, but urban environments arose from feudal needs and were themselves feudal in structure. Initially under control of the landed classes who desired a guaranteed supply of low-priced manufactured goods and the revenues accruing to local market monopolies, towns gradually emancipated themselves through feudal alliances and conflicts or by alliances with other towns or, not infrequently, through civil wars. Early towns were based on simple handicraft production and distribution controlled by artisan and trading guilds. The function of feudal towns was to produce for the countryside; there was little inequality between artisan manufacturers and merchants, who were initially peddlers traveling between town and manor.

However, the logic of feudal development favored the merchant, not the artisan, since it was the merchant class that developed and controlled economic exchanges between feudal producers and consumers. Trade in luxury goods catering to the landed elites (who concentrated the purchasing power of the countryside into their own hands) provided the initial source of money accumulation for merchants, an income further augmented by the extension of trade, which created markets both for local production and for local consumption of raw materials; this trade in its turn encouraged additional regional economic specialization and productivity. The

logic of money accumulation, however, remained bound by its feudal function of facilitating exchange between lords, peasants, and artisans. Merchants catered to

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aristocratic needs and generally had little control over production, which was either foreign to Europe or under the control of petty producers—artisan guilds and peasant cultivators. Thus while feudalism contained a dynamic, profit-oriented commercial class, the logic of profit accumulation turned on control over markets rather than production.

Feudal merchants, Kriedte maintains, were like feudal landlords; they were not so much producers of wealth as they were appropriators of it. Production was in the hands of an organized artisan labor force, which controlled the means of production much as their peasant counterparts did in the countryside, and like the latter, artisans were relatively uninterested in expanding productivity or profits. Craft guilds were monopolies constructed to eliminate competition, fix prices, and keep production behind demand so that all production could be sold. Guilds reacted very little to market incentives, using their monopoly organization to take advantage of peasants in good times and to minimize losses and spread them evenly when times were bad. Merchants, by contrast, were eager to accumulate money and increase the volume of trade, but they, too, remained deeply molded by the feudal relations on which they ultimately depended: their activities were based on their own guild monopolies and corporate charters, while their profits ultimately derived from the surpluses extracted by the seigneurial class. Kriedte, following an admittedly strong Marxist and Weberian tradition, refers to feudal merchants as "commercial capitalists." This terminology seems to me overly teleological in its Marxist form and ahistorical in its Weberian counterpart. While the genesis of capitalism out of feudalism is of obvious significance, it is not explained by simply defining the latter as the embryo of the former. Capitalism is not eternal; neither the accumulation of money nor commercial exchange is necessarily capitalist. Where the profit-accumulating class does not control the means of production, and where there are free markets in neither land nor labor, it is difficult to see the relevance of the term "capitalist." For these reasons, I have avoided the term "merchant capitalism," substituting "feudal commerce," a more appropriate term that nonetheless preserves the gist of Kriedte's argument regarding the significance of urban trade and manufacturing within the feudal mode of production.

Like feudal agriculture, feudal manufacturing and commerce were organized around extra-economic powers and privileges. Merchant guilds were parasitic precisely to the extent that they were legally em-

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powered to restrict markets as well as establish them. Merchants amassed enormous fortunes by exploiting price differentials—buying cheap and selling dear—but they were also able to maintain, reproduce, and even increase these differentials by using their wealth and monopoly powers to reinforce the separation of petty producers from their raw materials and consumers, and thus their dependence on the merchant class itself. Merchant wealth rapidly translated into political control by an urban "patriciate" able to counter their lack of control over the process of production by politically shifting the terms of trade in their favor. Urban monopoly power

permitted merchants to exclude foreign competitors, colonize the surrounding countryside (by means of tariffs, tolls, and other commercial regulations designed to canalize local trade), and reduce the independence of local producers (by controlling first their access to markets and raw materials, then, after their incomes were sufficiently reduced, their access to credit and working capital). Merchant control over markets worked to keep the prices of things they bought low and the prices of things they sold high. Artisan guilds, like the peasant community, fiercely resisted their subordination, but unlike the peasantry, they lacked sufficient control over the means of production to counteract merchant wealth and organization in the long run. In contrast to the declining rate of the feudal levy in the countryside, urban development demonstrated a steady increase in the merchant "levy" on petty producers ("exploitation through trade" or the differential rent accruing to merchant monopolies).

Merchant wealth meant not only an increasing subordination of craft guilds to their merchant counterparts but also a growing interaction of bourgeois and aristocratic accumulation (the wealthy merchants became tax farmers, revenue collectors, and administrators as well as bankers for the landed classes and the Church). Merchant accumulation translated into royal and aristocratic loans, which in turn produced increased monopoly prerogatives, aristocratic marriages, and the acquisition of seigneurial land holdings for the commercial bourgeoisie. The rise of mercantile fortunes, Kriedte concludes, was not necessarily revolutionary for the feudal mode of production. The life-style and status of the aristocracy remained the "sun" for the highest ranks of the merchant class, which was more prone to the temptations of "feudalization," buying seigneurial property, acquiring aristocratic titles, and so on, than to the hazardous and as yet relatively unprofitable task of pushing beyond commercial and financial activities toward the development of capitalist manufacturing. Despite the constant pressure ex-

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erted on the incomes of petty producers by merchant oligarchies, production itself remained largely in artisan hands.

Kriedte acknowledges that the dynamics of craft production and merchant commerce within the feudal mode of production tended to follow the movements of the overwhelmingly dominant agricultural sector. Price movements of manufactured goods undulate with those of basic foodstuffs, but vacillations are less marked since manufactured goods are less subject to diminishing returns and because the demand for manufactured goods is more elastic than the demand for food. The dependence of feudal towns on the agrarian countryside was determined by the relatively low purchasing power of the countryside and the relatively high price of food. However, Kriedte points out, increasing interregional trade during the economic upswing of the sixteenth century concentrated and redistributed European purchasing power to add almost unlimited foreign markets to hitherto limited local demand. Increases in market demand via foreign purchasing power were accompanied by the emergence of global prices and increasing price competition between rival networks of *entrepôts* and regional producers (each a feudal commercial empire with its own "urban colonial" territories, intra-urban economic organization, and European-wide system of political alliances). Kriedte argues that this sixteenth-century conjuncture of market demand and price competition, coupled with the availability of cheap labor power of smallholders in the countryside, constituted the preconditions for the birth of capitalist relations of production. By the sixteenth century, merchants, like some enclosing landlords, began to shift from speculative gains based on price differentials toward the profits to

be made by reducing the costs of production. Merchants, facing both increasing demand and increasing competition, were no longer prepared to accept the production monopoly of the guilds, and in order to evade the relatively high cost of guild labor, they began to move production from the cities to the countryside. This movement toward rural manufacturing, or as Kriedte calls it, "proto-industrialization," constituted the revolutionary breakthrough from feudal to capitalist relations of production.

Thus the birth of capitalism was a result of the confluence of feudal tendencies toward both rural and urban accumulation. The growth of trade, as we have seen, accelerated the dissolution of seigneurial authority and the differentiation of the peasant community. Urban markets were essential to the development of the yeomanry and gentry classes and acted as spurs to the development of both intensive agricul-

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ture (monoculture, crop rotation, animal husbandry, and so on) and the expropriation of smallholders. This same growth of trade also promoted class differentiation within the urban environment. First, as we have seen, the growing wealth of a merchant patriciate came to dominate the craft guilds and the surrounding countryside by methods that resembled the extra-economic powers of the seigneurial class. Second, the expansion of trade increased differentiation within the ranks of the producing classes as well. As cyclical expansion and contraction of the local economy gave way to interregional market competition, merchant domination, and, increasingly, competition from village proto-industry, the boundary between masters and "dependent" workers—journeymen and servants—became clearer and less easily crossed. Over the course of time, master craftsmen were able to shut out journeymen from advancing to independent status by adding a variety of expensive and time-consuming "stages" to the process of apprenticeship, stages from which the master's own sons were exempt, however.

Master status became increasingly hereditary from the sixteenth century, and the opportunity for the accumulation of wealth increased accordingly. Parvenu wealth from the producing classes, however, corresponded to the pauperization of growing numbers of journeymen forced to work either for masters as wage laborers without hope of advancement or for themselves in back alleys and garrets in order to escape the regulations and surveillance of the craft guilds. "New men" from the artisan class, employing wage labor, accumulated wealth and power until their wealth was measured in relation to their capital and no longer in relation to their own labor. If they became exceptionally wealthy, these capitalist entrepreneurs sometimes bought their way into a merchant guild, and some even became so powerful as to establish one for themselves, but in the main their access to wealth and power was significantly impeded by the privileges of the merchant oligarchies. Monopoly privileges remained enormously profitable in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of course, but they were also a source of increasing tensions within the ranks of the capitalist classes. Despite such antagonisms, however, smaller, provincial parvenu capitalists, as much as their larger, more established rivals, benefited from an increasing control of capital over production.

Proto-industrialization, the outcome of the decision of merchants to take charge of production, marks for Kriedte the originary moment of the articulation of feudal and capitalist relations of production posited by Rey. Cottage industries converted peasant villages into proto-

industrial villages that covered Europe by the eighteenth century. In such villages petty producers specialized in activities broken down by the greatest practicable division of labor and worked with materials and often even tools provided by merchant-manufacturers who, in contemporary parlance, "employed" or "maintained" them. Not surprisingly, textile manufacturing, next to food the most basic industry for feudal consumers, was the vanguard of the new capitalist production techniques, but capitalist relations of production in mining and other industries were also increasingly evident from the sixteenth century. Although it did not mark the beginnings of this process (we see it as early as the thirteenth century in northern Italy and the Netherlands), the sixteenth century crossed the threshold wherein rural capitalist manufacture became an essential component of the European economy. Although merchant capital continued to dominate the global economy until the nineteenth century (mercantilism being nothing more than urban colonization of the feudal countryside writ large), and despite the fact that capitalist production remained generally less profitable, and thus less attractive, than commercial and financial activities (hence the failure of the Italian and Dutch capitalist experiments), the sixteenth century inaugurated a symbiotic interrelationship between feudal and capitalist relations of production. Henceforth, Kriedte maintains, proto-industrial capitalism would "urbanize the countryside" (Marx), converting smallholders to market producers and consumers and expanding the domestic market for food and other commodities. The expanding market for food encouraged agrarian commercialization and specialization, which in turn created a non-feudal land market and rising market rents, which in turn accelerated the process of agrarian accumulation and peasant differentiation, which in turn increased the labor force of smallholders for rural capitalists. Like the yeoman peasant, the artisan-capitalist multiplied with rising prices and falling wages in the sixteenth century. Finally, the differential cost of labor between the unorganized cottager and the urban guild worker inexorably destroyed the remaining vestiges of feudal relations of production in the cities. The feudal right of workers to a trade was finally destroyed.

It is neither possible nor necessary to review Kriedte's excellent analysis of the sixteenth-century expansion, the seventeenth-century crisis, and the last feudal expansion of the eighteenth century. Suffice it to say that while feudalism continued to predominate, it was being progressively undermined by its own internal dynamic and by the expansion of capitalist relations of production until, by the end of the eighteenth

century, a decisive switch toward the dominance of capitalism was beginning to take place. By 1800, at least in the commercial heartland of Europe, proto-industrialization had become a barrier to the further development of capitalist production. Although rural manufacturing had significantly increased the dependency of the petty producers on the merchant-manufacturer, proto-industrialization was still only a halfway house between independent and wage labor. Whenever cottage households met their subsistence requirements, Kriedte explains, they tended to stop working. During the expansion of the late eighteenth century, the pressure of internal and external demand and the capitalist's desire to increase output ran up against the cottager's desire to curtail production during a boom (since higher prices meant that subsistence requirements could be satisfied in less time with less labor). In addition, Kriedte notes, coordination of

elaborate networks of cottage production was becoming increasingly difficult for merchant capitalists. Cottage industry allowed the merchant-manufacturer greater control over the division of labor and created a more efficient, because more integrated, labor process, but beyond a certain point it became impossible to control and supervise producers effectively.

The way out, Kriedte concludes, was greater centralization and greater mechanization, the creation of a new labor process, new work discipline, and a new degree of power over labor for capital. The English cotton industry, facing almost unlimited demand, was the first to tackle this problem, producing the factory system and inaugurating the dominance of the capitalist mode of production—what Rey calls a shift from the manufacturing to the industrial stage of the articulation of feudalism and capitalism. By the end of the eighteenth century, agriculture was still the most important creator of wealth in Europe, but it occupied only 35 percent of the labor force in Britain (65 percent in Prussia, 90 percent in Russia). British industrialization became a factor that accelerated the capitalist revolution in the mode of production on the Continent after 1800. The upswing of the eighteenth century ended with an economic crisis, but it was a crisis of a new type. In the nineteenth century, grain prices began to fall not because population declined, but because too much was being produced; proto-industry lapsed into agonies not because of the disappearance of markets but because of competition from factory production. If the special political power of the landed classes, noted by Rey, was not eliminated during the course of the nineteenth century, it was progressively and dramatically weakened by the transformation of the centralized feudal states of

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Europe into parliamentary capitalist regimes that accompanied the subordination of the feudal mode of production.

Anderson: The Absolutist State and the Feudal Mode of Production

Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism (1974a) and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974) by Perry Anderson are encyclopedic works, encompassing the slave mode of production of the Greeks and Romans, the emergence of feudalism, the crisis of the feudal mode of production from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, and the political and social consequences of the crisis for the different regions and kingdoms of Europe. What interests us here is the core of Anderson's broad synthesis—the internal dynamic of the feudal mode of production, the articulation of feudalism and capitalism, and the uneven and combined development of feudal Europe. Anderson adopts an extended rather than a restricted concept of feudalism. Whereas Bois and Kriedte focus on a more restricted view of the forces and relations of production, Anderson concentrates on the theoretically undeveloped political structures that assured the reproduction of the feudal forces and relations of production. In *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, Anderson adumbrates the key characteristics of the political instance within feudal societies: the "private sovereignty" of the lord of the manor, the progressive integration of political and economic relations as one moved down the feudal pyramids, and the multiple, divided, or "parcelized" sovereignties that proliferated as one moved away from the eminent domain of the prince. Parcelized sovereignties meant divided and overlapping systems of jurisdiction that were a source not only of potential peasant resistance and village independence but also of the relative autonomy of medieval towns. These sovereignties also implied relative weakness at the top of the feudal pyramids since feudal princes were obliged to live on their own

feudal resources with little direct political control over the population as a whole.

Parcelized sovereignty is the key to what Anderson calls "the feudal dynamic." The dynamism of feudal social formations stemmed from the contradictory articulation of an overwhelmingly dominant natural economy (always including, however, a small commercialized sector controlled by nobles) with an urban economy dominated by patrician oligarchs, guilds, and monopolies (but also characterized by commodity production and monetary exchange). Further contradictions emerged from the existence of myriad systems of justice (royal, sei-

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gneurial, religious) and property tenures (ranging from serfdom to free-holdings) within the feudal mode of production. Within these parcelized sovereignties the never-ending class struggle between lords and peasants was fought, shaped by differing historical conditions of existence, the uneven development of the state via intra-feudal rivalries (between lords, princes, towns, and the Church), and the varying regional levels of economic development (both with respect to the articulation of feudalism and capitalism specific to a particular place and time and the increasing integration of regional economies within feudal Europe as a whole). Anderson insists on the historical specificity of feudal social formations, the different paths to feudalism, and the variations of concrete feudal societies, and his analysis exemplifies the necessity and utility of distinct and discrete levels of historical analysis.

In *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, Anderson emphasizes the significance of urban development for the differing outcomes of the fourteenth-century crisis of feudalism (overpopulation, famine, plague, seigneurial attempts to shift their economic losses onto the peasantry, peasant rebellions and resistance to these efforts, and finally the endemic warfare between noble factions, each attempting to recoup their fortunes by booty and ransom at the expense of the other). Baldly stated, Anderson argues that serfdom disappeared in Western Europe because urbanization, structurally sheltered by the parcelization of feudal sovereignty, proceeded to the point that it could decisively alter the outcome of the class struggle in the rural sector. The towns were not only the locations of the greatest agricultural commercialization and the place where lords were under the greatest pressure to realize their incomes in money form; they were also, Anderson points out, the places where a flight from serfdom was a permanent possibility for discontented peasants. In Western Europe, the seigneurial class was unable to maintain serfdom, although the nature of the transformation of the countryside varied with economic and political structures. In England and Castile, seigneurial political power permitted enclosures and wool production as an alternative to seigneurial levies; in France and southwestern Germany, where peasant organization and noble rivalries had most eroded seigneurial authority, lords resorted to outright sale of emancipation and the security of peasant tenures (subject to certain seigneurial prerogatives) was assured; in northern Italy, the supremacy of the communes eliminated serfdom two or three generations ahead of France or England, and the region developed the first large-scale forms of commercial farming as well as short-term leases and sharecropping.

The great feudal depression of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

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was not a homogeneous phenomenon; it had different effects in different areas. However, Anderson posits a basic general division between the crisis in Western Europe, brought on by the classic mechanisms of expansion beyond the structural limits of the feudal mode of production, and the crisis in Eastern Europe, where the feudal system was nowhere near the boundaries of possible expansion. The crisis in Eastern Europe developed after and as a result of its Western counterpart. It initially involved agrarian depression: the collapse of grain prices in the West dried up the emerging grain trade between East and West, and the demographic migration that had stimulated Eastern European development during the preceding century came to an abrupt halt. The delayed onslaught of plague added to the agrarian and demographic crises. Face with a shortage of peasants and economic losses, the lords of Eastern Europe responded, predictably, by imposing new social controls and greater levies on the peasants (which were, predictably, resisted by the peasants in a series of massive rebellions) and by engaging in civil wars.

The crucial difference between the manorial reactions in Eastern and Western Europe, according to Anderson, is the fact that there were fewer and weaker urban centers east of the Elbe. This fundamental weakness of the towns allowed the seigneurial class to succeed in their manorial reaction and slowly subjugate the towns, destroy peasant rights, and systematically reduce tenants to serfs. The historic defeat of the towns, Anderson concludes, cleared the way for the imposition of serfdom in Eastern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, precisely the reverse of the situation in Western Europe. The degradation of the peasantry, whose village organization was relatively weaker and who lacked the urban escape valve of Western peasants, paralleled the spread of export agriculture directed toward Western markets in Eastern Europe. Eastern lords had the advantage of vast land reserves coupled with a lack of opportunities in less labor-intensive forms of agriculture such as wool production. Cereal production on large manorial estates was the obvious economic course of action, but this course restricted not only the development of greater agricultural productivity but also the growth and autonomy of towns as well. In Eastern Europe, the dissolution of serfdom had to await the employment of new, more intensive methods of cultivation by the aristocratic estates in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—methods that required more and more efficient labor than the feudal mode of production could supply and therefore made agrarian "revolution from

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above" a practicable strategy, first in Prussia, then in the Austrian Empire, and finally in Russia.

In *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, Anderson turns to the political consequences of these economic transformations, the absolutist state, which he defines as a feudal state. Although in Western Europe absolutist states mediated between the interests of the seigneurial and the entrepreneurial classes, it would be a mistake, according to Anderson, to designate them as bourgeois states. They represented, first and foremost, "a redeployed and recharged" apparatus of feudal domination, designed to clamp the peasant masses back into their traditional social position—despite and against the gains they had won by the widespread commutation of dues. In short, Anderson concludes, the absolutist state was "never an arbiter between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, still less an instrument of the nascent bourgeoisie against the aristocracy: it was the new political carapace of a threatened nobility" (P. Anderson 1974, 18). The absolutist state was simply the political reorganization of feudal domination and exploitation determined by the crisis of seigneurial revenues and the spread of commodity production and exchange. To be sure, Anderson admits, the shaking down of feudal pyramids into national monarchies was a violent

process that left residues of resentment between magnates and monarchs. The development of the absolutist state paralleled and accelerated the dissolution of seigneurial authority by concentrating previously parcelized sovereignties at the top, Weber's famous monopolization of the means of violence, but conversely, the absolutist state invested noble status and landed property with new guarantees. As sovereignty became more "public," property became more "private," but aristocracies remained the dominant and privileged class. The absolutist state not only guaranteed their continued predominance in the countryside (by guaranteeing their titles to the land and their remaining seigneurial rights and prerogatives) but also created new sources of aristocratic income through military and administrative service to the crown. These incomes, of course, were ultimately derived from taxing the non-noble classes, and therefore constituted a centralized alternative to the localized, seigneurial levy that it supplemented and ultimately replaced.

If the structure of absolutist states was fundamentally determined by developments within the feudal mode of production—namely, the dissolution of serfdom and the political reorganization of aristocratic power—it was "secondarily overdetermined by the rise of an urban bourgeoisie which after a series of technical and commercial advances

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was now developing into pre-industrial manufactures on a considerable scale" (P. Anderson 1974, 23). The unequal power and rank of the landed aristocracies and the urban bourgeoisie shaped the spread of Roman law in Renaissance Europe. Roman law, with its emphasis on sovereignty from above and absolute and unconditional private property from below, was encouraged by absolutist states and by the urban bourgeoisie at the expense of parcelized sovereignty and conditional property characteristic of classic feudalism. Absolutist states were promoters of law, but they were feudal war machines as well, reflecting the fact that in the feudal mode of production war was a rational and rapid way for the ruling class to acquire territory and thereby expand its surplus extraction. Absolutist states were thus characterized by contradictory elements of modernity and archaism, formal rationality coupled with a warrior ethos, which stemmed from the particular conditions of the feudal-capitalist articulation.

On the one hand, the development of a state bureaucracy and centralized taxation system facilitated rationalized administration, in contrast to the jumble of conflicting jurisdictions characteristic of parcelized sovereignty; on the other hand, it created "a monetarized caricature of a fief" by means of venality, the sale of offices that conferred privileged status on bourgeois buyers. This system, of course, created some tensions between old and new aristocrats, but it also had the effect of integrating the bourgeoisie into the state apparatus and ensuring their "subordinate assimilation" into a feudal polity wherein the nobility constituted the summit of the social hierarchy. Finally, mercantilism, the dominant economic philosophy of absolutism, reflected a contradictory adaptation of a feudal ruling class to an integrated market within the context of predatory power. According to Anderson, mercantilism not only represented a modern notion of state interest in productivity and intervention in the economy toward this end but also emphasized the feudal idea of economic expansion by conquest and military appropriation of rival economies. The interlocking ideas of wealth and war developed from the feudal mentality of extensive growth in the context of a zero-sum model of world trade. However, this feudal policy was felicitous for the commercial and manufacturing bourgeoisie as well. The bourgeoisie provided the ships, the implements of war, and a considerable portion of the finances for

predatory absolutism, and in return absolutism granted considerable upward mobility to the bourgeoisie and, perhaps more important, considerable autonomy for capitalist forces and relations of production.

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The emergence of centralized feudalism played an important but contradictory role in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Mirroring the complexities of the articulation of feudal and capitalist relations of production that it attempted to reproduce, the absolutist state was increasingly caught between two antagonistic tasks: on the one hand, providing for the economic well-being and ideological hegemony of the aristocracy; on the other hand, increasing the economic power and productivity of the kingdom as a whole. Its growing relative autonomy increased the discrepancy between its own fiscal-administrative functions and its attempts to reproduce feudal relations of production and aristocratic hegemony. As we have seen, royal taxation constituted a superior method of extorting the agrarian surplus, but the result was not only a further weakening of the seigneurial levy in the face of royal competition but also a lowering of the ceiling of subsistence for the peasant community as a whole. The monopoly of violence exercised by the state not only eroded the military power of the aristocracy but also constituted the means by which new economic rules and market unification were created, developments without which the expansion of capitalism would have been considerably slower. The insatiable demands of the absolutist state for loans, mercantilism and trading monopolies, powerful administrative positions, and the lucrative business of tax farming—all these factors facilitated the spectacular rise of bourgeois commercial-financial empires, while the increasing development of commercialization and capitalist manufacturing created social structures that became increasingly difficult to integrate into a feudal system. The contradiction between ascriptive and earned status, so long papered over by means of the royal bureaucracy, became increasingly intolerable. Parcelized sovereignty, embodied in the private sovereignties of manorial lords and urban patriciates, acted as a brake to the centralizing power of the absolutist state, but also transmuted itself into new demands for "liberty" and "freedom" from all feudal privileges and prerogatives.

Anderson's concept of the absolutist state, presented schematically here, is by no means insensitive to the historical specificity of each particular example. He emphasizes, in particular, the later, more reactive, and more militaristic and authoritarian character of absolutism east of the Elbe, a function of military pressure from the West but also a result of the relative underdevelopment of Eastern Europe, which was characterized by a more powerful and feudal aristocracy and a smaller and weaker urban bourgeoisie than was the case in Western Europe. Unfor-

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tunately, we cannot follow Anderson's specific analyses of the differences between and within Western and Eastern European absolutisms but must rest content with noting that these differences reflected the uneven and combined development of Europe. They were thus variations, not repudiations, of the general conceptual framework elaborated here.

Summing Up

My discussion of Bois, Kriedte, and Anderson has yielded an interpretation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism considerably more substantive than Rey's initial conceptualization of the articulation of feudalism and capitalism. Nevertheless, certain of Rey's basic insights have been preserved, corrected, and developed. The pivotal role attributed by Rey to the forces and relations of production in determining the character of economic exploitation, accumulation, and exchange has been verified by Bois's analysis of feudalism. Rey's insistence on the importance of the articulation of rural and urban exploitation for an accurate understanding of "primitive" accumulation has been validated by Kriedte, who also provides a compelling explanation of the origin of capitalist relations of production and a substantive discussion of the workings of the articulation of feudalism and capitalism barely outlined by Rey. Rey's notion of a "class alliance" between seigneurial and bourgeois elites has been considerably qualified by Kriedte and Anderson into a more nuanced account of the uneven development of the articulation of feudalism and capitalism and the contradictory nature of centralized feudalism. There is no denying, however, the general thrust of Rey's argument regarding the symbiotic nature of agrarian and urban relations of exploitation, no matter how much his application of the terms "feudalism" and "capitalism" to these relations requires correction. The beneficiaries of the transition to capitalism were the aristocratic and bourgeois elites, who "nationalized" their interests by means of the absolutist state and who "capitalized" on their prerogatives over the countryside and the towns by converting them to private property. The costs of the transition were borne by the exploited classes, the peasants and artisans unable to make it as yeoman farmers and capitalist entrepreneurs. The communal organization and resistance of peasants and artisans were the obverse of the class power of lords and merchants and their efforts to restructure the feudal economy; the transformation of peasants into cottagers and journeymen

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into wage laborers constituted the feudal conditions of existence for the emergence and development of capitalism.

Having said this, I would like to caution the reader that the foregoing discussions of lineage and feudal modes of production do not presume to be definitive resolutions of the problems they address; even less are they intended to disparage the vast literatures on lineage-based and feudal societies by overstating the originality of some of the conclusions reached by means of mode of production analysis. I am not competent to make such summary judgments, nor do I believe it is necessary to advance such grand claims in order to substantiate the theoretical value and explanatory power of the concept of a mode of production. The works we have reviewed have shown, convincingly in my opinion, that Structural Marxism has produced powerful concepts of social formations traditionally viewed as impervious to Marxist analysis.

Nor can it be said that the Marxist concepts deployed here—class struggle, mode of production, and forces and relations of production—have resulted in the simplistic reflectionism with which they are so often identified. It is perhaps necessary to state explicitly that I have not attempted to insist that all feudal or lineage modes of production are identical; that empirical analysis is unimportant to a scientific understanding of social formations; that class struggle is merely a matter of identifying individuals in terms of their economic relations so as to mechanically "read off" their actions and personalities; nor, finally, that non-economic structures and relations lack their own specific complexity and effectivity. I have simply argued that all human societies are most comprehensible as modes of production; that empirical analysis of

social formations is best approached in terms of the constraints and capacities of structures (in the last instance, the structures of the forces and relations of production); that all power, personal or institutional, is ultimately determined by the existing modes of production (their articulation, contradictions, and reproduction and their complex effect on the creation of each and every social subject); and finally, that although different and discontinuous levels of analysis exist because of both the complexity of social structures and the limits to our understanding, there is no reason to reject the idea of a science of society.

Chapter Science, Ideology, and Philosophy

3

The concepts put forward by Althusser's "science of social formations" constitute a formidable theoretical system. But is it a scientific one capable of providing empirically verifiable explanations, as Althusser claims, or is it, as many historian critics contend, an idealist "philosophy of history," a metaphysical labyrinth cut off from the material world and incapable of producing objective knowledge of it? From another direction, contemporary philosophy of science, hermeneutics, and postmodernism have produced a battery of arguments denying the possibility of objective knowledge of the world and the possibility of the type of meaningful distinction between scientific discourse and other discursive practices that Althusser wishes to defend. Ironically, Althusser's own claims regarding the conventionalist nature of science and his insistence on the social and historical nature of scientific practice seem to support rather than refute these criticisms of objective knowledge. That I do not believe this is the case is already obvious from my discussion of structural causality, wherein I have defended the view that Althusser's conventionalism is circumscribed by his realism. In the present chapter, I will defend Althusser's position regarding the scientific nature of historical materialism and the possibility of scientific or objective knowledge. To do so, I must clarify the relationship between ontological realism and epistemological relativism in Althusser's thought and the philosophical consequences Althusser has drawn from this relationship. I will thus be taking the side of a very small number of philoso-

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phers—Dominique Lecourt and Roy Bhaskar being perhaps the best-known to English readers—who have recognized the impressive "philosophy of science" embodied in Althusser's work.¹³

The present chapter, then, deals with concepts of scientific, philosophical, and ideological practices elaborated by Althusser in essays written between 1960 and 1975 and the philosophical and scientific implications of these concepts as they are developed in *For Marx* (French edition, 1965, comprising essays originally published between 1960 and 1964; English translation, 1969); *Reading Capital* (first French edition, 1965; English translation, 1970), *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists* (a 1967 lecture series published in book form in 1974; English translation, 1990), *Lenin and Philosophy* (a collection of essays in English translation [1971], the most relevant for our present purposes being those originally published in 1968 and 1969), and *Essays in Self-Criticism* (another collection of essays in English translation [1976], published in French between 1973 and 1975). The dating is important because in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, Althusser's thinking about the nature of philosophy underwent a dramatic change. From his initial position (in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*), which defined philosophy as a science of science, that is, as the arbiter of scientific practice, Althusser shifted to a historical framework that defined philosophy in terms of political and ideological struggles over knowledges produced within the sciences themselves. At the same time, Althusser's interest in ideology shifted from an emphasis on its epistemological status in relation to scientific practice toward an investigation of its material status, its functioning as a socially structured symbolic system constituting or "interpellating" human individuals as social subjects and its social basis in specific institutions or "ideological apparatuses."

These developments have occasioned considerable controversy regarding the compatibility of concepts Althusser introduced in different times and for different purposes, the general significance of Althusser's various revisions with respect to a comprehensive interpretation of his work, and finally, the meaning of the often elusive self-criticisms that Althusser himself has since provided. In short, the confusion over the relationship between concepts of ideology, science, and philosophy in Althusser's "early" (before 1967) and "later" (from 1967) works has resulted in what can only be called "the Althusser problem." Neither Althusser, any of his associates, nor any of the numerous commentators on the Structural Marxist school has produced a satisfying account of

the whole of Althusser's work.¹²³ Given this state of affairs, it is necessary to provide a synopsis of the trajectory of Althusser's thinking before passing on to an assessment of the final product. In the following section, I will argue for the underlying consistency of Althusser's thought, an argument premised on his unchanging realist and materialist concept of scientific practice. Only Althusser's unwavering defense of scientific knowledge as objectively valid yet historically limited and his ongoing attempt to resolve the tensions between these two positions in a materialist fashion can explain both the rationalist tendencies found in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* as well as the abrupt rejection of "theoreticism" in 1967. Once this underlying continuity is recognized, the seemingly incompatible aspects of Althusser's "early" and "later" works become not only comprehensible but also reconcilable.

The "Althusser Problem": Theoreticism and Its Consequences

For Althusser, historical materialism is a scientific discourse, and the concepts introduced by Marx must be seen as inaugurating a decisive break with respect to earlier views of human societies. Althusser has never wavered from this position, which he introduced in *For Marx* and reaffirms in *Essays in Self-Criticism*: "If I were asked in a few words the essential *thesis* which I wanted to defend in my philosophical essays, I would say that Marx founded a new science, the science of history. I would add: this scientific discovery is a theoretical and political event unprecedented in human history. And I would specify: the event is irreversible" (Althusser 1976, 151). Nor has Althusser substantially altered his view of what scientific discourse is. The distinctive characteristic of scientific practice is its conceptual nature, Althusser insists in *Reading Capital*, its capacity to formulate a theoretical object and to provide substantive knowledge of it by means of its own internal criteria: "sciences produce knowledge from their object by constituting it, and they produce knowledges of their object in the specific mode that defines it" (Althusser and Balibar 1971, 46). In *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Althusser reaffirms the idea that the production of knowledge takes place in abstraction: "if the process of knowledge does not transform the real object, but only transforms its perception into concepts and then into a thought-concrete . . . this means that, with regard to the real object, in order to know it, 'thought' operates on the transitional forms

which designate the real object in the process of transformation in order finally to produce a concept of it" (Althusser 1976, 192).

At the same time, Althusser has consistently located his conventionalist view of science within a realist and materialist ontology: "The principle of all existence is materiality, and all existence is objective, that is 'prior' to the 'subjectivity' which knows it and independent of that subjectivity" (Althusser 1976, 54). In *Reading Capital*, Althusser asserts both the distinction between concepts of things and things themselves as well as the logical priority of the latter over the former: "The real is one thing. . . . *Thought* about the real is another. . . . This principle of distinction implies two essential theses: (1) the materialist thesis of the primacy of the real over thought about the real, since thought about the real presupposes the existence of the real independent of that thought . . . (2) the materialist thesis of the specificity of thought, and of the thought process, with respect to the real and the real process" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 87). In *Essays in Self-Criticism*, he explicitly reaffirms both "the thesis of the primacy of the real object over the object of knowledge, and . . . the primacy of this first thesis over the second: the distinction between the real object and the object of knowledge" (Althusser 1976, 193). These materialist theses, Althusser goes on to say, "function" as the "minimum generality" required to define science in a manner "precise enough not to fall into idealism" and yet sufficiently "indefinite" to avoid reducing scientific practice to a crude reflectionism, "a dogma in bad sense of the term" (Althusser 1976, 193).

However, there is no point in denying a persistent tension between conventionalist and realist tendencies in Althusser's thought, a tension only summarily resolved by declaring the primacy of the latter over the former. In his early works, Althusser attempted to resolve the tension in a rationalist manner by establishing Marxist philosophy (dialectical materialism) as an independent arbiter of "scientificity" (independent, that is, of the science of history, historical materialism), a "Theory of theory" whose epistemological pronouncements would themselves have the authority of science. "I shall call Theory (with a capital T) general theory, that is the Theory of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences), which transforms into 'knowledges' (scientific truths) the ideological product of existing 'empirical' practices (the concrete activity of men). This Theory is the materialist dialectic which is none other than dialectical materialism" (Althusser 1969, 168). Such a rationalist view of phi-

losophy obviously conflicted with Althusser's conventionalist position that each historically constituted science possesses its own specific and individual criteria of scientific validity. Furthermore, the thinly veiled Spinozist

implication that epistemological certainty and complete knowledge are available to dialectical materialism was difficult to reconcile with Althusser's insistence on the partial and differential nature of the discourse of historical materialism itself.

To eliminate the tension between conventionalism and realism, without recourse to the epistemological absolutism of rationalist philosophy, it was necessary for Althusser to act on the primacy of realism over conventionalism and relocate the concepts of science and philosophy within historical materialism rather than outside it, to define science and philosophy "not simply from the standpoint of the existence of Marxist science as science, but from the standpoint of Marxist science as the science of History" (Althusser 1976, 155). For historical materialism, scientific practice is a legitimate object of knowledge, but only insofar as science is a social practice. The *science of history* circumscribes the *history of science*, but only because the latter is a science of social phenomena having the form and function of a historical practice. Neither scientific practice nor the history of science, Althusser insists, may be defined by philosophical categories of truth or falsity.^[3] While the science of history may speak of any historically known science as (1) containing its own internal criteria of truth and error and (2) possessing the capacity to produce a certain effect (knowledge) by means of these criteria, there can be no question of an epistemological guarantee for scientific knowledge, no independent philosophical certitude of the type implied by a "Theory of theoretical practice." What Marxism has is not an epistemology of historically real sciences but a science of historically real epistemologies—a theory of the materiality of the production of science, not the scientific production of a theory about materiality. Under such conditions the realist claim regarding the validity of knowledge effects cannot be proven (or disproven) apodictically by either philosophy or science. But the claim itself is not abandoned by Althusser; rather, its status is transformed from that of a scientific question (to be decided finally by the queen of the sciences, rationalist philosophy) to a philosophical position (to be defended as a "stake" in a never-ending theoretical-ideological struggle between materialist and idealist principles that constitutes the "history" of philosophy).

In *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Althusser acknowledges the incompatibility, in his early works, between the epistemological materialism of a

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realist *history of science* and the epistemological absolutism of a rationalist *philosophy of science* (a "Theory of theoretical practice"):

What did we understand [in *For Marx*] by epistemology? Literally the theory of the conditions and forms of scientific practice and of its history in the concrete sciences. But this definition could be understood in two ways. In a *materialist* way, which could lead us to study the material conditions of the theoretical "modes of production" and the "production processes" of already existing knowledge: but this would properly fall within the domain of historical materialism. Or in a *speculative* way, according to which epistemology could lead us to form and develop the theory of scientific practice (in the singular) in distinction to other practices: but how did it now differ from philosophy, also defined as the "Theory of theoretical practices"? We were now within the domain of "Dialectical Materialism," since philosophy was and is nothing but epistemology. This was the crossroads. (Althusser 1976, 124 n. 19)

Althusser goes on to criticize what he calls the "theoreticist tendency" of his early works: "the early works gave a *rationalist* explanation of 'the break' of Marx. Contrasting *truth* and *error* in the form of a speculative distinction between science and ideology in the singular and in general . . . from this rationalist-speculative drama the class struggle was practically absent" (Althusser 1976, 106). This explanation is not so much wrong—the rejection of philosophical rationalism does, after all, restore the historical contingency and social determination of philosophical practice—as it is woefully inadequate. Althusser's denunciation of "rationalist/speculative tendencies" begs the crucial *philosophical* question of a non-rationalist, non-speculative defense of the distinction between science and ideology; it also begs the *scientific* questions first of non-rationalist, non-speculative concepts of ideology, science, and philosophy and second of the historical relationships of determination that obtain between the production of knowledge and "the class struggle." What is missing from Althusser's elliptical self-criticism, then, is a re-evaluation of his philosophical defense of scientific realism in light of his rejection of theoreticism and, even more important, an elaboration of scientific concepts of ideological, scientific, and philosophical practices as historical-social activities divested of philosophical connotations of truth and adequacy. Without a discussion of these matters, Althusser's contrast between theoreticism and class struggle opens the way for an interpretation of his early and later works in terms of a facile opposition between theory and practice.

Althusser has, in fact, never responded directly to these issues despite the frequency with which they have been raised by critics and the polit-

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ical conclusions that have been drawn from his silence.^[4] Some commentators have used the ambiguity of Althusser's self-admitted "theoreticism" to argue that the science/ideology distinction is inherently epistemological and must be discarded as incompatible with the concept of values and beliefs as historical productions institutionalized in social apparatuses employed by Althusser after 1967.^[5] Others, agreeing that the science/ideology distinction cannot be upheld but arguing that it continues to be essential even in Althusser's later work, contend that the entire Structural Marxist enterprise has self-destructed.^[6] Both these lines of criticism have been used to justify voluntarist political positions that served as theoretical bridges from Marxism to neo-liberalism

or postmodernism for many French and British intellectuals. Such interpretations are, it seems to me, at the very least badly posed and even less satisfying than Althusser's own explanation. Indeed, there is justification for claiming that problems of inconsistency within Althusser's work have been created as much by incompetent or self-serving critics as by Althusser himself. Althusser's essays in self-criticism, if they lack the degree of clarity and comprehensiveness one might desire, have at least the merit of providing the components from which a consistent general interpretation of his development might be fashioned.

Althusser: The Concept of Ideology and the Ideology of Concepts

The key to such a general interpretation of Althusser's development turns on the realization that, once purged of its theoreticist elements, there is no theoretical incompatibility between his initial distinction between scientific and ideological discourses (a distinction based primarily on their *functional* characteristics as social practices and only secondarily and indirectly on the philosophical categories of their truth and adequacy) and his later insistence on the historical specificity and social character of scientific and ideological practices (which is no more than his original position divested of its rationalist attempt to invest the terms with epistemological certainty). In his early works, as Althusser himself points out, ideology "plays two different roles, designating, on the one hand, a philosophical category (illusion, error), and a scientific concept (a social instance) on the other" (Althusser 1976, 119). In *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Althusser rejects not the science/ideology distinction but rather the rationalist interpretation and defense of that distinction: "The science/ideology distinction must be rejected in its general

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rationalist perspective. It must be reworked from another point of view, which must split it up into the elements of the complex process of the production of knowledge" (Althusser 1976, 148). Such a "reworking" must begin with functional concepts of science and ideology and attempt to establish their place in the history, not the philosophy, of science.

The scientific concept of ideology, ideology as a social instance, refers to the *Lebenswelt* of social subjects, their consciousness or "lived experience" of their relationship to the world, and the material institutions and mental structures that constitute individuals as social subjects. This concept of ideology—defined in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* in terms of its subject-centered nature, the fact that ideology is "governed by interests beyond the necessity of knowledge alone, or, to put the same thing slightly differently, because it reflects many interests other than those of reason" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 141)—is maintained consistently throughout the entire course of Althusser's works. Notice, however, that this concept of ideology is functional, not epistemological; it has no necessary connotation of truth or adequacy but merely defines a symbolic system, a social practice and its effects. It is this historical concept that must be the basis of any scientific reference to ideology, including references to ideology from within the history of science as advocated by Althusser in *Essays in Self-Criticism*.

Scientific practice is defined in Althusser's early works in terms of the primacy of concept-centered or theoretical interests over subject-centered or practical interests. Theoretical practice is "distinguished from non-theoretical processes by the type of object which it transforms, by the type of means of production it sets to work, and by the type of object it produces (knowledges)" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 59). This concept of scientific practice no more depends on categories of truth or adequacy than does the concept of ideology; in the absence of any explicit rejection of this concept in his later works, I believe it is safe to assume that Althusser means to retain it as well. However, it is nevertheless the case that every science historically constitutes itself by "breaking" with the ideological representations which are both conditions of its existence as well as a system of concepts and beliefs which it rejects, retrospectively, as "erroneous." (Althusser refers to "theoretical" as opposed to "practical" ideologies, but his use of the term theoretical ideology is inappropriate here. As we shall see below, Althusser's term seeks to link theoretical positions, ultimately, to the field of practical ideologies. While this is a legitimate and productive move from the

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perspective of Althusser's concept of philosophy and the philosophical category of "the scientific," it is not the same phenomenon which I refer to as *ideology/error*. Although it is clumsy, I shall use the term ideology/error in order to make it clear, as Althusser unfortunately does not, when I am referring to a judgment of "error" pronounced from within a science on explanations and explanatory principles that have been rejected or superseded.)

When ideology/error exists as the "other" of a science, axiological distinctions (of "true-false" or "adequate-inadequate") are introduced into the history of science. In *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, of course, Althusser attempted to guarantee philosophically the axiological claims of science by transforming the scientific-substantive concepts of science and ideology/error into philosophical-epistemological categories of truth and falsity—which he then proceeded to defend as scientific propositions within a rationalist "science of science," the Theory of theoretical practice. By this unfortunate move Althusser not only confused the concepts of ideology and ideology/error but also subordinated both the historical development of science (science and ideology/error) and the historical struggle between science (knowledge) and ideology (interests) to the ahistorical Neverland of

philosophy, pure reason, and epistemological absolutism.

However, by abandoning his initial rationalist or theoreticist interpretation of the distinction between science and ideology/error, Althusser has clearly reasserted the *primacy of science over philosophy*, historical materialism over dialectical materialism, and by virtue of these moves has redefined philosophy as a *Kampfplatz* between science and ideology. Divested of its theoreticist connotations, the concept of ideology/error as the "other of science" is a concept essential for any knowledge of the development of science, and in this sense the science/ideology distinction must be retained within the problematic of the history of science. However, from a historical-scientific perspective, the distinction between science and ideology/error can have no recourse to epistemological absolutism and therefore no reference to philosophical categories of truth or adequacy. The distinction, in short, exists as a *concept* only as a means of constituting a specific theoretical object, scientific practice, and providing historical knowledge of its development. From within the problematic of the history of science, a given science and its ideology/error are both comprehended as theoretical modes of production whose "knowledge effects" purport to explain something about the world. The only difference between them, from

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the point of view of the history of science, is that ideology/error exists (and only exists) in a historically specific relation to a science, a relationship that is always that of loser to winner. While the history of science can comprehend both the debate and the outcome in theoretical and historical terms, it cannot sit in judgment regarding the truth of either position. Of course, the struggle for supremacy between a science and its ideology/error is not always confined to the narrow domain of science; often it is or becomes a broader struggle, one that is both theoretical (conducted in terms of existing standards of reason and knowledge) and ideological (conducted in terms of existing social values and interests). This broader struggle, Althusser insists, is philosophical, not scientific.

From the standpoint of the actual production of knowledge, epistemological debates are largely irrelevant. Sciences rarely, if ever, bother with philosophical debates, tending as they do to take their theoretical object and what Lakatos calls the "hard core" of their problematic as axiomatic. Of course, philosophical debates over science do take place, and these debates are often of great historical significance, involving as they do the *assimilation or repression* of a particular knowledge effect, a particular theoretical practice, and perhaps even the category of scientific practice itself. Althusser's rejection of theoreticism, the idea that epistemological certainty may be achieved by philosophical means, does not imply a weakening of his philosophical commitment to scientific realism or a rejection of his earlier views regarding the theoretical importance of philosophical practice. If anything, his new conception of philosophy intensifies his support for these positions. "Once we have distinguished between the scientific concept of science and the philosophical category," Althusser contends, "we see that the philosophical category is something to be fought for, it is not a given—and the place that it is fought for is philosophy" (Althusser 1976, 116). According to Althusser, what is at stake is knowledge of the world as interpreted by the criteria of contemporary science, and the philosophical basis of the struggle is the acceptance (or rejection) of precisely this world and precisely these criteria.

By characterizing philosophy as "class struggle in theory" in his later works, Althusser seeks to affirm, not deny, the substantive and objective nature of scientific knowledge and to call attention to the material presence of knowledge effects outside the hermetic realm of theoretical production. Knowledges, he argues, have a disruptive, contradictory, and potentially subversive nature because they come into existence in op-

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position to ideological levels of understanding, and by virtue of this opposition they necessarily conflict with the material interests invested in a non-scientific explanation of things. Insofar as society is structured by class struggle, knowledge of "how things really work" always has a "stake" that extends beyond science by way of philosophy into ideology and politics. However, it is important to remember that Althusser is not implying that philosophy is *just* class struggle any more than it is *just* theory. If philosophy is distinct from science by virtue of the political and ideological stakes invested in its theoretical activity, it is also distinct from ideology in its rational methodology and its dependence on the substantive results of scientific practice. Although philosophy produces no knowledge, it remains a necessary aspect of the knowledge process. In contrast to scientific *concepts*, which are substantive and which exist in relation to a theoretical object, philosophical *categories* are formal and have no theoretical object. However, because philosophical practice is contingent on the prior existence of the very knowledge over which it debates, and because the debates themselves must be rational in form, Althusser maintains that the ideological interests animating the positions taken with respect to knowledge must be articulated in terms that favor the victory of science.

Althusser's concepts of science and ideology as social practices imply a practice of philosophy that might be called "limited rationalism" (which assumes only the formal validity of logic, without which the activity of philosophy is incomprehensible) as opposed to the "grand rationalism" of the "Theory of theoretical practice" (which seeks to establish something about reality from the laws of logic). If philosophy must abandon epistemological absolutism, scientific concepts must be defended in terms of their adequacy rather than their truth.

From such a limited rationalist position, the axiological superiority of science over ideology/error remains defensible in terms of Althusser's materialist theses of ontological realism and epistemological relativism (without which the existence and intelligibility of science itself are incomprehensible). The assumption that the world postulated by both ideology and science is really there (that thought about the real logically presupposes the existence of reality independent of thought) justifies the claim that the thresholds of formalization that distinguish science from ideology/error provide not absolute truth (the abolition of the distinction between the real and thought about the real, the outcome of all rationalisms in the grand manner) but relative truth (affirmation of the distinction between the real and thought about the real, but also affirmation

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of the intelligibility and relative adequacy of thought—the modest but far from insignificant outcome of limited rationalism). Ontological realism and epistemological relativism cannot be proved by Althusser, of course, any more than they can be refuted by his opponents, but this is precisely the reason that Althusser continues to stress the necessity (and importance) of philosophy even after he abandons the claim that it has anything substantive to say about the production of knowledge.

This overview of Althusser's theoretical development anticipates a more detailed discussion of the issues it has raised. However, it should give the reader sufficient grasp of Althusser's general position to enable him or her to avoid the simplistic errors and misleading interpretations that proliferate in the existing secondary literature (which has largely missed the continuity between Althusser's early and later writings and which has frequently, often willfully, misrepresented Althusser's self-criticisms).^[2] Having clarified matters somewhat, I will proceed to Althusser's account of Marx's *Capital* as the originary moment of the science of history and from there to a renewed investigation of the concepts of science, philosophy, and ideology that I have as yet addressed only summarily.

Marx's "Epistemological Break"

Marx not only founded a new science, Althusser insists, but also opened up a third "continent" of human knowledge as well, an achievement comparable to the creation of mathematics by the Greeks and of physics by Galileo. There is no point in debating such an extravagant claim, yet the metaphor is an interesting one, for it provides a graphic example of the relationship between knowledge and power that Althusser put forward several years before Foucault made the idea popular (by eliminating all Marxist connotations from it). "A continent, in the sense of the metaphor, is never empty: it is always already 'occupied' by many and varied more or less ideological disciplines which do not know that they belong to that 'continent.' . . . Before Marx, the History Continent was occupied by the philosophies of history, by political economy, etc. The opening-up of a continent by a continental science not only disputes the rights and claims of the former occupants, it also completely restructures the old configuration of the 'continent'" (Althusser 1972, 166). In opening this new "continent," Marx did two things which, according to Althusser, have general significance for the historical explanation of the constitution of a science. First, Marx

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broke radically with existing philosophies of history—the theoretical humanism of Feuerbach and the essentialist and teleological elements of the Hegelian dialectic. Second, as a result of this previous break Marx was able to engage in a "symptomatic" reading of contemporary political economy that yielded, with the publication of the first volume of *Capital*, the problematic of a new science of history.^[3]

Althusser argues that between the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *Capital* there exists a radical break in Marx's thought, a break announced in the "Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach" (1845), which identifies human nature with the ensemble of social relations, thereby rejecting Feuerbach's ahistorical, abstract, and passively contemplative concept of "species being." The break is clearly evident, albeit in a partially negative and sharply polemical form, in the *German Ideology* (1845-46), in which the term *productive forces* emerges as a new strategic concept within Marx's thinking. This break was itself brought about by a philosophical shift from the radical-democratic political position that Marx held in the early 1840s to his adoption of a proletarian class position after his move to Paris in October 1843, a move that exposed him for the first time to an authentic popular political movement—the socialist movement of French and German artisans.

According to Althusser, the seeds of discontent with radical democracy are already present in Marx's "Introduction to the Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," written in 1843. In this work, Marx questions Hegel's inversion of reality and thought, contending that Hegel did not so much overcome the distinction between the world and the Idea as dissolve the empirical into the asserted, but unprovable, Idea as so many contradictory manifestations of the latter's unified essence. Thus for Marx, Hegel's vision of the political state as the mediating, reconciling agency of society and social conflicts is merely another idealist abstraction masking the real contradictions of society—contradictions between the citizen and the common good on the one hand and competitive, bourgeois individualism on the other. Marx's critique of Hegel locates the source of human "alienation"

in society, not in consciousness, but it is still far from constituting a break with the Hegelian dialectic or the anthropological humanism of Feuerbach. However, Althusser contends this philosophical shift did bring about a theoretical crisis in the form of a contradiction between Marx's new political position and the humanist-Hegelian theoretical position to which he still adhered. The *1844 Manuscripts* are properly understood, in Althusser's view, as an attempt to resolve this problem, an

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effort doomed from the start by the contradiction between Marx's desire to provide a materialist explanation of the present condition of the proletariat and the inadequacy of the anthropological and teleological dialectic with which he attempted to elaborate his explanation.

What Marx achieved in the *1844 Manuscripts* was not insignificant. Taking over the Feuerbachian notion of "species being," Marx reformulated it in historical and dynamic terms. For Marx, human nature was defined by human activity—the productive power of labor to transform the given world of nature and thereby the world of society. This view of human nature as a historically determined and variable phenomenon creates a tension within Marx's thought between the still metaphysical notion of alienation, the idea that there is some primal lack behind capitalist social relations, and the newly emerging emphasis on the constitutive role of social relations in defining human nature and society. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels resolve the tension of the *1844 Manuscripts*, albeit in a still tentative and embryonic form. In this massive (more than six hundred pages) and sustained indictment of German "Left Hegelianism," the term *productive forces* emerges as an explanatory principle within a new social theory. Although there remains some confusion between technical and social (class) relations within production, a confusion clarified in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), the concept of "man" or "alienation" no longer plays any explanatory role in *The German Ideology*. Where it continues to be used, it functions as a symptom, a characteristic of capitalist relations of production, and not as a causal explanation of historical development.

The period between 1845 and 1857 was, in Althusser's view, a transitional period in Marx's thinking. During these years the philosophical rejection of the humanist problematic, the emerging conceptualization of the forces and relations of production as class relations and the ultimate explanatory principles of historical development, and the concept of history as a process without a subject were applied to a systematic investigation of political economy. By operating within a problematic other than that of bourgeois economics, namely, the still embryonic historical materialism, Althusser contends that Marx was able to focus on questions and pose problems that Smith and Ricardo were driven toward without being able either to recognize or to resolve—for to do so would have put into question the capitalist system which they were attempting to defend as well as explain. By examining capitalist society in terms of existing notions of surplus labor and the labor theory of value and by seeing these as historical-social rather than natural rela-

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tionships, Marx was able to formulate the concept of capitalist exploitation in terms of relationships between wages, labor, and capital. From this reformulation followed the concept of the mode of production and with it the structural contradiction between the forces and relations of production, as well as the topographical metaphor of "superstructure," which defines the ways in which men and women become conscious of this contradiction and fight it out—both clearly expressed in the 1859 "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy."

By the publication of the first volume of *Capital* in 1867, Marx had, in Althusser's opinion, rounded out his new science of history and formulated the basic concepts of historical materialism. Surplus value rigorously specified the logic of capitalist exploitation and the mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production. The concept of surplus value was in turn essential for the development of a general concept of capitalist relations of production since it laid bare the relationships of class power embedded in the social relations of production. This new concept forced Marx to reverse his earlier tendency (in the 1859 "Preface") to privilege the forces of production at the expense of the relations of production and to recognize the latter as an integral aspect of the dynamics of a capitalist mode of production. According to Althusser, not only does *Capital* contain the basic concepts of historical materialism, but these concepts are either absolutely new—as are *mode of production, social formation, surplus value, infrastructure, and superstructure*—or have been given new and different meanings—as have *dialectic, class, and class struggle*. Significantly, in *Capital* the concept of "fetishization of commodities," often misrepresented as a survival of the problematic of alienation, is clearly posited by Marx as a product of capitalism and not its source, an unequivocal indication that Marx has rejected the humanist problematic of his early works. Class and class struggle are the new explanatory principles of history, and the struggle revolves around surplus value. While perhaps Hegelian in its mode of presentation, *Capital* lacks any reconciliation of the contradictions of capitalism, any overarching moral-ethical teleology or imperative.

The concepts of *Capital* not only have new meanings, but they actually function in a new way, a way that Althusser, looking back on his interpretation of Marx, describes in the following manner:

I showed that *in practice* Marxist theory functioned quite differently from the old pre-Marxist conceptions. It seemed to me that the system of basic concepts of Marxist theory functioned like the theory of a science: as a basic conceptual apparatus, opened to the infinitude of its object, that is designed

ceaselessly to pose and confront new problems and ceaselessly to produce new pieces of knowledge . . . it functioned as a (provisional) truth, for the (endless) conquest of new knowledge, itself capable (in certain conjunctures) of renewing this first truth. In comparison, it appeared that the basic theory of the old conceptions, far from functioning as a (provisional) *truth*, for the production of new pieces of knowledge, actually tried in practice to operate as the truth of History, as complete, definitive and absolute knowledge of History. (Althusser 1976, 154)

What Marx accomplished, then, was an "epistemological" break with certain views of history—Feuerbachian humanism, Hegelian dialectics—a break that resulted in a new way of thinking about history. Althusser insists that this new way of thinking is scientific because it provided Marx not only with an alternative explanatory mode or problematic but also with a new and more powerful level of explanation. By means of his epistemological break, Marx created a problematic capable of criticizing bourgeois political economy for its errors, such as its fetishization of the commodity form, but also capable of explaining the fetishization of commodities as a necessary phenomenological form within bourgeois society. Althusser agrees with Marx in labeling these rejected notions ideological, that is, erroneous, but goes on to emphasize a fact whose significance Marx himself seems not to have fully appreciated: such a designation is possible only retrospectively. It is only after the emergence of historical materialism from its ideological environment, that is, only from the point of view of the Marxist problematic, that political economy is erroneous. "Ideology [ideology/error] can only be identified from outside, after the event," Althusser insists, "from the standpoint of a Marxist science of history . . . not simply from the standpoint of the existence of Marxist science as *science* [a Theory of theoretical practice], but from the standpoint of Marxist science as the science of *history*" (Althusser 1976, 155).

Despite its significance, both as an example of what Althusser views as a "break" between ideology and science and as a political position within the spirited controversy over Marx's intellectual development, I will not comment further on the debates over Althusser's interpretation of Marx. Suffice it to say that Althusser's views have been defended and developed by certain Marx scholars and bitterly opposed by others. We are already familiar with Althusser's criticisms of humanism, empiricism, historicism, and the Hegelian dialectic; whether or not Marx actually subscribed to them cannot occupy us here, nor is it essential to the present discussion. The basic concepts that Althusser finds in *Capital*

tal must ultimately stand or fall independently of their origins. Despite the undeniable political "stakes" in the philosophical debates of "what Marx *really* meant," here we can do no more than acknowledge the existence of those debates.

Beyond Hermeneutics: A "Symptomatic" Reading of Capital

Of more interest is the peculiar "hermeneutic" method Althusser develops to interrogate Marx's text and the general applicability of this method for the history of symbolic structures and practices. Althusser begins by addressing the question of reading a text. How does one read Marx in order to discover the general structure of the science of history of which *Capital* is a concrete effect? The question of a "reading" is already a loaded one, of course, because Althusser rejects any theory of reading that requires only a "properly informed gaze" in order to reconcile the intentions of the author, the essence of the text, and the understanding of the reader. In an impeccably Derridean formulation, Althusser refuses a reading that stops at the level of the manifest content of the text, an "idea of reading which makes a written discourse the immediate transparency of the true and the real discourse of a voice" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 16). Althusser's rejection of a manifest reading, however, not only advances beyond theoretical humanism, the subject-subject model of interpretation (communication or empathy) characteristic of hermeneutics, but also expresses Althusser's opposition to the interpretive nihilism characteristic of the bastard children of hermeneutics, poststructuralism and postmodernism. What Althusser proposes is a scientific or "symptomatic" reading of the text, a reading premised first on a dialectic between the problematic whose structural principles govern the reading and the structural principles that constitute the unconscious structure of the text and second on the objective reality of the text as a social-historical production and the objective validity of the problematic for which the text is a theoretical object—conditions that permit Althusser to defend the results of such a reading as something more than an imaginative exercise.

For practitioners of traditional hermeneutic methodology, the social world is not simply produced by social agents but is also explicable only in terms of the meanings attached to their activities by the agents themselves. Accepting essentially the same definition of scientific practice as positivists do, advocates of hermeneutics go on to argue that

given the unique and autonomous nature of human practice, there can be no scientific understanding of society. Because any scientific analysis of social phenomena is itself a social practice, that is, of the same nature as its

theoretical object, such analysis can have no objective purchase on social phenomena. Althusser accepts the *epistemological* relativism implied by the hermeneutic position but rejects the *ontological* relativism implied by the hermeneutic claim that social reality is nothing more than what agents think it is. Social phenomena, like natural phenomena, are ontologically real for Althusser, and because they are real, they can be the object of scientific knowledge and explanation. Epistemological relativism, in other words, does not imply judgmental relativism, a nihilistic position that Althusser rejects as absurd. For any social practice to occur, there must be reasons by which social agents act (consciously or unconsciously); furthermore, if these reasons (and the structured habitus that produces them) were totally inadequate, totally at variance with objective reality, society could not exist.

For Althusser, there can be no "innocent reading," no reading that does not involve, at least implicitly, a theory that determines the character of the reading, nor can there be a final or definitive reading (corresponding to epistemological absolutism in philosophy). However—and this is what separates Althusser decisively from hermeneutic tradition generally and postmodernism specifically—the range of possible readings is not infinite but is limited by the problematic of the reading (with its relative degree of explanatory power) as well as the structure of the text itself (with its real existence as a product of a specific historical-social conjuncture). As Derrida says, there is no "outside" of the text, because we are always inside a realm of meaning that makes the text accessible to us in some manner or other. However, given Althusser's materialist coupling of epistemological relativism and ontological realism, not all realms of meaning have the same explanatory power. For Althusser, the process of reading necessarily entails a hermeneutic moment, but it is not therefore limited to a hermeneutic level of adequacy. At the most superficial level, we read a text as if it were written by ourselves; at a more sophisticated level, we comprehend it dialogically, learning its language and discovering the indigenous structure of its meanings. This latter reading is no doubt "thicker" than its descriptive predecessor, but, from Althusser's perspective, it is not any "deeper." Reading becomes deeper, what Althusser calls a symptomatic reading, to the extent that it is governed by a problematic grounded not in the experiential world of a subject but in the explana-

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tory world of a science. Given the fact that it is a material product of an objectively real historical conjuncture, a text may become the object of a scientific level of understanding that sublates the hermeneutic reading and produces an objective interpretation and a causal explanation of the text. Reading depth is achieved, Althusser insists, only when the text is treated as a product, not a cause.

Of course, the meaning *in* the text adds its own specific effectivity to the reading of the text. Even a symptomatic reading may be affected, sometimes dramatically, by its hermeneutical moment, particularly when the problematic in the text possesses greater explanatory power (with respect to the same theoretical object) than does the problematic of the reading. The reading of *Capital* that resulted in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* is of this latter type. It is a reading governed by a theoretical framework that is, Althusser acknowledges, still relatively underdeveloped—theoretically informed by Marxism but also, as we have seen, by the rationalist philosophy of Spinoza and the historical epistemology of Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem, to which we will return momentarily. While the ideological effects of this theoretical framework are manifested in certain strongly held philosophical positions (the objectivity and intelligibility of scientific knowledge, the scientific nature of Marxism, and so on), the problematic itself lacks a firm structure and internal consistency. As a result, the hermeneutic moment predominates, a moment described in the rationalist terminology of Althusser's early works as "philosophical": "We read *Capital* as philosophers. . . . We posed it the question of its *relation to its object*, hence both the question of the specificity of its *object*, and the question of the specificity of its *relation* to that object, i.e., the question of the nature of the type of discourse set to work to handle this object, the question of scientific discourse. And since there can never be a definition without a difference, we posed *Capital* the question of the specific difference both of its object and of its discourse" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 14).

The fact that Althusser's "philosophical" reading is couched in psychoanalytic terminology need not concern us greatly: Althusser seeks to emulate Freud's capacity to explain phenomena and events in terms of the structural mechanisms that generate them, a characteristic of any science and not particular to psychoanalysis. The important point is that the object of reading is knowledge of the structural mechanisms that make the text possible. Althusser's reading is "symptomatic" in the sense that "it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same moment relates it to a different text, present as the necessary

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absence in the first" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 28). The identity of the "latent" structure of the text, its problematic, is not constituted by its "manifest" content, the specific propositions that the text asserts, or even by the intentions of its author; it is constituted, Althusser argues, by the principles of meaning that condition the production of text and the problems that it is the function of the text to resolve. What a problematic makes visible, however, it also makes invisible by a system of exclusions perpetuated and sanctioned by the existence and peculiar structure of the latent structure itself. Thus a symptomatic reading reveals the unconscious infrastructure of a text by investigating what it does not, or rather cannot, say as well as what it actually does say. Both presence

and absence are interpreted by Althusser as overdetermined and unevenly developed effects of contradictions articulated on each other within the infrastructure of the text.

Although a symptomatic reading is neither innocent nor definitive, Althusser rejects pedestrian forms of deconstruction that find in the nature of writing *only* the differential, and ultimately equal, nature of all structures of meaning. If no reading is correct in an absolute sense, it does not follow that one reading is as good as another or that any reading will do. The symptomatic reading of British political economy conducted by Marx and the symptomatic reading of *Capital* conducted by Althusser himself are grounded in a body of concepts that is historical but not arbitrary. Furthermore, this body of concepts emerges with Marx, but often not explicitly and certainly not in any final form. As a result, Althusser's symptomatic reading of Marx is both interpretive and productive, seeking not only to reveal but also to develop the problematic of Marx's text. The open-ended, unfinished character of both Marx's work and Althusser's reading of Marx explains the apparent paradox behind Althusser's insistence "that the precondition of a reading of Marx is a Marxist theory of the differential nature of theoretical formations and their history . . . an indispensable circle in which the application of Marxist theory to Marx himself appears to be the absolute precondition of an understanding of Marx" (Althusser 1969, 38).

The paradox is only apparent because it is never a matter of a single reading of *Capital* but of successive readings involving considerable theoretical labor and the application of concepts explicitly given by Marx (as well as those that can be disengaged from his works). "This critical reading seems to constitute a circle, since we appear to be expecting to obtain Marxist philosophy from its own application. . . . This apparent circle should not surprise us: all 'production' of knowledge implies it in its process. . . . [W]e expect, from the *theoretical work*

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of these principles applied to *Capital*, their development and enrichment as well as refinements in their rigor" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 74). However, unlike the hermeneutic circle that it otherwise resembles, the scientific circle described by Althusser is open at any moment to a critical evaluation of its results, an evaluation whose possibility is conditional on the objective existence of the text as a social product and historical materialism as a scientific problematic. Althusser's symptomatic reading is circular but not vicious: "the circle implied by this operation . . . is the dialectical circle of the question asked of an object as to its nature, on the basis of a theoretical problematic which in putting its object to the test puts itself to the test of the object" (Althusser 1969, 38).

The Historical Epistemology of Bachelard and Canguilhem

Althusser's notion of a symptomatic reading, divested of theoretician implications, initiates a return to the problem of the production of knowledge from a historical perspective pioneered by French philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard and continued by his successor as the head of the Institut d'Histoire des Sciences at the University of Paris, Georges Canguilhem. There is no need to repeat here the excellent introduction to Bachelard and Canguilhem provided by Dominique Lecourt's *Marxism and Epistemology* (1975), but we might take a moment to summarize those aspects of their work to which Althusser is most indebted and to make clear the limits of that indebtedness as well, limits that are rather more sharply defined than is generally recognized by those unfamiliar with Lecourt's fine study.^[9]

In a series of books including *Le nouvel esprit scientifique* (1934; English translation, 1984) and *La philosophie du non* (1940; English translation, 1964), Bachelard established himself as the first to recognize the importance of historicity to the philosophy of science. Bachelard recognized the theoretical object of the history and philosophy of sciences as a set of historically determinate relations of production of concepts and took the unusual step, for a philosopher, of respecting the autonomy of scientific practice. Thirty years before Kuhn rediscovered certain of his insights, Bachelard put forward the proposition that every particular science produces its own norms of truth at each moment of its history, thereby dissolving the rationalist chains that bound the philosophy of science to what he called the "philosophy of philosophers."

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By invalidating the absolute category of Truth, Bachelard denied philosophy the right to tell the truth of the sciences and proposed instead to tell the truth about the Truth of the philosophers. This smaller truth was the fact that the central determination of all philosophy, insofar as it contains a theory of knowledge, is the specific relation of dependency of philosophy on the actual production of science.

Bachelard insisted on the internal autonomy of scientific discourse, the interdependence of the concepts that make up its theoretical structure or problematic, and also the necessity of a history of science in terms of its own internal structures of theoretical production. Innovations and progress in the sciences are neither the result of linear evolution nor the historical accumulation of factual information. Rather, they are achieved by sweeping transformations of existing conceptual frameworks, revolutionary transformations whereby earlier conceptualizations are rejected, replaced, or reformulated by new theoretical constructs. Bachelard rejected philosophies of knowledge and epistemology in favor of a historical epistemology and the concept of scientific

practice as a production. Philosophy of science must be separated from the philosophy of philosophers, he maintained, because the latter constitutes a repository of non-scientific images and notions, ranging from idealism to empiricism, which invade scientific discourse and become "epistemological obstacles" to scientific thinking. The only appropriate philosophy of science, Bachelard concludes, is a philosophy of negation, a rejection of the philosophy of philosophers that attempts to construct absolutes from the historical constructs of science.

As Bachelard's epistemology is historical, so the history of science practiced by Canguilhem is epistemological. In works such as *The Normal and the Pathological* (1943; English translation, 1978) and *La formation du concept de réflexe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (1955), Canguilhem grasped the fact that historical epistemology imposes a new unity on the scientific study of historically specific scientific practices. For Canguilhem, epistemology is no longer understood as a philosophical search for formal guarantees of certainty; rather, it consists in disengaging—discovering and analyzing—the problems posed or evaded, resolved or dissolved by the actual practice of scientists. For Canguilhem, the actual practice of scientists, while relatively autonomous, exists in no reified intellectual sphere; instead, it is firmly inscribed within a historically specific "cultural frame." Therefore, while the progress of knowledge is discontinuous, it is never accidental.

Canguilhem's work in the history of the biological sciences is a

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succession of unmaskings (of historical "accidents") and revelations (of historical necessity). To accomplish this task, it is necessary to bring out the specificity of the theoretical object of the sciences and to formulate the historical concept of scientific problems. For example, the history of the concept of reflex motion is obtained by asking what a theory of muscular motion and the action of the nerves must contain for a notion such as that of reflex motion to find in it a sense of truth. Posing the question of the concept in this way enables Canguilhem to discount the traditional paternity attributed to the concept, namely, the mechanistic physiology of Descartes, by demonstrating that reflex motion is unthinkable within the structure of a Cartesian problematic (wherein the motion of the "spirits" from the brain toward the muscle is strictly a one-way movement). The concept becomes conceivable, Canguilhem demonstrates, only with the vitalist theory of Thomas Willis, who by thinking the specificity of life in an integral manner and by assimilating life to light made it possible to think the movement of nerve and muscle as the reflection (analogous to optical laws) of an impulse from the periphery toward the center then back toward its starting point. By this example Canguilhem establishes two methodological principles: first, the history of concepts must be examined in terms of historical problematics and the problems posed and resolved by them; second, the theoretical and practical motives informing the way a science has gone about posing and resolving problems must be demonstrated as part of an adequate historical explanation of scientific practice. For Canguilhem, science takes the form of a struggle or a dispute and the function of the historian is to analyze its phases—not simply to draw up a balance sheet measured by the Truth of the present, but to provide a rational account of the sudden changes of terrain, the historical conjunctures that constitute that history.

Even these brief remarks are sufficient to demonstrate what Lecourt calls the "truly inestimable theoretical debt" that Althusser's reading of *Capital* owes to the historical epistemology of Bachelard and Canguilhem, a debt Althusser himself refers to as "incalculable" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 323). However, Althusser also quietly insists that he has "gone beyond" the work of Bachelard and Canguilhem in "certain ways." Although he does not elaborate, it is clear enough that the "certain ways" to which Althusser refers pertain to the historical materialist framework within which he grounds scientific practice. For Althusser, it is not simply a matter of Marxism returning to epistemology from

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the standpoint of the history of science in order to enrich its own self-understanding and rectify certain of its own concepts; it is also, and even more important, a matter of establishing historical epistemology and the history of science as a regional field within the general science of history. Because of his historical materialist problematic, Althusser's debt to Bachelard and Canguilhem is critical in nature, in this respect analogous to Marx's dependence on Smith and Ricardo. As Marx was able to interrogate British political economy as to the questions the latter could not answer or even ask, so Althusser forces French historical epistemology beyond the limits of its own self-understanding. Lacking a science of history, in particular a concept of ideology as a social instance, neither Bachelard nor Canguilhem is able to produce an adequate concept of the social nature of scientific practice.

Bachelard attempts to ground science in psychology, referring to his own philosophical practice as a "psychoanalysis of objective knowledge" and defining the scientific imagination as one of the "natural inclinations" of the human soul—inclinations that also include poetic reverie and the "common sense" of immediate experience. Canguilhem uses his brilliant historical investigations of vitalism as a philosophical position pertinent to the development of biology to ground the history of the life sciences in a "philosophy of life," an essentialist and teleological "unity" of the "concept of life" and "life itself" as manifested in the scientific discovery of DNA. In rejecting such psychological and biological explanations of scientific practice in favor of the determination of social structures, Althusser demonstrates convincingly that his concepts of science and philosophy are not reducible to those of Bachelard or Canguilhem, that they do not refer to precisely the same theoretical objects or function in

precisely the same way. Althusser's concept of ideology, as Ben Brewster (1971) quite correctly points out, is as invisible to Bachelard's philosophy of science as the concept of surplus value is to Ricardo's political economy. It is worth noting that shortly after Althusser's reformulation of the concept of philosophy in 1967, Canguilhem himself introduced the concept of ideology into his own lectures (see Canguilhem 1988). Althusser neither rejects Bachelard and Canguilhem as "bourgeois" philosophers nor substitutes their problematic for that of Marx; rather, he reads their works in a realist and a materialist manner, accepting and applying those concepts that increase the amplitude of historical materialism while rejecting and replacing those that do not.

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Beyond Historicism: The Relative Autonomy of Scientific Practice

Although Althusser's epistemological relativism insists on the transitive nature of scientific knowledge, it is not a form of historicism. It does not imply the reduction of scientific practice to nothing more than a reflection of its social and economic context, a "superstructure" whose theoretical object is merely a historical illusion and whose knowledges have validity only for the specific historical conjuncture that produced them. One of the dominant themes of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* is the specific effectivity of scientific practice, which gives its effects a certain autonomy relative to the conditions of its existence:

Science can no more be ranged within the category "superstructures" than can language. . . . To make of science a superstructure is to think of it as one of those "organic" ideologies which form such a close "bloc" with the structure that they have the same "history" as it does! . . . As for science, it may well arise from an ideology, detach itself from its field in order to constitute itself as a science, but precisely this detachment, this "break," inaugurates a new form of historical existence and temporality which together save science (at least in certain historical conditions that insure the real continuity of its own history—conditions that have not always existed) from the common fate of a single history: that of the "historical bloc" unifying structure and superstructure. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 133)

The problem in these early works, of course, is Althusser's failure to recognize consistently the irreducible gap that separates the philosophical defense of the *category* of science from the *concept* of science as a social practice, a failure that results in the rationalist notion of a "Theory of theoretical practice" and the ghost of epistemological absolutism that haunts the pages of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. However, as I have already indicated, the most striking thing about rereading Althusser's early works in light of his rejection of theoreticism is how much of his original position remains intact. Although defined historically rather than philosophically, scientific practice remains a legitimate theoretical object for history, that is, "a minimum of generality necessary to be able to grasp a concrete object" (Althusser 1976, 112). Althusser's proposition that science is constituted by the transformation of ideology into knowledge by means of theory holds up even after the difference between science and ideology is reformulated in functional rather than rationalist terms. Ideology remains, as Althusser initially introduced it in *For Marx*, a matter of the "lived" relation between individuals and their world (or rather a reflected form of this uncon-

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scious relation) even after it is made clear that this relation functions as a habitus, not as a science. Ideology is both a specific form of consciousness and a consciousness of a specific form: "This relation appears as '*conscious*' on the condition that it is *unconscious*. . . a relation between relations, a second-degree relation. In ideology people do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence" (Althusser 1969, 233).

The concept of ideology "presupposes both a real relation and an '*imaginary*,' '*lived*' relation," according to Althusser, "the expression of the relation between social subjects and their 'world,' that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1969, 233-34). Science distinguishes itself from its ideological origins by crossing certain thresholds of formalization that distance scientific discourse from subject-centered experience and interests. For Althusser, the essential difference between ideological practice and scientific practice is that the latter is accomplished under the control of explicit rules or rules capable of being made explicit and therefore susceptible to revision. Once it is made clear that these propositions pertain to social facts and assert nothing with respect to the absolute truth value of a particular science, there is no reason to reject the following claim, made by Althusser in *Reading Capital*, regarding the mode of production of scientific concepts and its relative autonomy:

[Scientific practice] is its own criterion and contains in itself definite protocols with which to validate the quality of its product, i.e., the criteria of the scientificity of the products of scientific practice. This is exactly what happens in the real practice of the sciences: once they are truly constituted and developed they have no need for verification from external practices to declare the knowledges they produce to be "true," i.e., to be knowledges. At least for the knowledges they have sufficiently mastered, they themselves provide the criterion of validity of their knowledges—this criterion coinciding perfectly with the strict forms of the exercise of the scientific practice considered. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 59)

From the standpoint of the science of history, scientific discourse is a relatively autonomous social practice whose mental and material dimensions may be understood and explained without recourse to the philosophical category of truth. However, a firm, non-philosophical distinction between science and ideology remains absolutely essential for such a thing as a history of science to exist. Such a distinction is

expressed by Althusser by means of the concept of a *knowledge effect*, the "peculiarity of those special productions which are knowledges" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 62). Although no science emerges *ex nihilo*, and despite the retrospective and differential nature of the science/ideology distinction, Althusser insists there can be no confusion between the scientific and ideological functions at work within a given discursive practice and no mistake with regard to which function is predominant. Ideological discourse is, above all else, a subject-centered discourse that expresses and communicates the way human beings identify with or internalize the existing world in order to exist as social agents. Ideology is a field in which personal and group interests predominate. Scientific discourse, by contrast, may have ideological effects, but its primary characteristic is its relative indifference to personal and group interests. Unlike ideology, science is a relatively object-centered field whose goal is primarily knowledge of the structural mechanisms that constitute the natural and social worlds.

Science is a higher-order discourse, a metalanguage whose discontinuity with respect to ideology Althusser expresses by means of Bachelard's concept of an epistemological break. An epistemological break involves simultaneously a rejection of the whole pattern and frame of reference of "pre-scientific" notions and the construction of a new "scientific" problematic. The negative moment in the emergence of a new science consists of the retroactive "creation" of a discourse designated as "erroneous" [ideology/error] whose cognitive pretensions must be discredited. In other words, it is only from the standpoint of a science that ideology/error becomes visible: "Ideology [ideology/error] never says, 'I am ideological.' It is necessary to be outside ideology, i.e., in scientific knowledge, to be able to say, 'I am in ideology.' . . . Ideology has no outside (for itself), but at the same time it is nothing but outside (for science)" (Althusser 1971, 175). Thus the positive moment of the emergence of a new science, Althusser insists, is always the "discovery" of a new causal mechanism and a new "theoretical object" constituted or "brought into view" by a new conceptual framework or problematic.

The specific effectivity of a science is determined by the nature of its problematic, which also constitutes the relative autonomy of a science in relation to the field of ideology from which it sprang. Because scientific practice is historically specific, Althusser insists that the problematic of a science constitutes an irreducible limit to its vision: "[A science] can only pose problems on the terrain and within the horizon of a definite theoretical structure, its problematic, which constitutes its

absolute and definite condition of possibility, and hence the absolute determination of the forms in which all problems must be posed, at any given moment in the science" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 25). However, it is the essential, constitutive characteristic of science that, unlike ideology, it is capable of posing problems within a definite context, pertaining to a specific object, and resolvable by theoretical means. Ideological practice, Althusser maintains, poses not problems but solutions; rather, it poses problems on the basis of a solution known in advance, pseudo-problems that are never more than a reflection of their answer. According to Althusser, ideological practice reduces knowledge to a phenomenon of recognition: "the [ideological] formulation of a *problem* is merely the theoretical expression of conditions which allow a *solution* already produced outside the process of knowledge because imposed by extra-theoretical instances and exigencies (by religious, ethical, political or other 'interests') to recognize itself in an artificial problem manufactured to serve it both as a theoretical mirror and as a practical justification" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 52).

For Althusser, sciences produce knowledges, but the latter do not simply offer themselves up innocently; this process or mode of theoretical production is the object of the history of science. The general concept of scientific practice was initially defined by Althusser in *For Marx* in terms of three thresholds of formalization or "generality," schematically designated as Generalities I, II, and III (Althusser 1969, 182-93). By *Generalities I*, Althusser understands those concepts, facts, observations, or whatever that constitute the "raw material" for a theoretical practice. *Generalities II* designates the problematic by which theoretical operations are performed on this raw material to produce *Generalities III*, which are new knowledges. Generalities II and III should be clear enough by now; in any case, their value as concepts is unaffected by Althusser's subsequent repudiation of theoreticist tendencies in his early works. For Generalities I, however, the implications of Althusser's self-criticism are not so straightforward. While Althusser has remained vague regarding this "raw material," he is at least firm on two fundamental points: first, Generalities I are objective, existentially real social phenomena; second, they are "always already worked up" material: that is, they are always, to a certain degree, the product of previous theoretical practice. While it is always the case that the raw material of scientific practice is real, it is never the case that scientific practice operates directly on the real to which its raw material refers. For Althusser, there is no pure experience of reality.

After the break that constitutes a scientific practice, knowledge de-

velops by an internal process that Althusser characterizes in terms of discontinuous shifts and leaps. We have already seen, for example, how the differential nature of Structural Marxist discourse operates to deepen knowledge within each level of its problematic and to broaden knowledge by constituting new and distinct levels. Knowledge at any given level may correct knowledge at another but not necessarily all other levels. By positing scientific discourse in this way, Althusser is capable of explaining the otherwise vexing fact that knowledge progresses (continuity) while at the same time changes (discontinuity). The process of knowledge production, in other words, is no more immune to the contradictions of uneven development than is any other social practice. First, given its differential nature, no science can ever eliminate completely the tensions that emerge between levels of explanation that are irreducibly distinct. Second, as it develops, a science accumulates anomalies and contradictions as well as knowledges. While these anomalies and contradictions may be resolved internally, this is not necessarily the case; where it is not the case—that is, where the anomalies and contradictions become too disruptive—the result may be a new epistemological break.

Despite its simplicity, or perhaps because of it, Althusser's concept of a mode of theoretical production is capable of explaining both the historical basis and the relative autonomy of science independently of the claims to epistemological absolutism with which it was invested in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. Ideology is not simply a theoretical input or raw material for a science; it is also a necessary condition of the existence for scientific practice. The relative autonomy of a science is relative precisely to the ideology within which it swims, inseparable from ideology insofar as science exists always and only in continual opposition to its ideological environs. The objectivity of science is constituted by its problematic, but a problematic always operates in an ideological and political conjuncture that it can never completely or finally transcend. Science is somehow always behind or at a distance from the limits of its problematic, and it can never know these limits in any sense other than that defined by its own practice. As a result of this ambiguity, a science must perpetually reject its prehistory. "Every recognized science," Althusser insists, "not only has emerged from ideology but continues endlessly to do so (its prehistory remaining always contemporary, something like its alter-ego) by rejecting what it considers to be error" (Althusser 1976, 113). Because science exists only in and through ideology, a science never breaks cleanly and irreversibly

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with "ideology in general"; rather, every science breaks incompletely and continuously with a specific ideology or ideology/error. The history of science is ultimately no more than the history of those theoretical and material struggles manifested as epistemological breaks and ongoing struggles between science and ideology.

If his early works seem overly optimistic in stressing the effectivity of science in relation to ideology, Althusser's emphasis on the effectivity of ideology in relation to science after 1967 strikes a much more pessimistic note. The intrusion of ideology into scientific practice is inevitable, Althusser argues, because, even though a science is constituted by its theoretical problematic, the scientific practice is performed by human beings constituted as social agents and operating within a socially determinate apparatus of institutions and relations. In *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, Althusser contends that ideology invades theoretical practice through the agent of scientific practice, the scientist, and that the Trojan horse of this invasion is philosophy, specifically what Althusser calls the "spontaneous philosophy" of scientists themselves.

By the term *spontaneous philosophy* Althusser understands something more precise than the "worldview" of scientists; he refers specifically to their philosophy of science. According to Althusser, the spontaneous philosophy of scientists has two elements: the first, which Althusser calls "intra-scientific," is based on the experience that scientists have of their own scientific practice; the second, "extra-scientific" element is derived from "convictions" and "beliefs" that come from outside scientific practice, from philosophy, religion, politics, and so on. Althusser contends that the first element is always materialist (science always affirms the realism of its knowledge), while the latter may be either materialist or idealist depending on the extent to which it defends or attacks a given science's knowledge effects. Significantly, in *The Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, Althusser stresses the dominance of the "extra-scientific" over the "intra-scientific" element, sharply qualifying the internal purity of the knowledge process that he accentuated in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. By asserting the primacy of the social over the theoretical within the ideological make-up of scientists themselves, Althusser acknowledges the power of ideology and philosophy to impede, distort, or even subvert the production (and reception) of knowledge effects. Far from being the impersonal and objective "Theory of theoretical practice" it was thought to be in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, philosophy emerges in Althusser's later

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works as a theoretical and ideological battleground where, among other things, the category of science itself is at stake.

Beyond Rationalism: Philosophy as Class Struggle in Theory

If Althusser was guilty of theoretically overestimating philosophy in his early works, he underestimated it politically.

As he himself points out in the 1967 preface to the Italian translation of *For Marx*, "I left vague [in *For Marx*] the difference distinguishing philosophy from science that constitutes philosophy proper: the organic relation between every philosophy as a theoretical *discipline* even within its theoretical forms of existence and exigencies, and *politics*" (Althusser 1969, 15). In proposing a new concept of philosophy as "class struggle in theory," Althusser not only abandons his earlier project of a general and independent philosophy but also defends a "new practice" of philosophy, a practice located on a specific terrain between ideological and scientific practice. In *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Althusser explains the change in his concept of philosophy:

(1) Philosophy is not Absolute Knowledge; it is neither the Science of Sciences nor the Science of Practices. . . . [I]t does not possess Absolute Truth, either about any science or about any practice. In particular, it does not possess the Absolute Truth about, nor power over political practice. On the contrary, Marxism affirms the primacy of politics over philosophy. (2) But philosophy is nevertheless not "the servant of politics," as philosophy was once "the servant of theology": because of its position *in theory* and of its "*relative autonomy*." (3) What is *at stake* in philosophy is the real problems of the social practices. As philosophy is not (a) science, its relation to these problems is not a *technical relation of application*. Philosophy does not provide formulae to be "applied." Philosophy cannot be applied. Philosophy works in quite a different way: by modifying the *position* of the problems, by modifying the *relation* between the practices and their object. (Althusser 1976, 58, n. 18)

For Althusser, science and politics together define the conditions of existence as well as the criteria of intelligibility of all philosophical practice. However, philosophy cannot be reduced to either the one or the other; in fact, it exerts an influence of its own on politics and theory. Philosophy, "because of its abstraction, rationality and system . . . is 'in' the field of theory," Althusser explains, "but it is not (a) science" (Althusser 1976, 37). Philosophy has no part in the production of knowledges, yet "outside of its relationship to the sciences, philosophy

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would not exist" (Althusser 1990, 109). Borrowing a phrase from Lenin, Althusser describes the function of philosophy as "drawing a dividing line" between science and ideology, producing, in Althusser's words, "critical distinctions: that is . . . 'sorting out' or separating ideas from each other, and even . . . forging the *appropriate* ideas for making their *separation* and its necessity visible" (Althusser 1990, 75). Philosophy intervenes in the field of science and "theoretical ideologies"—for Althusser, theoretical ideologies are "in the last instance . . . forms of practical ideology transformed within theory" (Althusser 1990, 106)—to create something new: a categorical distinction between "the scientific" and "the ideological," a philosophical-epistemological distinction couched in theoretical-scientific language but permeated throughout by political-ideological values.

Philosophy intervenes in the indistinct reality in which the sciences, theoretical ideologies and philosophy itself figure. . . . The result of philosophical intervention . . . is to draw, in this indistinct reality, a line of demarcation that separates, in each case, the scientific from the ideological. This line of demarcation may be completely covered over, denied or effaced in most philosophies: it is essential to their existence, despite the denegation. Its denegation is simply the common form of its existence. . . . [T]he enigma of philosophy is contained in the difference between the reality in which it intervenes (the domain of the *sciences* + theoretical *ideologies* + philosophy) and the result that its intervention produces (the distinction between the *scientific* and the *ideological*). This difference appears in the form of a difference between *words* . . . on the one hand nouns; on the other, their adjectival forms. . . . Is this not simply a nominal distinction, a terminological difference and therefore merely apparent? . . . [D]oes not the whole of philosophy consist simply in repeating . . . what is already inscribed in reality? Hence in modifying words without producing anything new? Yes, philosophy acts by modifying words and their order. But they are theoretical words, and it is difference between words that allows something *new* in reality, something that was hidden and covered, to be *seen*. The expression *the scientific* is not identical to the expression *the sciences*; the expression *the ideological* is not identical to the expression *theoretical ideologies* 'The scientific' and 'the ideological' are *philosophical* categories and the contradictory couple they form is brought to light by philosophy. . . . [T]he result of the philosophical intervention, the line that reveals the scientific and the ideological by separating them, is *entirely philosophical*. (Althusser 1990, 106-7)

Philosophy is a discursive domain in which science is assimilated by society, a necessary but not necessarily a smooth process. Often philosophy "draws a dividing line" between conflicting positions represented within the political and ideological spheres by practical and theoretical

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ideologies on the one hand and scientific knowledges on the other. The result may be spectacular and bitterly contested confrontations, which are ultimately, in Althusser's view, struggles for power. This should not really surprise us, Althusser explains, for while science is objective (relatively less subject-centered and more formally rigorous than ideology), it is never neutral: science is always against ideology/error, and the latter always reflects material conditions and practical interests. While knowledge defines the nature of scientific practice, power defines the "stakes" resulting from the production of new knowledge effects, and for Althusser, the two cannot be adequately thought in isolation from each other. Philosophy is always an intervention in this power struggle. The process of drawing a dividing line between science and ideology, Althusser reminds us, "irresistibly recalls a seizure of power or an *installation in power* A seizure of power is political, it does not have an object, it has a stake, precisely the power, and an aim, the effect of that power" (Althusser 1971, 58). The dividing line, in other words, is drawn within the realm of theory but not in the realm of science. It is drawn precisely at the intersection of science and ideology, a state of affairs that leads Althusser to envisage philosophy as a political intervention carried out in theoretical form. The tension between its political-ideological and its theoretical-scientific aspects constitute the specific effectivity of what Althusser calls the "philosophy effect."

Philosophy fulfills its function by means of a discourse distinct from

Philosophy fulfills its function by means of a discourse distinct from both ideological and scientific discourse. In contrast to ideology, philosophy is not necessarily restricted to subject-centered discourse, which is to say that it may be theoretical. However, unlike science, the discourse of philosophy lacks both a theoretical object as well as substantive concepts that may be developed or corrected to provide a growing body of knowledge. Philosophy,

Althusser insists, makes no advances or breaks. New philosophical categories emerge, to be sure, but for Althusser these are simply new ways of elaborating a never-ending opposition between idealism and materialism. The history of philosophy [is] . . . the history of an age-old struggle between two tendencies: idealism and materialism. . . . [However,] it is impossible to prove [the ultimate principles of materialism or idealism] because they cannot be the object of a knowledge . . . comparable with that of science which does prove the properties of its objects. So philosophy has no object . . . If nothing happens in philosophy it is precisely because it has no object. If something actually does happen in the sciences, it is because they do have

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an object, knowledge of which they can increase, which gives them a history . As philosophy has no object, nothing can happen in it. The nothing of its history simply repeats the nothing of its object. (Althusser 1971, 54-57)

What philosophy has for its "object," according to Althusser, is in fact not an object at all but a position, the demarcation that it traces between science and ideology. For Althusser, philosophical practice is rational but dogmatic. Philosophy is rational by virtue of the laws of formal logic that it deploys, but insofar as it has a substantive position, it is "parasitic" on the knowledge effects that it defends or rejects (for reasons that are ultimately ideological). Althusser maintains that all philosophical practice, including his own, operates by means of a transformation of substantive concepts, expressed in the form of a scientific problematic, into dogmatic categories, expressed in the form of theses. Both philosophical theses and categories are dogmatic, Althusser explains, in the sense that, unlike the substantive propositions of a scientific discourse, they are susceptible to neither formal demonstration nor empirical proof: "they are not susceptible to demonstration in the *strictly* scientific sense (in the sense that we speak of demonstration in mathematics or in logic), nor to proof in the *strictly* scientific sense (in the sense that we speak of proof in the experimental sciences)" (Althusser 1990, 74). For Althusser, philosophical propositions are, in Timothy O'Hagan's words, "*both* unprovable *and* lacking in truth value insofar as they are (a) *particular*, having a function and meaning only in relation to the political and scientific conjuncture in which they are made and (b) *practical*, enjoining us to adopt certain conceptualizations, analogies, models and in particular, lines of distinction and demarcation, which foster or hinder the emergence and development of particular phases of scientific knowledge, but do not themselves constitute such knowledge" (O'Hagan 1981, 244).

Because philosophical discourse is contingent on the substantive effects of science and ideology, Althusser insists that it is never true/false or adequate/inadequate, in a scientific sense, but merely "correct or incorrect" in a pragmatic sense. "What might 'correct' [*juste*] signify?" he asks rhetorically. "To give an initial idea: the attribute 'true' implies, above all, a relation to theory; the attribute 'correct' above all a relation to practice (Thus: a correct decision, a just [*juste*] war, a correct line)" (Althusser 1990, 75). For Althusser, philosophy always addresses practical questions: How do we orient ourselves in thought and in politics? What is to be done? However, philosophy is neither a gratuitous operation nor a speculative activity. "One cannot understand the task, de-

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terminant in the last instance, of philosophy except in relation to the exigencies of the class struggle in ideology—in other words, the central question of hegemony, of the constitution of the dominant ideology" (Althusser 1990, 258). Philosophy "decomposes and recomposes science and other discourses in order to place them under its hegemony—an operation which endows the whole operation of philosophy with significance. In order to distribute its objects in this order philosophy has to dominate them, this necessity compels philosophy to take power over them" (Althusser 1990, 252). Philosophy reorganizes scientific practice within the "systematic unity" of its Truth in order to facilitate the unification of the dominant ideology and to guarantee this dominant ideology as Truth.

As a *Kampfplatz* where the distinction between "the scientific" and "the ideological" is defined, the political significance of philosophy is, for Althusser, nothing but the obverse of its theoretical necessity. While there can be, strictly speaking, no history of philosophy according to Althusser, there is most certainly a history in philosophy. Philosophy, Althusser explains, characteristically intervenes in scientific practice at points of "crisis," those periods when "a science confronts scientific problems which cannot be resolved by the existing theoretical means or (and) that call into question the coherence of the earlier theory . . . either . . . a contradiction between a new problem and the existing theoretical means, or (and) . . . a disturbance of the entire theoretical edifice" (Althusser 1990, 109-10). Althusser alludes to several such moments of "crisis"—the crisis of irrational numbers in Greek mathematics, the crisis of modern physics at the end of the nineteenth century, the crisis of modern mathematics triggered by set theory in the early twentieth century—but he is more concerned with the spontaneous philosophical reactions to these crises on the part of scientists than with the content of the crises themselves. "In a 'crisis,' Althusser notes wryly, "we discover that *savants* themselves can begin to 'manufacture' philosophy. *Inside every savant, there sleeps a philosopher*" (Althusser 1990, 111). The spontaneous philosophy of scientists, having both idealist and materialist elements, may provoke a variety of responses to a given theoretical crisis, up to and including what Althusser calls a "reaction of capitulation" where scientists "go outside" science altogether in order to evaluate scientific practice from some extra-scientific, moralistic standpoint.

In the case of the crisis of physics, for example, many scientists abandoned belief both in the validity of scientific knowledge and in the ex-

istence of matter. Althusser condemns such an idealist response as regressive, yet he sees it as symptomatic of the way in which philosophy "exploits" science in the interests of some practical purpose or ideology.

The vast majority of philosophies, be they religious, spiritualist or idealist, maintain a relation of *exploitation* with the sciences. Which means: the sciences are never seen for what they really are; their existence, their limits, their growing pains (baptized "crises"), or their mechanisms, as interpreted by idealist categories of the most well-informed philosophies, are *used* from outside; they may be used crudely or subtly, but they are used to furnish arguments or guarantees for extra-scientific values that the philosophies in question objectively serve through their own practice, their "questions" and their "theories." These "values" pertain to *practical ideologies*, which play their own role in the social cohesion and social conflicts of class societies. (Althusser 1990, 129)

The materialist philosophical intervention, by contrast, resists this explicit or immanent move to idealism and combats all anti-scientific positions. The materialist philosophical intervention does not produce the distinction between science and ideology—that distinction exists as soon as scientific practice exists—but it does apply the philosophical (and thus categorical) distinction between the scientific and the ideological to a particular area, allowing us to see where the distinction lies by revealing the materialist and idealist components within a particular discourse. For Althusser, a materialist position in philosophy consists of a unity of three terms: object/theory/method. By *object*, Althusser understands an external object with a material existence; by *theory*, an objective scientific knowledge or theory; by *method*, scientific method (Althusser 1990, 135). Materialism must defend itself against an idealist tendency to privilege the subjectivity of experience over the objectivity of reality. The threat of idealism—latent in philosophical modernism from Kant to empirio-criticism—is finally realized in a postmodern move that releases subjective experience from its subordination to the materialist principle of ontological realism. The result is ontological relativism: the materialist unity, object/theory/method, is replaced by an idealist unity, experiment/models/techniques. "When experience (which is, note well, something very different from experimentation) is promoted to the highest position, and when one speaks of models instead of theory, we are not simply changing two words: a slippage of meaning is provoked, or better, one meaning is obscured by another, and the first, materialist, meaning disappears under the second, idealist, meaning" (Althusser 1990, 135).

According to Althusser, a materialist position in philosophy always facilitates the progress of science. A materialist position in philosophy, as we have seen in the case of Marx, constitutes, for Althusser, a precondition for the birth of a new science—an epistemological break that in its turn initiates a new crisis, not in science, but rather in ideology and philosophy. Althusser disparages the theoretical significance of many of the so-called crises of science. To the "crisis" of physics, the "disappearance" of matter, for example, Althusser responds by insisting that physics is not in crisis but in growth. "Matter has not 'disappeared,' the scientific concept of matter alone has changed in content, and it will go on changing in the future for the process of knowledge is infinite in its object" (Althusser 1971, 49-50). The problem, Althusser insists, is not in physics (the concept of matter) but in philosophy (the category of matter): "it is absolutely necessary to distinguish between the philosophical category of matter and its scientific concept. . . . Those materialists who apply philosophical *categories* to the objects of the sciences as if they were concepts of them are involved in a case of mistaken identity" (Althusser 1971, 50).

According to Althusser, Marxist philosophy does not exploit science; instead, it serves science by defending the materialist position in philosophy. Marxist philosophy does not attempt to transform philosophy into a science. It is still philosophy, but the scientific knowledge of ideology provided by the science of history makes Marxist philosophy a "correct" philosophy. "In the absence of an absolute guarantee (something that does not exist except in idealist philosophy, and we know what to think of that), there are arguments we can present [in defense of materialism]. They are both practical (they can be judged by comparing the services which we can render the sciences) and theoretical (the critical check on the inevitable effects of ideology on philosophy through a knowledge of the mechanisms of ideology and ideological struggle, by a knowledge of their action on philosophy)" (Althusser 1990, 131).

Beyond Empiricism: Knowledge as a Practice Without a Subject

Timothy O'Hagan, one of the most perceptive commentators on Althusser's concept of philosophy, maintains that Althusser conducts, in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, a double intervention in philosophy. According to O'Hagan, Althusser attempts "(1) to combine a realist

thesis of the priority of the material world with respect to any knowledge of it, with the recognition that scientific breakthroughs inaugurate radical discontinuities of conceptualization, which repeatedly call that realism into question; and (2) to establish an absolute difference between the 'real object' and the 'object of knowledge' and to combine that thesis with a non-normative account of the mechanism of knowledge production" (O'Hagan 1981, 249).

In rejecting the theoreticism of his early works, Althusser has sharpened, not blunted, the cutting edge of his original argument, which defends the category of the scientific on the basis of the existence of science rather than its truth, or rather its truth on the basis of its existence. Althusser's controversial epigram "The knowledge of history is no more historical than the knowledge of sugar is sweet" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 106) is not simply a mundane affirmation of a central axiom of conventionalism (the distinction between, for example, our knowledge of the French Revolution and the actual events themselves); it is also, and more interestingly, an affirmation of scientific realism (the principle first that the historical existence of the revolution is independent of and prior to our knowledge of it and second that despite its determinate historical nature, our knowledge of the revolution is, in fact, really objectively valid and not simply a subjective delusion).

The philosophical defense of science, consistently maintained throughout the course of Althusser's development, turns not on the rationalist question of guarantees: Is science able to know the real? It turns instead on the historical question of production: What are the mechanisms by which the real is known? "Knowledge is concerned with the real world through its specific mode of appropriation of the real world: this poses precisely the problem of the way this function works, and therefore of *the mechanism* that ensures it: this function of the appropriation of the real world by knowledge, i.e., by the process of production of knowledges which, *despite*, or rather *because* of the fact that it takes place *entirely in thought* . . . nevertheless provides that grasp . . . on the real world called its appropriation" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 54). Philosophy, we have seen, is unable to prove (or disprove) the validity of scientific knowledge; rather, it takes a position with respect to it. Philosophically defending historical materialism as a science, as well as the category of the scientific itself, forces Althusser to take a position combining ontological realism and epistemological relativism. From this position he critiques those theoretical ideologies and ideology/errors aspiring to displace or to discredit historical mate-

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rialism and defends the explanatory power of the latter. Because he asserts the ontological reality of a world (indirectly and incompletely) appropriated by a process of knowledge (historically relative but nevertheless objectively valid), Althusser is able to defend rationally the adequacy of knowledge effects without recourse to epistemological absolutism.

By posing the issue in materialist terms—that is, by starting from the proposition that knowledge *exists* — Althusser is able to reject the whole issue of "guarantees" as a false problem that emerges only outside the discourse of any genuine knowledge in order to further extra-theoretical or ideological interests. For Althusser, the question of the production of knowledge is historically *open* (open to the different questions that may be asked), but it is not therefore *problematic* (subject to different answers to the same questions). What renders knowledge problematic is not its production but its reception, which is always social and ideological as well as theoretical. The quest for guarantees for knowledge is always an ideological quest, a search for a "mythical Subject and Object, required to *take in charge*, if need be by falsifying them, the real conditions, i.e., the real mechanism of the history of the production of knowledges, in order to subject them to religious, ethical and political ends (the preservation of 'faith,' of 'morality' or of 'freedom,' i.e., 'social values'" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 55). The quest for guarantees is an ongoing ideological drama involving a small philosophical cast of characters: on the one hand, "the philosophical Subject (the philosophizing consciousness), the scientific Subject (the knowing consciousness), and the empirical Subject (the perceiving consciousness); and on the other, the Object which confronts these three Subjects, the transcendental or absolute Object, the pure principles of science, and the pure forms of perception" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 55). The function of this drama is not to produce knowledge of scientific practice (which becomes less rather than more comprehensible with each performance) but rather to maintain an ideological closure around the production of knowledge. Such a closure, Althusser insists, is centered on the category of "Man," the original source of all the different Subjects and Objects, and the philosophical expression of individualism, the dominant ideology of European capitalism. The latent theoretical humanism of the empiricist tradition—from Descartes (the subject-object problem) through Hume (the problem of causality) to modern analytical philosophy—explains why this tradition is necessarily the negative reference point for Althusser's philosophical defense of science.

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For Althusser, the empiricist tradition, which is organized around a relatively small number of central categories (those of subject and object, abstract and concrete, and the givenness of reality to observation), is responsible for the collapse of the process of knowledge into an ontology of experience and consequently for the creation of the insoluble "problem of knowledge." Empiricism, which operates with a concept of knowledge as the "vision" of an individual, makes it impossible not only to see scientific practice as a social production but also, Althusser argues, to define scientific practice at all. The starting point of the process of knowledge for empiricism, Althusser explains, is a "purely objective given," something immediately accessible to direct observation, and since what is so given is supposed to be the real itself, the concrete, the starting point of knowledge is held to be concrete reality. To obtain a clear and distinct idea of the real object, the subject of knowledge need only perform an operation of "extraction" on this reality, disengaging its essence by eliminating everything inessential or incidental that obscures that

essence. For the empiricist-individualist, Althusser concludes, the sight and possession by the subject of the essence of the object is what constitutes knowledge: the "whole of knowledge is thus invested in the real . . . as a relation inside its real object between the really distinct parts of that real object" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 31).

Althusser criticizes the empiricist view on two grounds: first, it takes the initial object or raw material of theoretical practice to be reality itself; second, it takes the product of theoretical practice, knowledges, to be a real part of the real object to be known. The first move results in an untenable concept of transitive causality, the identification of physical laws as constant conjunctions of physical events (rather than the structural mechanisms that generate such events); the second move results in the intractable philosophical problem of the correspondence between the real, the object of knowledge, and knowledge of the real, the experience of the subject (rather than the tractable problem of the mechanisms by which knowledge is produced).^[19]

We have already discussed Althusser's criticism of transitive causality and the concept of structural causality he puts forward as an alternative to it. Here we need only recall the fact that, by conceptualizing the social world in terms of distinct structural relationships (ontologically real if only empirically observable in their effects) that are articulated and overdetermined yet possess distinct and hierarchically stratified effectivities, Althusser is able to explain social phenomena causally (in terms of intransitive mechanisms and powers) not simply descriptively

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(in terms of transitive patterns of events). Althusser's concept of causality thus escapes the well-known antinomies created by the empiricist attempt to define causality in terms of empirical invariances, that is, in terms of constant conjunctions of physical events experienced under closed, experimentally controlled conditions. Roy Bhaskar, whose Althusserian critique of empiricism (Bhaskar 1979, 5-17) I am following here, has demonstrated how the empiricist position amounts to an absurd claim that human beings create natural law: if the laws of nature are simply constant conjunctions of events, and if constant conjunctions occur only under closed conditions, and if, finally, scientists alone can create such conditions, then scientists create the laws of nature! Furthermore, with respect to open systems—systems in which experimental controls are impossible and constant conjunctions do not obtain—Bhaskar maintains that the empiricist position implies either causal indeterminacy (there are no laws of nature) or an absurd claim that science has not yet discovered any laws applicable to open systems (there is as yet no applied science).

The correct interpretation of experimental activity, Bhaskar points out, recognizes that the object of scientific practice is knowledge of causal mechanisms, not patterns of events. To conceive of the laws of nature in terms of generative structures, tendencies, and powers is to admit that while such structures may be isolated in closed conditions, they are also operative in open, uncontrolled systems as well. Althusser's notion of structural causality, the articulation of structural tendencies and powers, expresses rather well the operation of causal laws in open systems. In social systems, a structural mechanism exists as a power or tendency whether or not it is empirically realized, an outcome that depends on the effectivities of other structures as well as its own. Furthermore, if the object of science is knowledge of causal structures and not constant patterns of events, then there is no reason why the term *science* should be restricted to those practices capable of creating controlled experimental environments. Finally, the open nature of social formations explains why historical materialism is necessarily explanatory and not predictive and why this fact in no way disqualifies the claim that its explanations are scientific.

Althusser also rejects the empiricist identification of the real and knowledge of the real; he insists on the relative autonomy of scientific practice, the fact that it takes place "in thought" and is irreducibly distinct from the real itself. For Althusser, the process of knowledge "never, as empiricism desperately demands it should, confronts a pure

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object which is identical to the real object" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 43).

Knowledge working on its "object" . . . does not work on the *real* object but on the peculiar raw material which constitutes, in the strict sense of the term, its "object" (of knowledge) and which, even in the most rudimentary forms of knowledge is distinct from the *real object*. For that raw material is ever already . . . elaborated and transformed, precisely by the imposition of the complex structure, however crude, which constitutes it as an *object of knowledge*, which constitutes it as an object it will transform, whose *forms* it will change in the course of its development process in order to produce knowledges which are constantly *transformed* but always apply to its *object*, in the sense of *object of knowledge*. (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 43)

In suggesting that the raw material of theoretical practice, Generalities I, is never simply given to experience but rather consists of ideas and concepts "already worked up" within a theoretical framework, Althusser is asserting the social-historical nature of knowledge (and the fact of science as a structured mode of production) against the ahistorical and empiricist assertion of the immediacy of "the facts." Of course, empiricism has its own definition of what is or is not a fact; it simply masks its *theory* of the fact behind the "givenness" of experience to the knowing subject. If facts were immediately given to experience, there would be nothing for science to do ("all science would be superfluous if the outward appearances and the essences of things directly coincided" as Marx points out in *Capital*). In reality, the very existence of science is predicted on an epistemological break with the subject-centered experience of things, the very ideology and ideology/error of individualism that empiricism seeks to identify as the essence of scientific method. For Althusser, Generalities II, the problematic of a science, is not a tool at the disposal of an autonomous subject but a historical structure of meaning operating within and through

the consciousness of a social subject. Thus the insight of a science should not be confused with the vision of an individual. "The sighting is thus no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of 'vision' which he exercises either attentively or distractedly; the sighting is the act of its structural conditions, it is the relation of the immanent reflection between the field of the problematic and *its* objects and *its* problems. . . . It is literally no longer the eye (the mind's eye) of the subject which sees what exists in the field defined by a theoretical problematic; it is this field itself which sees itself in the objects or problems it defines" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 25-26).

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Extending Althusser's line of argument, Bhaskar (1979, 22-28) argues that the category of the subject of knowledge is the umbilical cord joining empiricism and hermeneutics in a relation of theoretical symbiosis that functions to resist any scientific explanation of human subjectivity. By collapsing science into experience (causal laws equal empirical regularities equal patterns of events equal experiences), empiricism calls into existence a subject-centered world of meaning that it cannot itself explain. Insofar as it even bothers to try, Bhaskar points out, empiricism is able to deal with social symbolic structures only by reducing them to empirically verifiable patterns of behavior explicable by stimulus-response mechanisms (behaviorism) or means-ends calculation (utilitarianism). This manifestly impoverished framework, the outcome of empiricism's flawed concept of scientific practice, opens the way for a hermeneutic reaction against the very possibility of social science. Hermeneutics, accepting precisely the definition of science postulated by empiricism, employs the absence of empirical regularities in "society" to justify a radical separation of the human world, the world of interpretive understanding, from the natural world, the world of causal explanation.

For Althusser, the fact that social agents are subjects *in* history, and not subjects *of* history, erases the ideological category of the subject by which empiricism and hermeneutics, each in its own way, render knowledge of concrete social subjects problematical. Against empiricism, Althusser refuses to collapse the complexity of human consciousness into a single aspect of behavior (or even into the single dimension of behavior) or to reduce it to a crude reflection of the various structural relations that constitute its conditions of existence. Instead, Althusser posits the relative autonomy of ideological practice and a complex and overdetermined field of meanings where agents, constituted as social subjects, act and react to their environment in an open-ended manner. However, against hermeneutics, Althusser rejects the self-serving antithesis of interpretation versus causal explanation. Althusser, of course, recognizes that social structures are not permanent, that human agents transform as well as reproduce them, and that knowledge, by the fact of its existence, exerts its own effectivity on the social structures that constitute its object. However, he insists on the existential independence of these moments and rejects the false simultaneity, the plenary time, into which hermeneutics collapses the intransitive existence of causal structures (and the beliefs and meanings that they produce) into the transitive dimension of practice (and knowledge). By denying the

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intransitive nature of beliefs and meanings, hermeneutics forecloses the production of knowledges of them just as surely as the hopelessly restrictive concept of their intransitivity generated by empiricism.

Empiricism, far from defining (much less explaining) scientific practice, renders scientific knowledge problematic and clears the way for its philosophical negation by hermeneutics (the theological origin of hermeneutics is no doubt significant in this regard). The distinction between the real object and the object of knowledge is a philosophical paradox that cannot be resolved in philosophy (where nothing is resolved). The root of the problem, Althusser insists, is a theoretical humanist position in philosophy that creates the categories of the subject and object. Marxist philosophy does not resolve the problem; instead, it takes a position with respect to it, a position that rejects the problem by rejecting the theoretical humanist framework that creates it. Althusser's materialist theses regarding the primacy of the real object over the object of knowledge and the primacy of this thesis over a second, the distinction between the real object and the object of knowledge, combine an anti-empiricist ontological realism and an anti-hermeneutic epistemological relativism. In speaking of the process of knowledge as the "cognitive appropriation of the real," Althusser denies that the real exists as a function of the thought, experience, or observation of any subject: one can only appropriate that which exists independently of the action of appropriation. In denying that knowledge is hidden in the real or identical to it, Althusser makes it possible to comprehend scientific practice as a historical and social mode of production: there is no appropriation without an appropriating structure.

Marxism and the "Crisis of Marxism"

Althusser's philosophical position is obviously out of step with current postmodern (post-Marxist, neo-pragmatist, neo-liberal, poststructuralist) tendencies wherein individualism, pluralism, and relativism have congealed into an anti-scientific, anti-Marxist, and anti-modernist orthodoxy. I will not repeat the criticisms of postmodernist

tendencies already advanced in my introductory remarks, but it is worthwhile to recall, in light of the concept of philosophy as class struggle in theory, the dividing line that separates postmodernism in all its variations from Structural Marxism. Postmodern philosophy combines epistemological and ontological relativism in order to mount a relativist attack on scientific realism. From relativism, which constitutes its axiomatic core,

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postmodernism fashions a voluntaristic political individualism (either neo-liberal conformity or neo-anarchist dissidence) and a descriptive theoretical pluralism. Postmodern philosophy accepts—implicitly or explicitly, with regret or with enthusiasm—the rapid and brutal restructuring of global capitalism, and it masks its intellectual complicity in this process by exploiting the so-called crises of Marxism, modernism, and history to discredit the very project of a realist, complex, and scientific explanation of the current conjuncture. Althusser's philosophical position, which subsumes epistemological relativism by the principle of ontological realism, defends both the category of the scientific and the scientificity of historical materialism. By explicitly rejecting the problematization of knowledge, Althusser disrupts the *modus vivendi* currently (and cautiously) being negotiated between the old New Left and the new New Right under the auspices of postmodernism.

In a lecture delivered in 1977, Althusser addressed the "crisis of Marxism" in the context of Eurocommunist debates over a variety of issues including party democracy, national versus international paths to socialism, and parliamentary reformism versus proletarian dictatorship. Althusser told his audience that Marxism's major difficulties—the explanation of Stalinism, the absence of an adequate theory of the liberal democratic state or class struggle under contemporary capitalism, and so on—should be viewed as a challenge, indeed an important opportunity, not as a refutation or a defeat. Rather than relying on a vaguely defined faith in the future to justify ignoring the crisis or simply enduring it passively, Althusser advocated an active, analytical response. It is "much better," he concluded, to "view the matter with sufficient historical, theoretical, and political perspective . . . to discover—even if the task is not easy—the character, meaning and implications of the crisis" (Althusser 1978, 217). Althusser's message is even more relevant now, as socialists confront the simultaneous collapse of Stalinism and Fordism.

Hard questions must be asked of Marxism in light of contemporary events, particularly with regard to the political strategies socialists have hitherto pursued. The contemporary crisis has set two tasks for historical materialism: first, a scientific task, producing new knowledge of the way things *really* work in order to permit the emergence of a new political vision of how they might *possibly* work; second, a corresponding philosophical task facilitating the scientific task by defending the categories of realism and materialism and especially the category of science itself. Althusser forcibly impresses on us the fact that making a

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distinction between the concept of science and the category of the scientific increases rather than decreases the importance of philosophy. The philosophical category of science must be fought for—it is not a given—and the place that it is fought for is philosophy. In *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, Althusser stoutly defended the category of science against irrationalist and voluntarist tendencies on the Left in order to "resist the bourgeois subjective idealist and the petty-bourgeois Marxists who, all of them, shout 'positivism' as soon as they hear the term [science] . . . who refuse the very idea of a scientific theory, even the word 'science,' even the word 'theory,' on the pretext that every science or even every theory is essentially 'reifying,' alienating and therefore bourgeois" (Althusser 1976, 116-18). Aside from changing "Marxists" to "postmodernists"—acknowledging the conservative sea change that has taken place in philosophy since the global restructuring began in the late seventies—the philosophical struggle against irrationalism and voluntarism on (what is left of) the Left remains precisely as Althusser described it in the seventies.

We have already alluded to the fact that scientific practice is always critical since it necessarily intervenes in the ideological field of a social formation by attacking ideology/error and thereby provoking ideological and theoretical struggles that reverberate through philosophy onto the field of politics. The social sciences are particularly volatile in this regard because they lay bare the actual mechanisms at work in society and thus open up the possibility of changing things. Historical materialism, the science of social formations, continues to be the object and stake of a fierce and implacable class struggle because it continues to expose the exploitation and domination inherent in the capitalist mode of production. The very existence of historical materialism makes it difficult for philosophy to exercise its traditional function of reconciling the category of the scientific with the status quo. Marxism, Althusser explains, causes "a complete upset in philosophy: not only by forcing philosophy to revise its categories in order to bring them into line with the new science and its effects, but also, and above all, by giving philosophy the means, in terms of an understanding of its real relation to class struggle, of taking responsibility for and transforming its own practice" (Althusser 1976, 174).

To repress this understanding and evade this responsibility, Althusser insists, post-Marxist philosophy must attack not only Marxism but the category of science itself. The novelty of Marxist philosophy with respect to all previous philosophy is that the latter, in keeping with its

ideological role, denies its political nature, denies that it has any connection with politics, while continuing nonetheless to practice politics in its theoretical interventions. Marxist philosophy, by contrast, openly admits its dependence on science and its relationship to politics and openly takes both a realist and a proletarian position in philosophy. Historical materialism is both a scientific and a critical theory, its critical function following from its scientific nature. Althusser's concepts of ideology, science, and philosophy deny the obfuscatory and domesticating distinction, beloved of professional middle-class academics, between "two Marxisms," one scientific (totally unacceptable) and one critical (acceptable, but only if used with extreme caution). Instead, Althusser insists that Marxism is a revolutionary unity: the necessary, and necessarily explosive, interrelationship between the production of knowledge about how things happen in history and an uncompromising defense of that knowledge. In this sense Saül Karsz is correct to maintain that Althusser's definition of philosophy in terms of "a double articulation—theoretical and political *within* politics and theory"—is nothing less than "an attempt to realize Marx's famous thesis that philosophy must no longer interpret the world but must change it" (Karsz 1974, 305).

Chapter Ideology and Social Subjectivity

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Despite Althusser's general concept of ideology as a social symbolic system governed by practical interests and subject-centered experience, his focus, in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, is almost exclusively on a restricted aspect of ideological discourse, its functioning as a "knowledge effect" in relation to scientific discourse. In his later works, particularly a key 1969 essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (in Althusser 1971), Althusser returned to the general concept of ideology and its "practical-social" function—the material production of ideology and the constitution of social subjectivity—and to the relationship of ideological to economic and especially to political practices. This change of emphasis, I have argued, should not be misunderstood; it is neither a denial of the conceptual distinction between science and ideology nor a reversal of Althusser's defense of the relative autonomy of science as a social practice. It is rather a logical consequence of Althusser's rejection of philosophical rationalism and an attempt to develop further his materialist concept of ideology as a structured system of meaning embodied in and reproduced by concrete practices and institutions. By formulating the concept of ideology within a modernist framework of ontological realism and epistemological relativism, Althusser is able to specify the inner relationship between Marxism as a scientific discourse and Marxism as a philosophical position with respect to anti-Marxist perspectives: "Ideologies are not pure illusions (Error), but bodies of representations existing in institutions and prac-

tices: they figure in the superstructure, and are rooted in class struggle. If the science founded by Marx shows up the theoretical conceptions of its own prehistory as ideological, it is not therefore simply to denounce them as false: it is also to point out that they claim to be true, and were accepted and continue to be accepted as true—and to show why this is so" (Althusser 1976, 155).

While theoretically rejecting rival conceptions of historical practice as ideology/error, Marxism must also account for them in a scientific way, as objectively existing historical-social practices whose truth or falsehood is not at issue. Of course, an important element of this approach was already present in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, particularly when Althusser spoke of ideology in terms not of truth or falsehood but of the "imaginary":

So ideology is a matter of the *lived* relation between men and their world. This relation, that only appears as "*conscious*" on condition that it is *unconscious*, in the same way only seems to be simple on condition that it is *complex*, that it is not a simple relation but a relation between relations, a second degree relation. In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their condition of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an "*imaginary*," "*lived*" relation. (Althusser 1969, 233)

As an imaginary relation, ideology is neither necessarily true nor necessarily false; it is simply an order of consciousness in which, as Althusser rather clumsily puts it in *For Marx*, the "practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function" (Althusser 1969, 231). This "imaginary" relation may or may not correspond to a relation posited by a science; even though all ideologies are "imaginary," they are not therefore false.¹³ In this sense, ideologies are more basic to social formations than are the sciences since, unlike sciences, they are necessary to any conceptualization of social formations. Ideology, Althusser maintains, is "an organic part of every social totality . . . not an aberration or contingent excrescence of history [but] a structure essential to the

historical life of society" (Althusser 1969, 232-33). In contrast to science, ideology performs a ubiquitous social function, one that must be fulfilled in every society, including a socialist society, since in all societies men and women must be formed, transformed, and equipped to respond to their conditions of existence. This process of socialization requires a system of ideas, beliefs, and values by which men and women experience their world as a coherent whole and find their place within it as subjects.

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In "Ideology and the Ideological Apparatuses of the State," Althusser posits an account of social subjectivity more complex than the one presented in his early works. The initial view of the Althusserians defined the function of ideology in terms of social "cohesion" and the "masking" of social contradictions. The following citation, from Nicos Poulantzas's *Political Power and Social Classes* (originally published in 1968), is representative:

Ideology, which slides into every level of the social structure, has the particular function of *cohesion*. It fulfills this function by establishing at the level of the agent's experience relations which are obvious . . . and which allow their practical activities to function within the unity of a formation. . . . Ideology has the precise function of hiding real contradictions and of reconstituting on an imaginary level a relatively coherent discourse which serves as the horizon of the agent's experience; it does this by moulding their representations of their real relations and inserting these in the overall unity of the relations of production. . . . [The function of ideology] is not to produce knowledge effects, not to give agents knowledge of the social structure, but simply to *insert* them as it were into their practical activities supporting the existing social formations. (Poulantzas 1973, 207-8)

Ideology aims for cohesion, and it achieves this aim by means of the social subject, not as a result of the autonomous activity of human beings, but rather by means of the structured process of constituting human beings as social subjects. For Althusser, any theory of ideology predicated on an individual or a class subject not only slips inevitably into an essentialist problematic of alienation but also mistakes effect for cause since ideology creates subjects rather than breaks them down or alienates them from their nature or essence. Ideology also masks existing social contradictions by naturalizing existing social relations, the positions occupied by social subjects, within an imaginary discourse that presents these relations as inevitable (thereby excluding the possibility that things might be different) and coherent (thereby excluding or rationalizing the existence of problems within these social relations).

This initial conception of ideology asserts both too much and too little. It claims too much by blandly proclaiming the total success of ideology with respect to its functions of cohesion and masking (without any elaboration of the specific mechanisms by which such effects are realized). It claims too little insofar as the effectivity of ideology, despite certain indications to the contrary, is defined largely in negative and oppressive terms—as nothing more than the "false consciousness" without which capitalism could not survive. Finally, the emphasis on cohesion and masking ignores the uneven development of the field of

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ideology and the existence of contradictions within the socialization process. In "Ideology and the Ideological Apparatuses of the State," Althusser goes beyond his initial problematic of cohesion and masking to explain the mechanisms by which subjects are formed and the political implications of the process. Althusser's efforts have been greatly extended by others, Pierre Bourdieu and Göran Therborn in particular, and have served as the point of departure for the work of postmodern icon Michel Foucault, whose negative dependence on Althusser deserves special consideration in light of his celebrity status and his anti-Marxism.

Althusser: The Interpellation of Social Subjects

In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser abandons the rather amorphous idea of cohesion in favor of a more concrete concept of the function of ideology, namely, the reproduction of existing relations of production: "[The] reproduction of labor power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e., a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression" (Althusser 1971, 132). Althusser argues that the function of ideology is to reproduce this submission and this ability, but to comprehend this process requires a good deal more than the traditional metaphor of base/superstructure. However, it is only by locating the role of the superstructure in securing the reproduction of the mode of production that we begin to develop an adequate theory of the superstructure. Althusser proposes two theses regarding this process: "Thesis 1: Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence. . . . Thesis 2: Ideology has a material existence" (Althusser 1971, 153, 155). The first thesis, with which we are already familiar, is developed in conjunction with the second by means of the category of the subject: "Every human, that is to say social individual, cannot be the agent of a practice unless he takes the form of a subject. The 'subject form' is in fact the form that the historical existence of every individual, every agent of social practices, takes: for the relations of production and reproduction necessarily involve, as the integrating element, what Lenin called [juri-

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dico-] ideological social relations which, in order to function, impose on every individual-agent the form of a subject" (Althusser 1976, 95).

To reproduce the existing relations of production, there must be individuals equipped to respond to the needs of society, and this end is achieved by constituting the social subject, a process Althusser calls "interpellation." For Althusser, the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, "in so far as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1971, 171). All ideology and all ideological discourse are therefore based on the subject-form, the category of the subject, which, Althusser insists, pre-exists the concrete individual (who is to become a social subject) by means of an operation of the category of the subject on the concrete individual.

This is a proposition which entails that we distinguish . . . between concrete individuals on the one hand and concrete subjects on the other, although . . . concrete subjects only exist insofar as they are supported by a concrete individual. . . . [I]deology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation . . . called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" . . . [T]he hailed individual will turn around [and] by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really him* who was hailed" (and not someone else). (Althusser 1971, 174)

Ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects by means of the pre-existing category of the subject. It invariably creates subjects and controls them by recognizing them as subject-objects, subjects in relation to objects (or more precisely, in relation to possible object-directed practices). From the perspective of any meaningful concept of social practice, therefore, there is an underlying complicity beneath the superficial "opposition" of subject and object within traditional philosophy. As Alex Callinicos observes, "The notion of a subject cannot be separated from that of its object, and from the relation held to subsist between them. In a sense, subject and object are *made* for each other. To conceive of a subject is to conceive of whatever it is the subject of. To conceive of an object is to conceive of whatever it is an object for" (Callinicos 1976, 65).^[2] What we call the individual is in fact a structured combination of relations of subjectivity or subject-object relationships.

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The process of interpellation is accomplished by means of a general framework of centering, which Althusser describes in terms of an absolute Subject around whom an infinity of individuals/subjects is interpellated. Taking religion as a classic manifestation of this process, Althusser notes that religious ideology is indeed addressed to individuals in order to transform them into subjects. However, this process is dominated by the central position of God: "there can only be such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the absolute condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*, i.e., God" (Althusser 1971, 178). A reciprocal relation of mutual recognition exists between this absolute Subject and individual subjects. "Were not men made *in the image* of God? As all theological reflection proves, whereas He 'could' perfectly well have done without men, God needs them, the Subject needs the subjects, just as men need God, the subjects need the Subject" (Althusser 1971, 179). The relation between the Subject and the subjects may be understood as a "mirror-connection" or, more precisely, "[a] double mirror-connection such that it *subjects* the subjects to the Subject, while giving them in the Subject in which each subject can contemplate his own image (present and future), the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him, . . . i.e., those who have recognized God and have recognized themselves in Him, will be saved" (Althusser 1971, 180).

Mirror-connections pervade the ideological instance; the Subject is there before we are born, and we are marked by the interpellation process even as we emerge from the womb. For Althusser, the individual is "always already subject" and, as such, always already enmeshed in the practices and rituals of ideological recognition. These rituals, inscribed in material institutions, assure that the majority of individuals will reproduce the existing relations of production. They are subjects in both senses of the word: (1) free subjects, with a free will, and (2) subjected beings stripped of all freedom. "The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously (1) the interpellation of 'individuals' as subjects; (2) their subjection to the Subject; (3) the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself; (4) the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on the condition that the subjects recognize what they are and *behave* accordingly, everything will be all right" (Althusser 1971, 180-81).

There is an obvious and important parallel between the concept of interpellation and the concepts of "imaginary" and "symbolic" put for-

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ward by Althusser's contemporary Jacques Lacan (whose rereading of Freud has caused at least as much controversy as Althusser's rereading of Marx).^[3] According to Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language—a private, thus unique language that emerges during the Oedipus complex (it does not exist before this moment) when the child makes the transition from what Lacan calls the "imaginary stage" of psychological development to the "symbolic stage." The imaginary stage is characterized by relations of identification; the child does not clearly distinguish his or her separateness from the world of adults and builds up a complex network of associations between sounds and reality based on mechanisms of identification. Obviously, the child must be forced

out of such relationships if he or she is to acquire a sense of individuality and a sense of place with respect to other individuals. In Lacan's view, this break is achieved with the acquisition of language (the symbolic), which, above all, gives the child the personal pronoun "I" and transposes the imaginary process of identification onto a structured field of symbols organized around the phallus, which Lacan calls the "Law of the Father," that is, the social significations, relationships, and values embedded in language. The acquisition of language creates the subject (the ego) and is accompanied by the repression of the private discourse of the imaginary stage, the latter becoming, according to Lacan, the unconscious.

The acquisition of the symbolic is a matter of both syntax and semantics. The syntactical element differentiates the child from others (the acquisition of the "I") and provides him or her a certain power to control the world of others by means of symbolic manipulation (sentences). However, the semantic element also assigns the child a place in the social space—what Althusser calls "the Law of Culture"—with which the child is supposed to identify (the transposition of the imaginary into a network of secondary identifications) and accept without question. However, the "I" of society's discourse, imposed on the child from without, does not coincide with the private language that the infant developed during the imaginary stage and whose significations (correlated signs and desires) were repressed with the acquisition of the symbolic yet persist as the unconscious. Thus there is a perpetual conflict between the unconscious and the ego, an ongoing process of contradictions between the real (desire), the symbolic, and the imaginary.

Being and consciousness are always at odds with each other, according to Lacan. The subject is never a unifying whole, since being is radically ex-centric to itself—characterized by a fundamental gap at its

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center which is predicated on the difference between the language of the unconscious and the symbolic order of society and which is intensified by the ambiguity between signifier and signified characteristic of all languages. The ego is constituted in relation to an ambiguous chain of signifiers that in their unity constitute the Other that is their transcendental locus; it is through the Other that the individual ego constitutes itself in an existence where desire is possible. Desire motivates the subject, but it is always controlled (and frustrated) by the Other—the discourse of the symbolic. Desire is doomed to perpetual unfulfillment since it is always caught in the network of secondary identifications (the imaginary) that surround, or more precisely articulate, the Other. The conditions of the subject, the ego and the unconscious, are limited to what is possible in the Other. In this sense, Lacan concludes, they are all discourses of the Other.

Despite the important distinction between the social world and the world of the psyche, similar relationships apply within the Althusserian conceptualization of the ideological instance. Actual social relationships between the individual and his or her conditions of existence (the Lacanian real) are experienced through interpellated "mirror-connections" or subject-object relations (the Lacanian imaginary). The Absolute Subject, which for Althusser represents the structured system of places and roles defining social subjects in terms of a center (the second order, or double mirror-connection), corresponds to Lacan's concept of the symbolic, the Other, the Law of the Father. Ideological interpellation is contradictory because, as is the case with the Lacanian psyche, the multiplicity of subject-object interpellations does not necessarily correspond to actual lived relations, nor are these relations even necessarily compatible with each other. Althusser defines ideology as both a recognition and a misrecognition (*connaissance* and *méconnaissance*). What we recognize (and accept as given) is our interpellation as subjects and our place in society, "the 'obviousness' that you and I are subjects—and that this does not cause any problems" (Althusser 1971, 172). What we fail to recognize (or rather what we see through a necessary distortion that is the form of recognition in ideological practice) is, "in the last resort, the reproduction of the relations of production and the relations deriving from them" (Althusser 1971, 183).

Because ideology is a different order or mode of discourse from science, Althusser's concepts of recognition and misrecognition cannot be compared to the knowledge and ideology/error of scientific practice. Ideological recognition is anchored in the real because ideology always

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refers to its material conditions of existence, but its relation to the real takes the form of an imaginary identification and is thus at the same time a misrecognition; ideology only "knows" the real in order to "represent" it in an order appropriate to its practical goals. As Althusser explains, "it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to these conditions of existence which is represented to them there. . . . What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (Althusser 1971, 164-65). In the field of ideology the subject exists in relations that correspond to commodity relations in the field of the capitalist economy: as the Subject (God, but also Reason) constitutes all human beings in social relations of equivalence and naturalizes or fetishizes the subject form, so the Commodity (Money, the embodiment of exchange value) constitutes all production in social relations of equivalence and naturalizes or fetishizes the commodity form.

Ideological Apparatuses and State Power

The concept of an "ideological apparatus" is a second major innovation of the essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," and it is by means of this concept that Althusser grounds the process of interpellation in concrete social practices and institutions. Ideology is a domain of consciousness, according to Althusser, but it is also a material practice that exists within the context of concrete practices and rituals: "I shall talk of actions inserted into *practices*. And I shall point out that these practices are governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed, within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus*" (Althusser 1971, 168). Such apparatuses cannot be adequately expressed in terms of the traditional metaphor of a superstructure, for the latter term disguises their formative influence on the reproduction of existing relations of production. Nor can the traditional Marxist emphasis on the state as a repressive tool of the ruling class be allowed to obscure the many non-repressive ways in which the power of the ruling class is maintained. Althusser contends, following Gramsci (for the relationship between them, see Buci-Glucksmann 1980), that we must see the political power of a ruling class as consisting not only of their monopoly of the repressive apparatus of the state (the army, police, and so on) but also of their ideological hegemony over society, a hegemony

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embodied in the institutionalization of their ideology in various apparatuses usually considered "private," what Gramsci calls "civil society." Althusser maintains that one must distinguish between state power, the objective of the political class struggle, and the state apparatus. Power may change without necessarily affecting the apparatus, he points out, and a communist revolution must insure not only the transfer of power but also the destruction of the apparatus. However, to accomplish this end, "it is indispensable to take into account not only the distinction between State power and State apparatus, but also another reality which is clearly on the side of the (repressive) State apparatus, but must not be confused with it. I shall call this reality by its concept: the ideological State apparatuses" (Althusser 1971, 142).

Ideological state apparatuses are different from the formal state apparatus, which includes the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, and so on; these institutions make up what Althusser calls the repressive state apparatus. The ideological state apparatuses, in contrast, exist for the most part outside the public sphere and include such institutions as churches, schools, the family, political parties, trade unions, mass media, and culture. Althusser sums up the distinctions between the two types of state apparatuses in the following manner:

1. All the State Apparatuses function both by repression and by ideology, with the difference that the (Repressive) State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by repression, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology.
2. Whereas the (Repressive) State Apparatus constitutes an organized whole whose different parts are centralized beneath a commanding unity, that of the politics of class struggle applied by the political representatives of the ruling classes in possession of State power, the Ideological State Apparatuses are multiple, distinct, "relatively autonomous" and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express, in forms which may be limited or extreme, the effects of the clashes between the capitalist class struggle and the proletarian class struggle, as well as their subordinate forms.
3. Whereas the unity of the (Repressive) State Apparatus is secured by its unified and centralized organization under the leadership of the representatives of the classes in power, the unity of the different Ideological State Apparatuses is secured, usually in contradictory forms, by the ruling ideology, the ideology of the ruling class. (Althusser 1971, 149)

The role of the repressive state apparatus consists essentially in se-

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curing by force (physical or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproduction of production, which are, above all, the political conditions for the action of the ideological state apparatuses: "it is the latter which largely secure the reproduction specifically of the relations of production, behind a 'shield' provided by the repressive State apparatuses. It is here that the role of the ruling ideology is heavily concentrated, the ideology of the ruling class, which holds State power" (Althusser 1971, 150). The ideological state apparatuses are "unified," despite their diversity and contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology or, in the language of structural causality, the "ideology in dominance" that permeates even oppositional ideologies in such a way that every subject is interpellated in relation to a common center. It is in the concept of the ideological state apparatuses and the explanation of the reproduction of the existing relations of production by means of the hegemony of the dominant ideology that Althusser's concept of history as a "process without a subject" and his theory of ideology find their common ground. As Callinicos perceptively remarks, "Ideology is the way in which men and women are formed in order to participate in a process of which they are not the makers, and ideology performs this function by giving them the illusion that history was made for them" (Callinicos 1976, 70).

Althusser's concepts of interpellation and ideological apparatuses are enormously suggestive for social theory, and as we shall see, Structural Marxists have applied them with profit to the realms of aesthetics and political theory. However, the form in which they are introduced in the 1969 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" tended (understandably enough, given Althusser's initial focus on the reproduction of the existing relations of production) to identify the concept of ideology with a particular form of ideology, namely, the dominant ideology. This reduction has the unfortunate consequence of understating the complexity of the interpellation

process as well as its contradictory nature. In addition, if Althusser may be said to have ignored the relationship between ideology and politics in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, in his later essay ideology and politics have become all but indistinguishable. All ideologies, it would seem, are appendages of the state, and the latter assumes an almost monolithic aura of invincibility. This view, as we shall see, distorts not only the concepts of ideology and politics but the relationship between them as well.^[4]

Althusser has since attached a postscript to his essay in which he

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acknowledges the fact that ideologies are "determined in the last instance by class struggle" and explicitly rejects the idea that the ruling ideology is some sort of "ideology in general" or even the "conflict-free realization of the ideology of the ruling class." However, it remains difficult, within the stated framework of the concepts of interpellation and ideological state apparatus, to discern the possibility of contradiction and opposition within the ideological sphere. The slogan "class struggle" is invoked as if these two (theoretically) empty words are sufficient to banish the (politically) debilitating effects of the theory to which they are appended. The fact of the matter is that certain of the issues raised by the new concepts can be answered only by penetrating beneath the rhetorical surface of the term "class struggle" to their theoretical content, a task we will take up in due course. Certain other questions, however, may be dealt with immediately, and first among these is whether or not the individual-subject may be viewed as something more than a robot fabricated by the dominant ideology: how, in other words, are we to conceptualize interpellation, not as a univocal process, but as one that remains contradictory *despite* the domination of the ruling ideology?

Bourdieu: Ideology, Habitus, and Symbolic Capital

French cultural anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu has provided a fruitful approach to the problem of social subjectivity, one that incorporates the structural determination of the process of interpellation within a dynamic, open-ended framework of social practice. In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (French edition, 1972; English translation, 1977), Bourdieu sublates the antagonism between phenomenological methodologies, which focus on primary experiences, and objectivist methods, which focus on the objective relations that structure primary experience, by means of a dialectical "theory of practical knowledge" focusing on the relations between objective structures and the structured "dispositions" within which those structures are actualized and which tend to reproduce them. Individuals, interpellated as subjects, Bourdieu maintains, are not imprinted with a fixed set of rules and procedures as much as they are endowed with a social sense or "cultivated disposition, inscribed in the body schema and the schemas of thought, which

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enables each agent to engender all the practices consistent with the logic of challenge and riposte, and only such practices, by means of countless inventions, which the stereotyped unfolding of ritual would in no way demand" (Bourdieu 1977, 15). The structured social-symbolic field of ideological significations, which Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*, enables agents to generate an infinity of practices adapting to endlessly changing situations without ever being constituted as a monolithic set of rules, rituals, or principles.

For Bourdieu, the structures constitutive of a particular social formation produce a habitus wherein the agent's interests are defined and with them the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices. Habitus is a system of "durable, transposable *dispositions*", structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles of generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way being the product of obedience to rules" (Bourdieu 1977, 72). Habitus is the condition of existence of all practice, the source of a series of moves objectively organized as strategies, which cannot be reduced to either a mechanical reaction or creative free will.

The habitus . . . produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus. It follows that these practices cannot be directly deduced either from the objective conditions, defined as the instantaneous sum of the stimuli which may appear to have directly triggered them, or from the conditions which produced the durable principle of their production. These practices can be accounted for only by relating the objective *structure* defining the social conditions of the production of the habitus which engendered them to the conditions in which this habitus is operating, that is, to the *conjunction* which, short of radical transformation, represents a particular state of this structure. In practice, it is the habitus, history turned into nature, i.e., denied as such, which accomplishes practically the relating of these to two systems of relations in and through the production of practice. The "unconscious" is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus. (Bourdieu 1977, 78)

Bourdieu's is a materialist theory of social action. The nature of habitus as the ideological unconscious of practice creates a "common-

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sense" world endowed with the objectivity secured by a consensus on the meaning of practices and the world that exists among subjects who do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing, but who are aware of the possible sequences and consequences of their actions. Subjects are aware of their social position and its trajectory—all the properties of which they are bearers—and hence of "the social distance between objective positions, that is between social persons conjuncturally brought together (in physical space, which is not the same thing as social space) and correlatively . . . of this distance and of the conduct required in order to 'keep one's distance' or to manipulate it strategically, whether symbolically or actually" (Bourdieu 1977, 82). The habitus has an endless capacity to engender practices whose limits are set by the historically determinate conditions of its production. Thus "the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings" (Bourdieu 1977, 95).

As a system of symbolic identifications with social positions, habitus provides coherence as well as contradiction. Because symbolic objects can enter, without contradiction, into successive relationships set up from different points of view, they are subject to what Bourdieu describes as "overdetermination through indetermination"—"the application to the same objects or practices of different schemes . . . which . . . are all practically equivalent, is the source of the polysemy characterizing the fundamental relationships in the symbolic system, which are always determined in several respects at once" (Bourdieu 1977, 110). Thus from the point of view of practice, Bourdieu insists that there are only approximate or partial logics. This is the case because practices are the product of a small number of generative schemes that are practically interchangeable, that is, capable of producing equivalent results from the point of view of the "logical" demands of practice. Their "quasi-universality" is always bound to practical interests that impose on the generative schemes a necessity that is not that of a logic but of a *doxa* .

For Bourdieu, every established order produces, to different degrees and with different means, the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is the dialectic of the objective chances and the agent's aspirations out of which arises the "sense of limits" commonly called the "sense of reality." The sense of reality, always the perception of a subject, is the correspondence between objective classes

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and internalized classes, social structure and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order.

In the extreme case, that is to say, when there is a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization . . . the natural and the social world appears as self-evident. This experience we shall call *doxa* , so as to distinguish it from an orthodox or heterodox belief implying the awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs. Schemes of thought and perception can produce the objectivity that they do produce only by producing misrecognition of the limits of cognition that they make possible, thereby founding immediate adherence, in the doxic mode, to the world of tradition experienced as a "natural world" and taken for granted. (Bourdieu 1977, 164)

The principles of the construction of reality, in particular of social reality, are a central dimension of political power. While Bourdieu opposes the notion of an ahistorical and abstract application of a single economic rationality to societies that "think" differently about economic interest, he insists on the economic nature of all symbolic systems. Even those that appear economically irrational to us, he maintains, never cease to conform to economic calculations, even if they give every appearance of disinterestedness by departing from the logic of interested calculation (in the narrow sense) and playing for stakes that are of non-material nature and not easily quantified. The theory of economic practice, in other words, is simply a particular case of a general theory of the economics of practice. "The only way to escape from the ethnocentric naiveties of economism, without falling into populist exaltation of the generous naivete of earlier forms of society, is to carry out in full what economism does only partially, and extend economic calculations to *all* the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as *rare* and worthy of being sought after . . . 'fair words' or smiles, handshakes or shrugs, compliments or attention, challenges or insults, honour or honours, powers or pleasures, gossip or scientific information, distinction or distinctness, etc." (Bourdieu 1977, 177).

Symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby *disguised* form of physical "economic" capital, produces its proper effect insofar, and only insofar, as it conceals the fact that it originates in "material" forms of capital that are also, in the last instance, the source of its effects. Only a reduced and reductive materialism can fail to see that strategies whose object is to conserve or increase the honor of the group (Bourdieu's example is based on his fieldwork in Algeria), in the forefront of which

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stand blood vengeance and marriage, are dictated by interests no less vital than are inheritance or fertility strategies. "The interest leading an agent to defend his symbolic capital is inseparable from the tacit adherence, inculcated in the earliest years of life and reinforced by all subsequent experience, to the axiomatics objectively inscribed in the regularities of the (in the broad sense) economic order which constitutes a determinate type of symbolic capital as worthy of being pursued and preserved" (Bourdieu 1977, 182). Such objectification guarantees that domination need not be exercised in a direct, personal way because domination is entailed in the means (economic or symbolic capital) of appropriating the mechanisms of the field of production and the field of cultural

production independently of any deliberate intervention by the agents.

However, just as economic wealth cannot function as capital until it is linked to an economic apparatus, so cultural competence in its various forms cannot be constituted as symbolic capital until it is inserted into the objective relations between the system of economic production and the system producing the producers. Habitus provides the dominant class with what Max Weber calls "a theodicy of its own privilege," a theodicy manifested, according to Bourdieu, in relations of symbolic protection and symbolic violence. The development of objective mechanisms of symbolic protection and violence permit an increasing degree of domination by indirect means. Whereas slavery is constituted by the direct appropriation of persons, client relations are characterized by gentle, hidden violence. Client relations entail "winning over" inferior classes by means of personal bonds of generosity and dignity that demonstrate that the "master" has the virtues corresponding to his status. "The system is such that the dominant agents have a vested interest in virtue; they can accumulate political power only by paying a *personal price* . . . they must have the 'virtues' of their power because the only basis of their power is 'virtue'" (Bourdieu 1977, 194). The gift, generosity, conspicuous distribution—the extreme case of which is the pot-latch—are operations of "social alchemy," according to Bourdieu, which may be observed whenever the direct application of overt physical or economic violence is negatively sanctioned, a gentle, hidden exploitation brought about by the transmutation of economic capital into symbolic capital.

In contemporary industrial societies, symbolic capital is no longer associated with personal relations between biological individuals but rather with impersonal relations between objective positions within the

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social space. The objectification accomplished by academic degrees and diplomas and in a more general way by all forms of credentials is inseparable from the objectification that the law guarantees by defining permanent positions that are distinct from biological individuals. Once this state of affairs is established, relations of power and domination no longer exist directly between individuals; they are a function of pure objectivity. In such societies it is not by lavishing generosity, kindness, or politeness on their social inferiors but rather by choosing the best investment for their money or the best schools for their children that the possessors of economic or symbolic capital perpetuate the relationship of domination that objectively links them with their inferiors or even their descendants. "If it be true that symbolic violence is the gentle, hidden form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible," Bourdieu argues, "it is understandable why symbolic forms of domination, so prevalent in pre-capitalist societies, should have progressively withered away as objective mechanisms came to be constituted which, in rendering superfluous the work of euphemization, tended to produce the 'disenchanted' dispositions their development demanded" (Bourdieu 1977, 196).

Therborn: The Contradictions of Ideological Interpellation

Bourdieu emphasizes habitus as a generative matrix of ideological practice and symbolic capital as the overdetermined effectivity of economic relations within the field of ideological relations. By contrast, Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn, in *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (1980), emphasizes the contradictory nature of ideological interpellation. Although he accepts Althusser's theory of ideology as his point of departure, Therborn insists first that the ideological apparatuses are unevenly developed as well as structurally integrated and second that the contradictions within the interpellation process take a precise general form stemming from the fact that ideologies not only *subject* individuals to the existing social order but also *qualify* them for conscious social action. There is an internal tension within the double functioning of interpellation, which results from a lack of correspondence between subjection and qualification. The dynamic nature of social formations, Therborn contends, makes perfect interpellation impossible:

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The reproduction of any social organization, be it an exploitative society or a revolutionary party, entails a basic correspondence between subjection and qualification. Those who have been subjected to a particular patterning of their capacities, to a particular discipline, qualify for the given roles and are capable of carrying them out. But there is always an inherent possibility that a contradiction may develop between the two. New kinds of qualification may be required and provided, new skills that clash with traditional forms of subjection. Or, conversely, new forms of subjection may develop that clash with the provision of still-needed qualifications. The effects of a contradiction between subjection and qualification are opposition and revolt or underperformance and withdrawal. (Therborn 1980, 17)

According to Therborn, ideology subjects and qualifies individuals by telling them what exists, what is good, and what is possible, and there is always a certain "lack of fit" between these three messages. Furthermore, these contradictions within ideology coexist with a multiplicity of contradictions between and within economic and political relations, and these are not independent. They are interrelated by virtue of "relations of overdetermination" determined, in the last instance, by the economy. "Marxism has traditionally focused upon one fundamental contradiction: that is between the forces and relations of production. . . . But it is also quite possible for political and ideological contradictions to develop—contradictions which . . . are essentially located between relations of social *domination* and the forces of *execution* of societal tasks in the state, and ideologically between *subjection* and *qualification* " (Therborn 1980, 45-46).

The dominance of the economic contradiction, Therborn argues, precludes the possibility of its permanent resolution by political or ideological means. "Marxism asserts that the political contradictions of domination-execution and the ideological contradictions of subjection-qualification are largely governed by, though not reducible to, the economic correspondence or contradiction between the relations and forces of production. . . . But if a contradiction develops between the relations and forces of production, no ideological formation can adequately and harmoniously subject-qualify the new economic subjects for the contradictory economic order. The old matrix of economic affirmations and sanctions then tends to crack" (Therborn 1980, 47). Therborn also rejects the conflation of the ideological and political instances implied by Althusser's term ideological state apparatus.^[5] Therborn retains the concept of ideological apparatuses, but he introduces a distinction between these and what he calls "counter-apparatuses."

Even though ideological interpellations occur everywhere [they] tend to cluster at those nodal points in the structure-in-dominance which we may call

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ideological apparatuses All such apparatuses are traversed by the class struggle, but even in a simplified model we should make a distinction between two types of apparatus bearing upon the formation of class members. One is *predominantly* a manifestation of the ruling-class (or ruling alliance's) organization of power and discourse; the other is made of what we might call *counter-apparatuses*, which largely express, although in varying degrees, the resistance and discourse of the ruled classes. (Therborn 1980, 85-86)

The term *counter-apparatus* is useful, for it provides a place for contradiction and class struggle to operate in the realm of the ideological, a place that does not exist in Althusser's essay. Therborn also significantly enhances the concept of interpellation by specifying what he calls the "biographical path" of an individual through a complex of apparatuses and counter-apparatuses—families, neighborhoods, schools, jobs, parties, trade unions—that are themselves complex entities whose "class" content is not nearly as transparent as Althusser seems to imply (Therborn 1980, 84-89). Indeed, Therborn is especially sensitive to the difficulty of relating all ideology to economic class position. He divides the world of ideological interpellation along two bipolar axes, one existential, the other historical. Each axis has two polar positions, an "inclusive" pole (being a member of a meaningful whole) and a "positional" pole (having a particular place in the world in relation to other members). From this typology Therborn infers the existence of four basic types of interpellation: inclusive-existential ideologies, for example, the meaning of life and death; inclusive-historical ideologies, such as nationalism or ethnicity; positional-existential ideologies, for example, gender distinctions; and positional-historical ideologies, such as social class or caste (Therborn 1980, 22-27).

Therborn admits that these are heuristic distinctions and that particular ideologies may exhibit characteristics of more than one of the four dimensions, either at the same time or in different contexts, but what is most interesting for our purposes is the relationship he posits between all these dimensions and class struggle. Therborn does not reduce them to class struggle, even though he does insist that Marxism must see them *in terms of* class struggle: "All ideologies (in class societies) exist in historical forms of articulation with different classes and class ideologies. This means that forms of individuality, (fe)maleness, religion, secular morality, geographic and ethnic positionality, nationalism are bound up with and affected by different modes of class existence and are linked to and affected by different class ideologies. . . . The patterning of a given set of ideologies is (within class societies) overdeter-

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mined by class relations of strength and by the class struggle" (Therborn 1980, 38).

While non-class ideologies have a historical and material existence that cannot be reduced to that of the dominant mode of production, their relative autonomy does not imply that they are unrelated to that mode of production and the class struggles it engenders, for they are always linked with class positions and inscribed within an overall social formation constituted by relations of class struggle. Despite the vagueness of his reference to class struggle, it has an important theoretical benefit since it permits Therborn to rectify the silence of Althusser's original presentation with respect to the problem of the generation of ideology. To explain the emergence of ideology, Therborn advances the following general propositions:

1. The generation of ideologies in human societies is always from the point of view of social science and historiography, a process of change of pre-existing ideologies.
2. Ideological change, and the generation of ideologies, is always dependent upon non-ideological material change.
3. The most important material change is constituted by the internal social dynamics of societies and their modes of production.
4. Every mode of production requires specific economic positional ideologies and in every exploitative mode of production specific class ideologies.
5. Every new mode of production will generate new economic positional ideologies.
6. All human societies exhibit existential- and historical-inclusive as well as historical-positional ideologies.
7. The concrete forms of existential, historical-inclusive and historical-positional ideologies other than the economic are not directly determined by the mode of production, but changes in the former are overdetermined by the latter.
8. New modes of production and new classes will generate forms of existential, historical-inclusive and other historical-positional ideologies that are capable of supporting and reinforcing the new predominant class ideologies, if the former do not already exist. (Therborn 1980, 41-42)

It is possible to advance beyond the general nature of Therborn's remarks and specify precisely the relationship between ideological practice and the practices of the political and economic instances, and we shall take up this task later. At this time, however, I would like to stress a more positive point, the value of Therborn's work as an example of the vitality of the Althusserian problematic. It is a critique, often a fun-

damental one, but it is also an extension of Althusser's concepts. Therborn's efforts, and even more those of Bourdieu, who does not even consider himself a Marxist, seem to me compelling arguments for the scientific nature of Althusser's work; Structural Marxism is not a rigid or finally finished set of dogmas but an open-ended research program capable of correction, clarification, and development. The work proceeds despite the philosophical and political turmoils that continue to swirl around it, and this progress is nowhere more evident than in the case of the theory of ideology.

Althusser: The "End of Ideology" Ideology

Aside from the furor over theoretical anti-humanism, nothing has generated as much controversy as Althusser's contention that ideology is a fundamental component of all human societies rather than a temporary aberration to be overcome with the triumph of socialism.

I am not going to steer clear of the crucial question: *historical materialism cannot conceive that even a communist society could ever do without ideology*, be it ethics, art or "world outlook." Obviously it is possible to foresee important modifications in its ideological forms and their relations and even the disappearance of certain existing forms or a shift of their functions to neighbouring forms; it is also possible (on the premise of already acquired experience) to foresee the development of new ideological forms (e.g., the ideologies of "the scientific world outlook" and "communist humanism") but in the present state of Marxist theory strictly conceived, it is not conceivable that communism, a new mode of production implying determinant forces of production and relations of production, could do without a social organization of production, and corresponding ideological forms. (Althusser 1969, 232)

There can be no end of interpellation, Althusser maintains, for that would entail the end of human society as well. However, as Althusser also clearly indicates in this passage, the necessity of ideological practice does not imply the legitimacy of any *particular* system of interpellation in any particular social formation. Even less can it be construed as an implicit argument for the continued viability of the bourgeois ideology of possessive individualism, although it is the basis on which any explanation of the latter's viability must rest.

The rather obvious nature of these conclusions indicates that the real objections to Althusser's repudiation of an "end of ideology" must be sought elsewhere. For most critics the philosophical stakes have little if any relation to the consistency much less the explanatory power of Al-

thusser's theory of ideology; instead, the theory is attacked on grounds that are ideological or political. E. P. Thompson, for example, calls Althusser's description of the subjective experience of individual men and women as ideological "the ugliest thing that he has ever done" (Thompson 1978, 174). Jacques Rancière contends that Althusser's defense of the science/ideology distinction fails to recognize that "the relation of science to ideology is one not of rupture but of articulation" and constitutes a "complete distortion of the ideological struggle" in the interests of "the wisdom of the Central Committee" and "bourgeois academic discourse" (Rancière 1985, 116). In both of these cases, the crucial objection to Althusser's position is presented in terms of the "spontaneous philosophy" of an "alienated" subject—either the individual (Thompson) or the working masses (Rancière)—and, more precisely in terms of "praxis," the union of theory and practice embodied in the subjects of history.

Althusser explicitly rejects the identity of theoretical and political practice. Indeed, his whole work has demonstrated the problematic nature of every attempt to conflate the two. Philosophies of praxis, Althusser argues, set out to absorb politics and theory into a third concept that subsumes and mystifies them both. While this strategy may occasionally have a useful polemical effect, for example, when directed against economism or idealism, it is incapable of producing scientific concepts since the projected third concept, praxis, inevitably slides into an ethical philosophy of history, either a call to action or a rationalization of previous successes or failures. For Althusser, the working-class movement consists of a "fusion" of two distinct entities, an experience of exploitation and a theory of that exploitation. The two are not identical: it is not by Marxism that the proletariat discovers that it is exploited; however, it is by Marxism that it learns the mechanisms and the modalities of its exploitation.

Behind the clamor for an "end of ideology" there is always the idea of alienation. Strictly speaking, alienation is not a social but an ontological category predicated on a human essence, or, as Etienne Balibar puts it, a "primitive transparency" to be recovered with the end of ideology (Balibar 1974, 226). The category of alienation lacks the specificity demanded of a scientific concept: individuals can be alienated in private property, the state, labor, the family, religion, and so on, yet the term itself does not facilitate the analytical investigation of these different forms. Instead, as Robin Blackburn and Gareth Stedman Jones (1972, 378) have remarked, employing the term *ideology* prejudices the

issue by assuming some underlying homology between these different alienations.

For Althusser, the proletariat (a term whose pertinence we have yet to examine) is not out to realize its essence—only to better its existence and put an end to its exploitation. To do so, of course, requires action, and action can take place only through ideology, that is, the form of a social subject. However, the chances of successful action are considerably improved by objective knowledge of the conjuncture, and the political value of

Marxism follows from the fact that it makes action based on knowledge possible. Thus, while theory and practice are never identical for Althusser, they are never totally separable either; theory is the critical guide of practice and practice is the unceasing critique of theory. Althusser's thesis that all practice takes place in ideology does not mean that practice is somehow inferior to theory. The "question of political action" does not disappear, Althusser explains; what disappears is the notion that political action is determined by "the omnipotence of 'transcendence,'" that is by the liberty of 'man' [rather than] by quite different conditions: by the state of the class struggle, by the state of the labor movement, by the ideology of the labor movement . . . and by its relation to Marxist theory, by its mass line" (Althusser 1976, 53-54).

Deleuze and the New Philosophy: Postmodernism and the New Right

For Althusser, science is influenced and sometimes even perverted by ideological interests and political power, but these influences are external, not internal, to scientific practice; in its concept, scientific practice remains uncontaminated by all motives other than the production of knowledge. Structural Marxists, intent on defending the category of the scientific, have been relatively indifferent to the ideological effects of scientific practice and the functioning of various scientific institutions as ideological apparatuses. Althusser, of course, acknowledges the institutionalization (and dissemination) of knowledge to be an ideological force: he insists, for example, that the educational system is the central ideological apparatus in industrial capitalist societies (Althusser 1971, 157). Althusser is quite aware that ideology invades theoretical practice through the "spontaneous philosophy" of scientists and he insists that science, being historical and social in nature, always exists in a certain relation to ideology and power.

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The way the exact sciences . . . are taught implies a certain ideological relation to their existence and their content. There is no teaching of pure knowledge [*savoir*] that is not at the same time a *savoir-faire*—that is, the definition of a know-how-to-act-in-relation-to-this-knowledge, and to its *theoretical and social function* . . . All science teaching, whether it wants to or not, conveys an ideology of science . . . based upon a certain idea of the place of science in society and a certain idea of the role of intellectuals who specialize in scientific knowledge and therefore of the division between manual and intellectual labor. (Althusser 1990, 94-95)

However, Althusser tends to portray science, and not just the Marxist science of history, as liberating and positive. It is a form of power, to be sure, but for Althusser, it is a latent power, a potential and positive power to understand and operate on the world. Science produces knowledge effects that may or may not be corrupted by power, but power itself comes from elsewhere; it is external to knowledge, not intrinsic to the very production of knowledge. About the darker side of science, the tyranny of instrumental reason (what Weber calls the "iron cage" of rationalization) and its normalizing effects on social subjectivity (insofar as the human subject becomes an object for science), Althusser has been significantly silent. In light of the Bolshevik transmutation of Marxism into an anti-democratic ideology rationalizing the class power of party functionaries, the social-political dimension of science—specifically the human sciences and most specifically Marxism as a science of history—cannot be ignored.

Althusser's defense of Marxism as a science and his assumption of the desirability of scientific knowledge were often criticized in the aftermath of the events of May 1968. In the early seventies various "ultraleftisms" enamored of spontaneity, Mao, and the Cultural Revolution denounced Althusser's "fetishism of knowledge" in favor of a view of science as simply another repressive aspect of bourgeois society. Jacques Rancière, one of the original coauthors of *Lire le Capital*, contended in *La leçon d'Althusser* that Althusser had betrayed his initial project of undermining the stranglehold of the party bureaucracy on Marxist theory and had erected a new form of "petty bourgeois" elitism, replacing the party leaders with professors and displacing concrete social struggles into a meaningless series of abstract conceptual oppositions (Rancière 1974, 55-111). Two other former students of Althusser and former Maoists, André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henry Lévy, moved beyond even Rancière in their condemnation of science, identifying Marxism with totalitarian politics and rediscovering the Cold War rhetoric of libertarian individualism. This self-styled "New Philosophy"

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was an instant media sensation and typified the distressingly smooth shift of intellectual fashion in Paris to a virulently anti-Marxist, post-modern *poste-gauchisme* during the mid-seventies.^[6] Peter Dews succinctly sums up the basic tenets of *thenouvelle philosophie*: "Marxism is responsible for the terror of the Soviet camps; the State is the central source of oppression and therefore any politics directed towards the seizure of State power is dangerous and vain; science always operates within and reinforces relations of power or, to raise the stakes a little higher, 'reason' is inherently totalitarian; since any political ideology will eventually be used to justify crimes against humanity the only 'safe' form of political action is a militant defense of human rights" (Dews 1979, 129).

Aside from the shamelessness of their opportunism, there is little that is noteworthy in the writings of the *nouveaux philosophes*. However, they are important here for two reasons: first because they represent a French variant of an international phenomenon, the neo-conservative intellectual movement known as the New Right, and second because their ideas (and those of the New Right generally) reflect a symbiotic relationship with

those of the postmodern Left, a relationship rarely acknowledged yet absolutely fundamental to any understanding of the contemporary malaise of social theory. To illuminate the "elective affinity" that unites the New Right and the postmodern Left, it is therefore useful to examine the French case: the relationship between the New Philosophy and postmodern dissidents Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, from whom the New Philosophers parasitically derive their rhetoric of power and the substance of their critique of science. I begin with a brief introduction of Deleuze because his neo-Nietzschean *gauchisme* most accurately reflects the characteristics of postmodern dissidence and because he provides the philosophical foundation for certain of Foucault's historical investigations. Foucault's work, by contrast, must be given greater attention because Foucault is something of a renegade Althusserian and because he, more than any other figure, attempts an immanent critique of Structural Marxist concepts and proposes a post-modern alternative to Structural Marxist concepts of history, science, and ideology.¹²¹

From a neo-anarchist position, post-Marxist from the very beginning and postmodern *avant la lettre*, Gilles Deleuze has produced a series of original and important books—*Différence et répétition* (1968), *Logique du sens* (1969), and, with antipsychiatrist Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980)—each

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attacking all structuration in theory and in society from a neo-Nietzschean perspective first elaborated by Deleuze in *Nietzsche et philosophie* (1962). For Deleuze, ontology is difference: the essence of all being is plural, productive, and devoid of deeper unity or meaning. Behind every thing or idea there are differences, yet behind difference there is nothing. By ontologizing the concept of difference, Deleuze seeks to escape from the labyrinth of absence and presence that envelops discursive practices, and it is this illusion of absence that serves as the (anti-) foundation of his thought. For Deleuze, the concept of difference is different from simple conceptual difference: the latter is merely a pseudo-difference established within a general framework of identity; the former, however, marks an authentic difference, the difference between identity and non-identity. Primal difference, according to Deleuze, is "nomadic" and "extraterritorial," totally foreign to all structures or boundaries. The historical condition of difference, however, is to be structured or coded by society, a process Deleuze calls "territorialization." Territorialization constitutes all social phenomena, according to Deleuze, yet it lacks any unified or central locus, logic, or meaning. Difference, being ontologically prior and antithetical to society, resists the coding process, and therefore all forms of territorialization are inherently unstable and incomplete.

Throughout its history, Western philosophy has attempted to repress or conceal difference by means of concepts and structures organized around "representation, similarity and repetition." These operations, Deleuze maintains, obscure the production (both the "bringing into existence" and the "showing") of differences by stressing re-presentation, identity, and "repetition of the same." For Deleuze, identity is mere illusion because there is no essence to represent; nothing exists beneath the arbitrary surface coding of difference. Meaning is precisely the existing physical state of affairs, beneath which is primal chaos, undifferentiated and formless flux. Language, which Deleuze also sees as nomadic, infinitely productive, and ultimately devoid of any "deep structure" of meaning, has also been territorialized by structural thinking, which imposes an illusion of systemic organization on language from which meaning may then be derived. In contrast, Deleuze insists that language, which appears to be built on two codings (signifiers and signifieds), is in fact based on a primal, paradoxical, self-referential illusion, a "sombre precursor," or "esoteric word." This latter term is literally nonsensical, for its self-reference simply masks the endless proliferation of difference. Language conceals difference behind the facade

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of its own "logic of sense." For Deleuze, "the logic of sense" is based on "events," the meaningless conjuncture of the "mélanges" of bodies that make up the physical world, but it occludes the arbitrariness of such events by means of endless mechanisms of reference. The meaning of a sentence (the event itself) is only apparently "referred to." In actuality, because the event is the precondition of meaning, it can be referred to only by another sentence, then another, and so on in an infinite evasion (which is also a repression).

Similar and more directly political processes are at work in the realm of social institutions and the human sciences. The basic unit of meaning of Deleuze's interpretation of human existence is the "body," which he defines, in Nietzschean terminology, as a "relation of forces," or more precisely as a relation between "dominating" and "dominated" forces. All reality is always already made up of a proliferation of forces in tension with each other. The living body is an arbitrary product of the forces that compose it in a "unity of domination," a multiple phenomenon composed of "active" and "reactive" qualities whose unity is hierarchical. The historical situation of the body is to have experienced the "genealogy" of Nietzschean resentment, which Deleuze interprets as a denial and reversal of difference and the triumph of a reactive, deformed nihilism, a "will to nothing" that destroys all affirmative values from within. For Deleuze, the actualization of difference by the individual (will to power of the living body) is affirmative and healthy. The denial of difference by society (the reactive social body) is repressive and unhealthy. The social body plays the same repressive role as representation does: it serves to contain the nomadic distribution of differences and has resulted (by a kind of negative Hegelianism) in the triumph of reactive over active forces.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, psychic development is interpreted in much the same way. In contrast to Freudian interpretations (and their Lacanian re-interpretation), Deleuze and Guattari deny any "primal lack" or yearning for

a pre-Oedipal, instinctual desire for unity. The Oedipus complex, Deleuze and Guattari maintain, does not involve the resolution of problems created by pre-existing, instinctive desires; it is first and foremost the territorialization of desire, the organization and coding of a fragmented, differentiated "desiring production" that is the essence of human reality. The various "desiring machines" that make up the unconscious are first organized by the parents (and by society) and then "resolved," that is, further territorialized into a social body, a corporal form of representation. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is

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"active," productive, a part of the social "infrastructure" yet "revolutionary" since to question its repression by a "reactive," guilt-based psychoanalysis will always reveal complementary structures of social repression.

The anti-Althusserian implications of Deleuze's work are clear. While both Althusser and Deleuze oppose domination in the form of capitalist property relations and recognize the importance of the constitution of subjectivity in maintaining these relations, the basis of explanation is radically different for each. Deleuze, following Nietzsche, sees a chaotic will to power as the ahistorical, ontological motor of history. To be sure, this chaosmos is always historically structured, but the principle of that structuration lies outside history. For Deleuze, as for Nietzsche, history is merely one more (false) structure of meaning imposed on meaningless differences taking a historical form. Change is purely formal, never substantive. Liberation, insofar as such a thing makes any sense at all for Deleuze, consists of refusing and contesting the territorialization of difference in theory, in the psyche, and in society. The social world is a *mélange* of structured differences lacking a central structure or an overarching pattern. Contestation cannot be localized but must be as nomadic as difference itself. Schizophrenia, a psychological refusal of the Oedipus complex, is a passive example of resistance by desiring production. Deleuze and Guattari call for an "active schizophrenia," the conscious refusal of all structures of exploitation, subjection, and hierarchy. For Deleuze, a Marxist theory of society is hopelessly narrow in its explanatory framework (classes are beside the point, and the repression of desire is universal) and dangerous in its theoretical rigor and its political implications (it entails yet another imposition of meaning on difference and implies a centered and therefore illusory locus of repression which can serve as a target for political action but which will not attack the roots or reverse the process of structuration).

Deleuze's problematic was a powerful influence on the French Left in the seventies, the decade Nietzsche replaced Marx as the central reference for French intellectuals. It seemed to provide a framework within which the ideals of May 1968 could survive the pessimism that attended their defeat. Indeed, that defeat could be rationalized by stressing the deficiencies of Marxism, which was ultimately held responsible for the failure of the revolution (Althusserian theory as a repressive and narrow rationalism; the reactionary nature of the French Community Party, which lost the revolution by pursuing limited, tra-

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ditional, self-interested tactics; and so on). Leaving aside (for the moment) the theoretical significance of the neo-Nietzschean dissidence, it is clear that its negative thrust cut two ways. It did attempt to provide a critical perspective against which domination could be measured, but it also exploited the extreme disappointment within the ranks of the Left after 1968 and contributed significantly to the general anti-Marxist fervor that swept Paris after 1975. Positively, it joined with poststructuralism to form the theoretical core of what became known in the United States as postmodernism.

Foucault: Archaeology Versus History

No one weathered these sea changes of fashion with more success than did Michel Foucault. A celebrity of the age of high Structuralism, Foucault achieved superstar status in the era of postmodernism by reformulating his historical enterprise in an explicitly Nietzschean direction pioneered by Deleuze. Prior to 1968, Foucault seemed to be engaged in a project not dissimilar to that of Althusser, despite Foucault's admittedly non-Marxist orientation. Both were obviously indebted to the same philosophy of science for their focus on knowledge as a historical problem and for their relativistic epistemology; both were pursuing a structural, explicitly anti-humanist, anti-Hegelian explanation of historical phenomena; and both spoke about and against certain forms of historically structured domination that they held to be constitutive of contemporary society. Foucault was a student of Althusser, while Althusser cited Foucault's first books with approval. Nevertheless, there were significant differences between the two men, and these differences crystallized into outright opposition in 1969-70, when Althusser introduced his concepts of interpellation and ideological apparatuses and Foucault responded with his neo-Nietzschean formulation "knowledge/power."

The differences between Althusser and Foucault center on the problem of historical thinking generally and, more specifically, on historical materialism as a scientific discourse. Both perceived similar problems and limitations in existing forms of historical thinking, but their responses to the "crisis of historicism" were, from the beginning, antithetical. Althusser's project was, as we have seen, to revive Marxism as a theoretical perspective, to establish its claims as a science of history within a modernist reworking of the ideas of science and historical discourse, and

to elaborate a form of historical causality that would do

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justice to the complexity of social formations and human subjectivity within a framework of economic determination. Foucault, by contrast, was never persuaded by Althusser's attempt to overcome the limitations of Marxism, which Foucault insisted on dismissing as inherently simplistic. Foucault's project was to investigate the structures of human knowledge in relation to their conceptual conditions of existence and to their institutional forms without recourse to any theory of historical determination. Indeed, so strong was his reaction against historical explanation that Foucault refused to elaborate any causal relationships within society or even to defend the truth claims of his own historical writings. As a result, Foucault's ongoing attempts to develop a methodology for his brilliantly idiosyncratic "histories" were, in large part, defined negatively by an Althusserian moment with which he was in constant and not always productive tension.

Foucault is, as we would expect, a very unconventional historian. He is a historian of discourse, and more precisely of the discursive practices of the human sciences. He is concerned with both the internal rules and norms, the rules of exclusion and hierarchy that dictate what can be said within these discourses, and with the institutions, the material sites of the social power that envelop, legitimize, normalize, and sustain scientific discourse. In his early books, *Madness and Civilization* (1961; English translation, 1965) and *Birth of the Clinic* (1963; English translation, 1973), Foucault investigates the discourses of psychiatry and medicine and the ways in which these discourses produce, perceive, and regulate their objects, "sanity" and "health." Foucault seeks, provocatively, to demonstrate that distinctions basic to these discourses, distinctions between madness and sanity, sickness and health, are arbitrary distinctions related not to the progress of knowledge but to new or changing social relations of exclusion and integration embedded in institutional frameworks such as asylums and clinics, whose functions were social control—normalization and administration—and were neither scientific nor humanitarian.

While Foucault refuses to posit any general statement regarding the relationship between discourse and society, he appears to be reducing discourse to those social institutions and non-discursive forces that provide its material conditions of existence. The history of madness reveals no progress in the theoretical understanding of an illness. Rather, it indicates a consistent tendency to project general social preconceptions and anxieties into theoretical frameworks that justify the confinement of whatever social groups or personality types that appear to threaten

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society during a particular period. The poor, the dissident, the criminal, and the insane are separated or herded together, treated as humans or as animals, confined or liberated, according to considerations that are primarily political rather than scientific. Medical practice, Foucault argues, is similarly grounded in social concerns, the clinic and the hospital being microcosms of those attitudes toward human nature prevailing among the dominant classes of society at a given time. Small wonder that Althusser approved of these works and saw them as recognizable offspring of his own ideas.

However, in his next two works, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; English translation, 1973a) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; English translation, 1972), Foucault shifts his perspective to the internal structural constraints of discourse alone and to a new anti-materialist methodological strategy that he calls "archaeology." Institutional and social determinations of discourse disappear, replaced by what Foucault calls an "episteme," by which he understands "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems . . . the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyzes them at the level of discursive regularities" (Foucault 1972, 191). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault contrasts the four epistemic epochs of the so-called human sciences—discourses whose objects are life (biology), labor (society), and language (culture)—from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century. The first of these, the Renaissance, was characterized by similitude, the desire to find the same within the different, the extent to which objects resemble each other and the extent to which words truly signify things. The tortuous attempt to demonstrate the similarity of things, that everything to a significant extent resembles everything else, exhausted itself by the seventeenth century. An "archaeological shift" occurred, bringing a new episteme that dominated the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which Foucault calls the Classical Age. The classical episteme focused on differences revealed by the Renaissance and attempted to account for them by a discursive protocol involving comparison, ordering, and representation. According to this protocol, representation is certain and logical; the principle of comparison and ordering of differences moves from the simple to the complex in a carefully calibrated system based on contiguity and continuity. The role of consciousness is one of exteriority. Mind simply observes and classifies representations that are

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themselves independent and immediate. Representing the essential order of things, identity *and* difference, means the discovery of a system of control over them. The belief of the Classical Age was that if the correct table of relationships could be discovered, one could manipulate "life," "wealth," and "language" by manipulating the signs that signify them. However, the classical principle of order and comparison is undermined by the perception of temporality, of the differential origin of things, a perception that destroys the timeless ground of continuity and contiguity, which made things measurable and comparable.

At the end of the eighteenth century another "archaeological shift" occurred, inaugurating the Modern Age, dominated by an awareness of temporality and finitude. Knowledge was problematized as thought was increasingly absorbed with the historicity of species, modes of production, and language usages. "Man," hitherto invisible, became a knowing subject among objects and, more significantly, the object of his own historical understanding. Epistemology came into being as an attempt to discover the grounds on which representations are possible or legitimate given the finitude and limitations of the human subject. "Man" is thus no more than an epistemic creation of the Modern Age, which began with the realization of human finitude and was characterized by its attempt to overcome or transcend these limitations within the epistemic framework of the human subject—to find a ground for meaning and knowledge within what Foucault calls the "analytic of finitude." The modern episteme has exhausted itself attempting to overcome oppositions between the transcendental form of knowing and the historical content of knowledge, between the thinking cogito and the "unthought" background that is its condition of existence, and, finally, between the historical situation of man, how man is already in history and cut off from all origins, and the historical primacy of man, that man is the agent or maker of history. As a result, Foucault concludes, the Age of Man is currently being displaced by a new, fourth age that has abandoned the analytic of finitude and accepted the disappearance of the human subject, the opacity of language, and the absence of historical meaning. Significantly, Foucault credits Nietzsche with the initial insight into the coming "post-Modern" age:

In our day, and once again Nietzsche indicated the turning-point from a long way off, it is not so much the absence or the death of God that is affirmed as the end of man. . . . Rather than the death of God—or, rather, in the wake of that death and in a profound correlation with it—what Nietzsche's thought heralds is the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man's face

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in laughter, and the return of masks; it is the scattering of the profound stream of time by which he felt himself carried along and whose pressure he suspected in the very being of things; it is the identity of the Return of the Same with the absolute dispersion of man. (Foucault 1973, 385)

The foregoing remarks convey something of the breadth of Foucault's erudition and the considerable originality and penetration of his analyses. They also, however, reveal the gaps and tensions that lurk beneath the surfaces of Foucault's thought, gaps and tensions that no amount of rhetorical brilliance or historical insight can conceal. First, Foucault oscillates between the primacy of internal (in *The Order of Things*) and external (in *Madness and Civilization*) determinations of knowledge effects. Which, if either, is determinant in the last instance? What is their interrelationship? A second group of questions centers on the status of knowledge effects themselves. Unlike Althusser, who carefully distinguishes between the concepts of different discursive practices (science, ideology, philosophy, and, as we shall see, literature), Foucault's approach progressively erodes all such distinctions. Foucault has chosen as his object a discourse that he calls "pseudo-science," but he offers no criterion by which such a distinction might be justified. While the relationships Foucault adduces between social power and the practice of medicine and the revelation of a dependence of the human sciences on a broad "mind-set" like the episteme are illuminating, in the end we must ask if these discourses are only this and nothing more. Whereas Althusser asserts the principle of realism and the validity of scientific discourse by means of his materialist thesis, Foucault seems completely uninterested in knowledge effects as productive of knowledges. Finally there are the inevitable questions regarding the nature of Foucault's own discourse. Foucault wishes to have his epistemological cake (radical relativism) and eat it, too (have us accept his "histories" as somehow compelling). How, we must ask, would Foucault defend his discourse in the realm of philosophy?

Foucault's answers, except to disciples and those commentators with independent anti-historical or anti-materialist positions to defend, are disappointing. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault attempts to address questions of method and summarize the results of his previous work. Much of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* elaborates a critique of history, and the history of science in particular, which reproduces, in slightly different form, that of Althusser—a dependency that does not interest us at the moment. What is of interest is Foucault's attempt to overcome the deficiencies of history by means of an archaeological

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method that is neither a science nor a philosophy nor a history. Archaeology is a "diagnosis" of systems of thought whose task, Foucault tells us, is "to make differences: to constitute them as objects, to analyze them, and to define their concept" (Foucault 1972, 205). As a diagnosis of differences, however, archaeology cannot itself be a totalizing type of discourse. Archaeology, Foucault insists, "is trying to deploy a dispersion that can never be reduced to a single system of differences, a scattering that is not related to absolute axes of reference; it is trying to operate a decentering that leaves no privilege to any center" (Foucault 1972, 206).

The particular differences with which the archaeological method is concerned are those related to statements

"to describe statements, to describe the enunciative function of which they are the bearers, to analyze the conditions in which this function operates, to cover the different domains that this function presupposes and the way in which those domains are articulated" (Foucault 1972, 115). The vast "archive" of statements is noteworthy for the processes of "rarefaction" that it displays, how it is that certain statements are made and not others, and the methods of justification and refutation that confer on statements their right to be taken seriously. Foucault advances beyond Althusser in one significant sense: he introduces an important refinement to the Althusserian distinction between science and ideology, the idea of discursive "thresholds of scientificity." For Foucault, the process of discursive differentiation has several distinct moments whose distribution, succession, and possible coincidence (or lack of it) constitute the domain of archaeology.

The moment at which a discursive practice achieves individuality and autonomy, the moment therefore at which a single system for the formation of statements is put into operation, or the moment at which this system is transformed, might be called the *threshold of positivity*. When in the operation of a discursive formation, a group of statements is articulated, claims to validate (even unsuccessfully) norms of verification and coherence, and when it exercises a dominant function (as a model, a critique, or a verification) over knowledge, we will say that the discursive formation crosses a *threshold of epistemologization*. When the epistemological figure thus outlined obeys a number of formal criteria, when its statements comply not only with archaeological rules of formation, but also with certain laws for the construction of propositions, we will say that it has crossed a *threshold of scientificity*. And when this scientific discourse is able, in turn, to define the axioms necessary to it, the elements that it uses, the propositional structures that are legitimate to it, and the transformations that it accepts, when it is thus able, taking itself as a starting point, to deploy the formal edifice

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that it constitutes, we will say that it has crossed the *threshold of formalization*. (Foucault 1972, 186-87)

However, there is no functional distinction between subject-centered, practice-oriented discourse and object-centered, knowledge-oriented discourse in Foucault. Furthermore, Foucault's gain in precision does not enable him to resolve the problem of the social context of this process, the problem of determinative priority between discursive and social structures, or the problem of the epistemological status of archaeology itself. Most of the time, Foucault insists that discursive practices arbitrate the transformation of *savoir* (the basic, general level of knowledge) to *connaissance* (science): "A statement belongs to a discursive formation as a sentence belongs to a text. . . . [T]he regularity of statements is defined by the discursive formation itself. The fact of its belonging to a discursive formation and the laws that govern it are one and the same thing" (Foucault 1972, 116). Yet at times he displays confusion or uncertainty as, for example, when he discusses the discourse of political economy:

Broadly speaking, and setting aside all mediation and specificity, it can be said that political economy has a role in capitalist society, that it serves the interest of the bourgeois class, that it was made by and for that class, and that it bears the marks of its origins even in its concepts and logical architecture; but any more precise description of the relations between the epistemological structure of political economy and its ideological function must take into account the analysis of the discursive formation that gave rise to it and the group of objects, concepts, and theoretical choices that it had to develop and systematize; and one must then show how the discursive practice that gave rise to such a positivity functioned among other practices that might have been of a discursive but also of a political or economic order. (Foucault 1972, 185-86)

Foucault is still unable or unwilling to situate discursive practices in any firm relationship to their historical context. He attempts to escape this difficulty by cribbing from *For Marx*: "the field of statements is . . . a practical domain that is autonomous (although dependent), and which can be described at its own level (although it must be articulated on something other than itself)" (Foucault 1972, 121-22). However, Foucault refuses the task of describing this "something other than itself" on which the field of statements is articulated, preferring, disingenuously, to label himself a positivist instead. The problem is resolvable only by means of a general theory of social formations, one that would establish a relationship and a hierarchy between social phenom-

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ena; Foucault, unlike Althusser, refuses to supply such a theory. The reasons for the refusal lie in Foucault's determined (and futile) search for an escape from totalizing thought—that assertion of meaning which, for Foucault, is immediately a distortion and immediately contaminated by the analytic of finitude. Archaeology is neither a science nor a history; it must not attempt to penetrate beneath the description of surfaces. By a negative logic, one dominated by his obsessive refusal to assume the responsibility for asserting something, Foucault is led "to the project of a *pure description of discursive events* as the horizon for the search for the unities that form within it" (Foucault 1972, 27).

For Foucault, the attempt to penetrate beyond this descriptive "horizon" and develop a more powerful explanatory strategy is fraught with peril since to say *something* is to exercise precisely the same kind of exclusionary power that it is the task of archaeology to reveal yet refuse to perpetuate. Foucault comes to precisely the same point as Althusser with regard to the absence of a firm philosophical ground for historical (or archaeological) discourse—Foucault explicitly notes that "to tackle the ideological functioning of a science in order to reveal and to modify it . . . is to *question* it as a discursive practice . . . to *treat* it as one practice among others" (Foucault 1972, 186; my emphasis)—but he flees from the task of confronting the consequences. "For the moment, and as far ahead as I can see," he concludes lamely, "my discourse, far from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support" (Foucault 1972, 205).

Interpretations of Foucault's dense and elliptic text have ranged from serious philosophical exegesis to aesthetic appreciation of it as a parody of epistemological discourse. One interpretive strategy, surprisingly overlooked by otherwise thorough commentators, is the anti-Althusserian dialectic at work in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault's "archaeological method" is largely a negative image of Althusser's differential history. Both approaches begin with the discontinuity of historical discourse and the absence of any absolute grounding for

historical knowledge. The difference is that Structural Marxism incorporates these incontestable positions into a problematic that then moves on to produce knowledges whose validity it may not be able to prove philosophically but which it can use to defend itself on the battlefield of philosophy. Foucault's archaeological method, in contrast, cannot but flaunt its own arbitrariness and brazenly accept the consequences. "If, by substituting the analysis of the rarity for the search for totalities, the description of relations of exteriority for the theme of

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transcendental foundation, the analysis of accumulations for the quest of the origin, one is a positivist, then I am quite happy to be one" (Foucault 1972, 109).

Foucault's discourse is willfully superficial since, in his view, any attempt to assert meaning constitutes a fall into the coils of modernist oppositions. "It is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak" (Foucault 1972, 130). Yet Foucault certainly does speak, and he expects to be taken seriously: "in so far as it is possible to constitute a general theory of productions, archaeology, as the analysis of rules proper to the different discursive practices, will find what might be called its *enveloping theory*" (Foucault 1972, 207). Those who dare to press Foucault on matters of inconsistency, logical contradiction, or the larger theoretical implications of his archaeological method are dismissed as theoretical tyrants: "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order" (Foucault 1972, 17). This last remark is the most prescient in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. It portends the imminent resolution of the tension between the production of discourse through epistemic structures and the social determination of the structures of thought themselves by means of an undifferentiated concept of knowledge/power.

From Archaeology to Genealogy

The Archaeology of Knowledge did little more than expose the soft theoretical underbelly of Foucault's otherwise important historical works. The failure of his attempt to "out-Althusser Althusser" propelled Foucault toward the only viable approach left open to him, that is, toward Nietzsche and to the neo-Nietzschean, postmodern Left of Deleuze. In the early seventies Foucault returned to the problem of the rarity of discourse from a new "genealogical" perspective and resolved the question of determinative priority between structures of thought and the structures of society, brutally, in favor of the latter. The notion of episteme is abandoned in favor of a new term, *discursive regime*, which represents a strong identification of knowledge and domination. "What was missing [in *The Order of Things*]," Foucault remarked in a 1977 interview, "was this problem of the 'discursive regime,' of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements. I confused this too much with systematicity, theoretical form, or something like a paradigm" (Foucault 1980a, 113).

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The move away from "theoretical forms" toward a "discursive regime" reactively mirrors Althusser's well-publicized redefinition of philosophy and shift toward the material apparatuses of ideology and the process of interpellation, and once again places Foucault in a position of negative dependence on Structural Marxism. By the time of his important essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971, in Foucault 1977), a new set of differences between Foucault's position and that of Althusser were coming into focus. Lacking anything comparable to Althusser's multifaceted concept of ideology or any general framework for differentiating the existence and function of social practices, Foucault had always conceptualized discursive practice in one-dimensional terms, as either "knowledge" or "power"; hereafter he simply collapses them into a simple unity, knowledge/power. Foucault explicitly reformulates his idea of discourse in terms of power. The discursive regime becomes *adispositif*, a system or apparatus (the debt to Althusser could hardly be clearer), signifying that knowledge is now merely an effect of power, that power alone creates structures of thought and constitutes the condition for the possibility of knowledge. In the published summary of his 1971-72 course on penal institutions, Foucault summarized his position this way:

power relations (with the struggles that traverse them or the institutions that maintain them) do not play with respect to knowledge a facilitating or obstructive role; they are not content merely to encourage or stimulate it, to distort or limit it, power and knowledge are not linked together solely by the play of interests or ideologies; the problem is not therefore that of determining how power subjugates knowledge and makes it serve its ends, or how it imprints its mark on knowledge, imposes on it ideological contents and limits. No body of knowledge can be formed without a system of communications, records, accumulation and displacement which is in itself a form of power and which is linked, in its existence and functioning, to other forms of power. Conversely, no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge. On this level, there is not knowledge on the one side and society on the other, or science and the state, but only the fundamental forms of knowledge/power. (Foucault, quoted in Sheridan 1980, 131)

Foucault has a valid point to make here. It is essential that social theory recognize that the production of knowledge is itself a process of interpellation embedded in an ideological apparatus. However, I suggest that Foucault has bent the stick too far in this direction, promulgating a simplistic reduction of knowledge to domination that extends beyond the history of science (where it has an undeniable, if partial,

heuristic value) to the philosophy of science (where it serves as an epistemological category based on a ontological essence, power). Concealed within the conceptual transition from episteme to knowledge/power is a rather ominous shift in Foucault's attitude toward the content of discourse. Knowledge effects are no longer neutral things (*Archaeology of Knowledge*) or even effects of exterior "bad" things (*Madness and Civilization*); knowledge becomes in itself an explicitly oppressive form of domination. Foucault's insight, that knowledge is a process of interpellation, is inscribed within a simple, undifferentiated negativity that distinguishes Foucault's usage of the term knowledge/power from Althusser's concepts of science, philosophy, ideology, and ideological apparatuses. Foucault's conceptualization not only forecloses any attempt to articulate a philosophical defense of its own interpretation of historical events but also pre-empts any attempt to discuss knowledge effects in relation to their theoretical object and the knowledges they produce of that object.

In actuality, Foucault's "genealogical method" is a poor alternative to the Althusserian problematic and not much of an improvement over archaeology, whose ad hoc character and bias against totalization it retains without qualification. Aside from a focus on knowledge as an ideological apparatus, all the positive attributes of genealogy derive from the recognition of subjectivity as a social production, an insight taken over completely from Althusser and then impregnated with a Nietzschean-Deleuzian vitalism. The result, far from overcoming the methodological and epistemological problems of archaeology, reproduces them in an intensified form. Whereas structural causality can easily accommodate knowledge/power in terms of an articulation of scientific practice within a social whole that assigns it a place and a function (a social whole determined, in the last instance, by the economy), Foucault can express knowledge/power only as reified and hypostatized fact. Subtracting those materialist elements it borrows from Structural Marxism, Foucault's genealogy is little more than a series of rhetorical flourishes, oscillating between a peculiarly teleological form of historicism and a strident, politicized aestheticism that denies the truth of its own research.

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault elaborates on what he takes to be the strengths of the genealogical method. First among these is the fact that genealogy, like archaeology, continues to reject historical determination and scientific realism, the belief in "immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession." If the genealo-

gist "listens to history," Foucault explains, "he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms" (Foucault 1980a, 142). The "search for origins" that defines history for Foucault is abandoned by the genealogists in favor of an analysis of what he calls "descent." The difference between descent and origin is that the former is not based on a category of "resemblance." Rather than the unity of resemblance, genealogy is interested in "subindividual marks that might possibly intersect . . . to form a network that is difficult to unravel." The genealogist "sets out to study the beginning—numberless beginnings whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by an historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement" (Foucault 1980a, 145-46). In fact, the distinction between origins and "beginnings" turns on ontologizing difference in the manner of Deleuze, a move that simultaneously asserts the accidental nature of being and the privileged eye of the genealogist.

An examination of descent also permits the discovery, under the unique aspect of a trait or a concept, of the myriad events through which—thanks to which, against which—they were formed. Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things. . . . Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species. . . . On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist. (Foucault 1980a, 146)

Genealogy, Foucault seems to be saying, is the method of knowing real history (*proper dispersions*), the anti-teleological teleology (the *chain of accidents*) of what exists, by means of an anti-reflectionist reflectionism (which *permits the discovery* of the true untruth of being). It must be left to the reader to measure Foucault's disarmingly frank embrace of ad hoc historicist reflectionism against the Structural Marxist project of differential history. Here it is necessary only to contrast Foucault's historical reflectionism with his antithetical posture of epistemological relativism in order to demonstrate the absurdity of the whole genealogical enterprise. Not only does Foucault claim to have privileged access to history—to real historical events and tendencies which he wishes to bring to our attention and against which he wishes to enlist our support—but he also disclaims any responsibility for what

he views to be the totalitarian implications of his claim to knowledge. If knowledge is power, and power is bad, then theory must be rejected: "Reject all theory and all forms of general discourse. This need for theory is still part

of the system we reject" (Foucault 1980a, 231).

Foucault wants his genealogies to be part of what Deleuze and Guattari call a *rhizome*, a vine-like subterranean resistance that surfaces, unexpectedly, as a nomadic guerrilla attack on the global network of power and then disappears again. "Against this global policy of power," Foucault valiantly proclaims, "we initiate localized counter-responses, skirmishes, active and occasionally preventative defenses. We have no need to totalize that which is invariably totalized on the side of power" (Foucault 1980a, 212). The fear of totalization, rooted in the reduction of knowledge to power, leads Foucault to pragmatism, a reduction of his genealogies to political pamphlets whose sole value resides in their rhetorical power. "Writing," Foucault insists, "interests me only insofar as it enlists itself into the reality of a contest, as an instrument of tactics, of illumination. I would like my books to be, as it were, lancets, or Molotov cocktails, or minefields; I would like them to self-destruct after use, like fireworks" (Foucault, quoted in Megill 1985, 243). Where the coin of reason has been devalued, the counterfeit of manipulation will have to serve, and with it comes the inevitable inflation of rhetoric and voluntarism.

Both the historicist-theoretical and the rhetorical-pragmatic tendencies of Foucault's method have a common objective, the identification of and resistance to structures of domination. The problem is that these tendencies contest each other in an irreconcilable fashion. Rather than setting up a productive tension between theory and practice, one that would clarify and distinguish each in relation to the other, Foucault elides the antithesis between them, leaving us in a realm of political fiction: "I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions. For all that, I would not want to say they were outside the truth. It seems plausible to me to make fictions work within truth, to introduce truth-effects within a fictional discourse, and in some way to make discourse arouse, 'fabricate,' something which does not yet exist, thus to fiction something. One 'fictions' history starting from a political reality that renders it true, one 'fictions' a politics that does not yet exist starting from a historical truth" (Foucault 1980a, 193). Even if one shares Foucault's desire for a new vision of the future, one may entertain deep reservations about fictionalizing history as the means to achieve it.

In his major works of the seventies, *Discipline and Punish* (1975;

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English translation, 1979) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976; English translation, 1980), Foucault focuses on "disciplinary technologies" (normalizing techniques, forms of domination), which he holds to be both more representative of modern industrial societies and more broadly diffused throughout social practices than the economically derived domination emphasized in Marxist analyses. Indeed, Foucault likes to accuse Marxists of missing the actual "mechanics of power" or the "general functioning" of power by focusing on only one of its forms, economic domination: "Psychiatric internment, the mental normalization of individuals, and penal institutions have no doubt a fairly limited importance if one is only looking for their economic significance. On the other hand, they are undoubtedly essential to the general functioning of the wheels of power. So long as the posing of the question of power was kept subordinate to the economic instance and the system of interests which this served, there was a tendency to regard these problems as of small importance" (Foucault 1980a, 116). Again, I have no quarrel with the rational kernel of Foucault's critique (despite the straw-man tactics that serve to give it more force than it would otherwise carry), nor do I deny the important corrective function Foucault's works have performed. Foucault's seminal studies of prisons and sexuality, and his concepts of disciplinary technology, bio-power, and so forth have justifiably called attention to the subtle mechanisms and pervasive presence of normalizing technologies within social institutions and discursive practices.

Nevertheless, as several critics have pointed out, Foucault's Nietzschean problematic, heavily indebted to Deleuze, works at cross-purposes to a materialist understanding of power. It seems to me that the merits of Foucault's historical analyses derive from their reactive tension with (and underlying dependence on) Althusserian concepts. Foucault's Nietzschean turn, far from advancing beyond Structural Marxism, in fact represents a regression, inferior by the very criteria that Althusser and Foucault share. Foucault is ineluctably driven away from the materiality of power (the starting point of his analyses) toward a mythologized, ahistorical, and ultimately essentialist concept: Power. From the perspective of Power, Foucault is unable to distinguish between different forms or relations of power (any more than between different forms of discourse), nor can he formulate any coherent concept of political resistance to power. However, if we strip away Foucault's Nietzschean veneer, his essentialist ontology of Power, and his rather vulgar anti-Marxism, we discover an imaginative practitioner of

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differential history whose insights may be reconciled with Althusser's Structural Marxist problematic. This outcome is surprising only at first glance; on reflection it is a logical terminus to the common project—the anti-historicist, anti-humanist, anti-empiricist reformulation of historical methodology—begun by Althusser and Foucault in the sixties.

On the Subject of Power

The human sciences, long the object of Foucault's interest and animosity, are the paradigmatic examples of

knowledge/power. Taking up, in a more sophisticated and direct way, themes of *Madness and Civilization* and *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault dramatically asserts the dominating character of discourses pertaining to human beings, their social nature, and organization in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. For Foucault, expanding our scientific knowledge of human beings is only the ideological exterior of a process whose invisible core, masked by scientific and humanitarian rhetoric, is actually a complex and relentless conquest of human beings. In *Discipline and Punish*, a brilliant survey of prisons and their rationale, Foucault argues that the transition from physical punishment to modern methods of imprisonment and rehabilitation—the whole legal, psychiatric, carceral apparatus—is not the result of a "humanization" of the social handling of deviant behavior based on an increase in knowledge. Instead, it is one instance of a general process involving the creation and expansion of what Foucault calls "discipline," the internal subdivision and subjugation (*dressage*) of the body, as opposed to "punishment," the external command and control over an otherwise whole and independent body.

Such disciplinary technologies, forms of political anatomy that Foucault calls "bio-power," extend far beyond the phenomenon of the prison system. They form discrete parts of a general pattern, originating in the eighteenth century, that progressively embraced the entire spectrum of the human sciences. In Foucault's view, the exercise of power over the population and the accumulation of knowledge about it are really the same process. Science functions within social formations to increase the leverage of power over the body, which in turn advances objectification: not power *and* knowledge but knowledge/power.

I am not saying that the human sciences emerged from the prison. But if they have been able to be formed and to produce so many it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power: a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering the accumulation of men docile and

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useful. This policy required the involvement of definite relations of knowledge in relations of power; it called for a technique of overlapping subjection and objectification; it brought with it new procedures of individualization. The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. (Foucault 1979, 305)

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that discourse about sexuality is also a *dispositif*, yet another example of bio-power serving to bring the body under calculation, observation, and normative control. Foucault attacks the commonly held view that sex was "hushed up" by Victorian morality in the nineteenth century. In fact, he notes, discourses about sexuality proliferated at an unprecedented rate after 1800. However, as discourses *about* sexuality proliferated, the *actual* libidinal life of individuals became more restrictive. Sexuality was posited as the most powerful of drives, so powerful (and so irrational) that new forms of collective and individual discipline were necessary to control it. Through various strategies (redefining women as hysterical, attacking adolescent masturbation, the socializing of procreation of couples, and the psychiatrization of sexual "abnormality"), bio-power was extended during the nineteenth century through the "scientific" understanding of sexuality. Moreover, sexuality became an integral part of what Foucault calls "confessional technology," the idea that one could, with the help of experts, of course, know and cure one's self by telling the truth. "Western man," Foucault insists, "has become a confessing animal." What we are accustomed to view as a therapeutic process becomes in Foucault's eyes merely "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing the truth" (Foucault 1980, 59).

Bio-power is obviously, if negatively, related to the Althusserian concepts of interpellation and ideological apparatuses; the underlying anti-Althusserian animus of Foucault's thinking is readily discernible. Points of demarcation, however, must be clearly noted. Whereas Structural Marxism is able to situate the interpellation of human beings within a conceptual framework that accounts for both the positive as well as the negative aspects of the process, for both the internal complexity of subjectivity as well as the external forces that overdetermine it, Foucault presents us with a homogeneous field of power couched in exclusively negative, oppressive terms on which a mysterious and monolithic strategy of domination is being impersonally enacted. This is, of course, not an original strategy. Foucault's understanding of power and domination is infused with the rhetoric of libertarian-libertine aesthetic revolt (a

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tradition that runs from Sade to Bataille) and neo-anarchist, irrationalist populism (from Michelet through Bakunin and Sorel to the *soixantehuitards*). Whatever persuasive character this tradition possesses turns on a strategy of avoiding distinctions between different types, degrees, and relations of power—and invoking instead a primal opposition between an ahistorical essence of liberty (existing prior to society) and society itself (the essentialized antithesis of liberty, which is becoming ever more successful in limiting, regulating, and dominating liberty). It is the achievement of Nietzsche, of course, to have given this essence a name, "will to power," but it is his French admirers who have extended the domain of heroic striving for liberty to include the toiling masses (for whom Nietzsche had only contempt).

While ideological interpellation is always a matter of power, Althusser, in contrast to Foucault, does not conclude that it is therefore necessarily oppressive. Ideological interpellations—including knowledge/power and bio-power—are assigned a place and a function by the matrix effect of a mode of production. However, they also possess their own relative autonomy, distinct effectivity, and internal contradictions. For Althusser, because of substantive differences and an irreducible degree of contradiction or incompatibility among the various

interpellations, they cannot be reduced to a monolithic, undifferentiated whole. More fundamentally, Althusser acknowledges no "essence of human liberty" waiting to be set free from the process of interpellation. In actuality, it is interpellation that gives the human subject its "essence," the capacity to act in society, and without interpellation society is simply unthinkable. Foucault knows this, of course, but his description of the process of interpellation is necessarily negative given his dogmatic rejection of any Marxist (or even any historical) problematic that might explain power in terms of society (rather than society in terms of Power). Foucault can explain knowledge/power and bio-power only by hypostatizing them, that is, by making Power, in true Nietzschean fashion, the primal stuff, the ontological precondition of historical processes. This reification of power—a subtle move from the explanation of power to an explanation by Power—pushes Foucault toward the idealist and voluntarist camp of Deleuze despite the strong materialist element in his own best work. The material world is never left out of Foucault's analyses—the materiality of power is the source of Foucault's undeniable superiority vis-à-vis the other French Nietzscheans—but it is, in the last instance, the effect of Power, which is always anterior to any particular configuration of power.

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The consequence of hypostatizing Power is an inability to specify relationships between bio-power and other forms of social power. For example, Foucault frequently acknowledges some more or less strong historical relationship between bio-power and capitalism. He notes that it becomes historically possible to make people work efficiently and productively only after they have been "caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault 1979, 26). Even more directly, "If the economic take-off of the West began with the techniques that made possible the accumulation of capital, it might perhaps be said that the methods for administering the accumulation of men made possible a political take-off. . . . In fact, the two processes—the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital—cannot be separated" (Foucault 1979, 220-21).

Foucault cannot, however, flesh out the relations of determination between economic power, its reproduction, and other relations of power such as bio-power. Bio-power is linked to the development of capitalism, but because it precedes and exceeds this and every other historical transformation, the entire picture loses any recognizable shape.

This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of population to economic processes. But this was not all it required; it also needed the growth of both of these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern. If the development of the great instruments of the state, as *institutions* of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics . . . operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them. They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony. (Foucault 1980, 140-41)

Foucault's analysis loses its focus at precisely the point where the reciprocal determinations of power must be conceptually disentangled, given a hierarchy of dominance and subordination, and set into coherent theoretical form. From a certain point of view, Foucault's problem-

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atic appears to take into account the "real" complexity of history, the absence of any causal nexus, the excess of historical signifieds over theoretical signifiers, and so on. If this were the case, we would still be entitled to ask why the analysis pulls up just here and not at a higher or a lower level of abstraction. The answer, I think, has less to do with empirical "complexity" than with ontological simplicity—a metahistoricization of Power. Differences in power and the hierarchical relationships between different forms of power do not really matter for Foucault, because in the end such distinctions are epiphenomena of Power. Power serves as an escape mechanism for Foucault, an escape from the responsibility of proceeding from description to explanation. "Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization. . . . Power's condition of possibility . . . must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms could emanate. . . . Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1980, 92-93).

"Power is everywhere." Located at every point in the social structure, or rather in every "relation of force" between points, Power constitutes and traverses individuals, invades and informs the gestures of the body, circulates within regimes of discourse, and produces effects of knowledge and pleasure. Power is diffused through the finest channels of the social body by what Foucault calls "micro-powers." Here Foucault reverses the traditional conception of power as invested in a central organizing instance—most notably the state. "Micro-powers" may be "crystallized" so as to produce certain global effects of domination—for example, class domination—but there is no intrinsic relation between these "micro-powers" and the larger structures of domination that are supported by them. The various forms of exploitation cannot be predicted because Power precedes structure and therefore cannot be deduced from it. Power is thus some kind of undifferentiated force or energy that circulates through social formations and is basic to them. It is ultimately unimportant (as well as impossible) to distinguish

ideological, political, economic, or theoretical practices, for such distinctions don't really matter: they are all merely forms of power. It is never, with Foucault, a question of what power and for what purpose, since power is always already there, obeying its own laws, and its only purpose is its own expansion.

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Foucault's problem, of course, is how to formulate a radical, democratic political practice from such a Nietzschean metaphysics. In the absence of concrete relations of determination, power is effectively emptied of any real political content. Foucault attempts to avoid this outcome by introducing Deleuze's concept of "resistance" into his problematic. The shortcomings of the whole Nietzschean methodology are nowhere more evident than in Foucault's tortuous attempt first to generate resistance out of power and second to demonstrate how such resistances might actually succeed in subverting power without simply becoming new forms of domination in their turn. The passage is lengthy but it must be quoted in full:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always "inside" power, there is no "escaping" it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner? This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellion, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not derive from a few heterogeneous principles; but neither are they a lure or a promise that is of necessity betrayed. They are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite. Hence they too are distributed in an irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior. Are there no great radical ruptures, massive binary divisions, then? Occasionally, yes. But more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds. Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. (Foucault 1980, 95-96)

Despite ritualistic assurances of the existence and efficacy of resistances, what comes through most clearly in this passage is Foucault's

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inability to conceptually distinguish resistance from power and thus specify the conditions of possibility of resistance. Resistance has what Poulantzas refers to as an "impossibly natural" character in Foucault's thinking. If power is the source of resistance, that is, if power alone is positive and productive, how can resistance be anything other than a form of power? If, assuming its existence as given, resistance is always resistance to power, what happens if resistance succeeds? Once power is "defeated," is not resistance itself transformed into a new form of power generating in turn a new form of resistance? Resistances ceaselessly merge into the power from which Foucault tries to distinguish them, and the ultimate consequences are pessimism and passivity. Since power is everywhere, everything is contestable; at the same time, because it is everywhere, eternal and omnipresent, the outcome of the contest, the inevitable victory of power, is pre-ordained.

This is the point where perceptive critics are quick to point out the underlying unity of Foucault's "micro-powers," the "active schizophrenia" of Deleuze and Guattari, and the Moloch-power of the state posited by the New Philosophers. Not only do they commonly reject any "grand strategy or power" or any "grand refusal" as being inherently an increase rather than a diminution in power, but they also share a common view of power as homogeneous and monstrous. Because they posit power as the essence of society, they cannot see power as differentiated, delimited, or determined. The impossibility of Foucault's resistances, an unpleasant corollary of Deleuze's ontology of Power, is the obverse of the New Philosophy's conception of the state as the perennial expression of Original Evil opposed to the Original Good of individualism. In this respect, Poulantzas observes correctly, "The New Philosophy can legitimately call Foucault to their support: more than the last consequences of his thought, they are its ultimate truth" (Poulantzas 1978, 149).

Foucault's assertion of resistances also directly promotes the illusion of radicalism that allows the New Philosophy to mask and surreptitiously defend capitalist exploitation. While rallying to the defense of certain radical causes, the New Philosophy studiously avoids the class struggle, the economic taproot of power, and instead revives all the old themes of totalitarianism. Foucault and Deleuze, despite their active participation in a number of progressive political causes, from prison and mental health reform to the emancipation of homosexuals, ultimately espouse an egoistic individualism that degenerates all too easily from postmodern dissidence to neo-liberal conformity. Dissidence and anti-Marxism become, in the hands of the New Philosophers, a thinly

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veiled defense of the status quo. Deleuze, Foucault, and the Nietzschean Left are enlisted, inevitably if not entirely by choice, into the ranks of petty bourgeois populism, a tradition Dominique Lecourt has perceptively described as

the "Occidental ideology of dissidence" (Lecourt 1978, 24). As Lecourt points out, this tradition characteristically combines a "radical" critique of Marxist theory (which exploits every "crisis" within that theory for anti-Marxist purposes) with an anarchist or libertarian politics in order to undercut, neutralize, or deflect any potentially egalitarian development in political and ideological practice. For every Camus or Foucault there is an Aron or a Glucksmann ready to draw the appropriate conservative conclusions from the dissident critique. Never far beneath the choppy waves of Dionysian dissidence and Promethean rebellion flow the disempowering currents of Apollonian accommodation and Sisyphean despair.

In his final, posthumously published works, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* (French editions, 1984; English translations, 1985 and 1986), Foucault abruptly abandons his dissident postmodern position and, under the growing influence of American academics, refashions himself into, of all things, a neo-liberal humanist—albeit of a peculiar postmodernist persuasion. Typically, Foucault reacts to criticisms of his essentialist view of Power not by fundamentally rethinking his position but by blithely striking out in a different direction altogether, abandoning genealogies of knowledge/power for a new project, a genealogy of ethics. Using Greek and Roman culture as historical foils, Foucault embarks on a subject-centered meditation on "practices of the self" organized around the social structures of sexuality. Sexuality remains a structured phenomenon composed of three elements (acts, pleasures, and desires) and organized in terms of four ethical categories (an ethical substance, the human attributes to be acted on; a mode of subjection, the way people are "socially encouraged" to recognize moral obligations; an ascetic, the practices of the self by which morality is attained; and a telos, the ideal or model being sought), but its structure no longer constitutes a dominating, oppressive form of bio-power or knowledge/power. Power has become rather cuddly, a field of "problematization" that is no more than the social background for the personal choices of a self-realizing subject. Ethics is enabling rather than oppressive: "the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct" (Foucault 1986, 251).

Foucault has many interesting and original things to say about

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Greek, Roman, and Christian sexuality. However, his genealogical method remains essentially unchanged. History for Foucault remains a disconnected series of phenomena whose only interest is to reveal past forms of behavior that might be "reactivated" for political purposes in the present. Since Greek sexuality, with its "aesthetics of experience," is not grounded in or determined by specific social conditions, there is no reason, for postmodern "New Historicism" at any rate, why it cannot be simply recreated in contemporary capitalist societies. The new self-fashioning subject of history does correspond more consistently to the unchanged voluntarism of Foucault's postmodern politics, but this new theoretical move begs rather than resolves the question of power raised by Foucault in the seventies. Power, as an oppressive force, simply disappears from the field of ethics altogether as the impossible dissidence of "resist everything" is transformed into its conformist obverse, "anything goes." Foucault's new attention to the subject, coupled with his fragmentation of social structures into autonomous spheres, does provide a coherent defense of neo-liberal micro-politics, but it offers no analysis of the complexity of political problems or the obstacles standing in the way of their resolution. Partial changes can be achieved, Foucault maintains, because changes in one domain, for example, sexuality, do not imply disruptions and confrontations in other domains. "We have to get rid of this idea of an analytically necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or political structures," Foucault insists emphatically in an interview on his new genealogy of ethics (Foucault 1983, 236). Far from signaling an advance in social theory, a "New Historicism" as it is now called, Foucault's new methodology signifies nothing more than the capitulation of postmodern dissidence to the liberal capitalist status quo.

Poulantzas: Power, Class Struggle, and the State

Whatever their faults, Foucault's historical analyses of various ideological apparatuses are of great significance, and they have always been taken seriously by the Structural Marxists. Pierre Macherey has gone so far as to refer to Foucault as "our Hegel," an apt if ironic characterization that reflects both the felt need to absorb Foucault's insights into the problematic of historical materialism as well as an equally pressing need to divest his work of its irrationalist and voluntarist character. The most significant questions in this regard are, of course, those pertaining

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to power. What is power? Where does it come from? How does it function? The problems we have pointed out with respect to Foucault's answers to these questions are called into being by his attempt, at least until his final works, where power simply disappears, to make power the primordial constituent of social formations and *then* try to figure out some way of subverting it. Because Foucault links his otherwise compelling historical analyses of ideological apparatuses to a Deleuzian ontology of Power, he can conceive of power only as a vitalist essence prior to its concrete social forms. Foucault cannot distinguish the necessary existence of ideological apparatuses from their historically determinate place and function because he situates Power somehow beyond any structured whole within which its mechanisms and effects might be causally explained.

A Structural Marxist problematic must therefore be able to differentiate and contextualize power within social structures without, as Foucault's very limited view of Marxism suggests it must, eliminating the internal and relational character of power or reducing all power to class power centered in the state. Conversely, a Structural Marxist account of power, in asserting the relational nature of power and criticizing the identification of all domination with state power, may not have recourse to a conception of power that extends beyond the pale of social determination, nor may it go so far as to discount the central significance of the state as a condensation of power determined in the last instance by the mode of production and class struggle. In the end, Foucault's final devaluation of power and his valorization of an individualistic dialectic of adaptation and transcendence must be rejected as simplistic and ultimately conformist. Within the Structural Marxist camp, the works of Nicos Poulantzas, published between 1968 and 1978, constitute the most sustained analysis of the source and circulation of power, analyses that anticipate, from a Marxist perspective, many of Foucault's criticisms of orthodox Marxist interpretations. Although a full discussion of Poulantzas must be reserved for later, this is the place to discuss his specific objections to Foucault's notion of Power and the alternative view that Poulantzas would substitute for it.

In *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), Poulantzas acknowledges a similarity between his own relational view of power and attempt to differentiate political and economic power and certain of Foucault's formulations. Nevertheless, Poulantzas rejects any move to separate power from the forces and relations of production or to mystify the nature and functioning of power, traits that Poulantzas sees as the common

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ground uniting Foucault's concept of bio-power and the New Philosophers' one-dimensional view of state power. For Poulantzas, power always has a precise material basis in social struggles, and its materiality is not exhausted in any specific apparatus of power or in any "essence" defined as Power. As against the New Philosophers on the one hand and Foucault on the other, Poulantzas insists that *neither* the state nor Power is the first cause of struggle. Struggle always emerges out of social contradictions—economic contradictions between the forces and relations of production, political contradictions between domination and execution, and ideological contradictions between subjection and qualification. As a result, Poulantzas views state power as neither ahistorical nor unlimited. "Power is a relation between struggles and practices . . . and the state is above all a condensation of a relationship of forces defined precisely by struggle," Poulantzas explains. "No more than other power mechanisms does the state encounter limits in an original outside: it is not that the State is an omnipotent entity beyond which lies emptiness; but already inscribed in its materiality are internal limits imposed by the struggles of the dominated. Such struggles are always present in the State (and, more generally, in power mechanisms); for even though the State is already there, neither the state nor power is the First Cause of struggle" (Poulantzas 1978, 151).

Poulantzas also maintains that the mode of production and class power structure all power relationships, even those that originate elsewhere:

The relational field of class-specific power therefore refers to a material system of place-allocation throughout the social division of labor: it is fundamentally, though not exclusively determined by exploitation. This explains the existence of class division and thus of class struggles. We may even conclude that in a society in which the State utilizes all power (e.g., phallocracy or the family) for purposes of *relaying* class power, every struggle, be it heterogeneous to class struggles properly so-called (e.g., the struggle between men and women) acquires its characteristic meaning only to the extent that class struggles exist and allow other struggles to unfold. (Poulantzas 1978, 148)

Poulantzas is making three important points here: first, power relationships are always social relationships; second, social relationships, even those of a manifestly non-economic nature, have a "class-specific" element attached to them; and third, the state, while not the source or foundation of power, is nonetheless grounded in power and functions as the central apparatus through which power is deployed. As against

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both Foucault and the New Philosophers, Poulantzas posits the following propositions regarding the state and power:

- (a) Class power is the cornerstone of power in class-divided social formations, whose motive force is class struggle;
- (b) Although grounded in economic power and the relations of production, political power is primordial in that it changes in its character condition every essential transformation in other fields of power; . . .
- (c) In the capitalist mode of production political power occupies a field and a place that are distinct from other fields or power, however much they may intersect on another;
- (d) This power is pre-eminently concentrated and materialized by the State [which, while not a *source* of power] is the central site of the exercise of power. (Poulantzas 1978, 44)

Leaving aside for the moment the important question of precisely how economic relations overdetermine political and ideological relations and how the state apparatus actually works, it is clear that Poulantzas's approach to power avoids the problems that plague Foucault's account. Power, for Poulantzas, has a pattern and a limit in social struggles; power is not simply a particular expression of a pre-existing, inexplicable essence (as in Foucault's works of the seventies), nor is it reducible to the nullity of a "problematization" (as in Foucault's last works). In contrast to Foucault, Poulantzas is able to differentiate power theoretically, to posit links from economic relations to the state and to the production of knowledge without reducing political and ideological apparatuses to simple reflections of economic power or collapsing them into an undifferentiated, tendentially monolithic, network of power relations. Poulantzas's assertion of concrete relations between power, social struggles, and the state opens up these areas to further research and refinement. By contrast, Foucault's refusal to link knowledge/power and bio-

power to the social formation as a complex whole (and thus to the mode of production and the state) stuffs these relations into the black box of "pluralism" and preempts further investigation into the materiality of power.

Finally, Foucault's scattering of micro-powers, his homogenizing of the mechanisms of power, and his stubborn insistence that the state is simply one form of power among others (albeit an inexplicably dangerous one) has profound and pessimistic political implications. Contrary to Foucault's own belief, power cannot be effectively resisted if it cannot be identified in relation to a structured totality and a hierarchy of relations of dominance and subordination. When power is diluted and scat-

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tered resistance is localized. When resistance is localized, it will be either co-opted or repressed. When power is conceptualized as homogeneous, resistance is effectively de-politicized. The anti-state rhetoric of the New Philosophers, for example, opposes the state not for any particular political purpose, most certainly not as a result of any understanding of its central role in the class struggle, but simply because the state is the quintessential form of Power. What is missing from the New Philosophers, as from Deleuze and Foucault, is a *reason* for political activity, a theoretical explanation as to how anything might possibly be different. Foucault's final retreat from the entire question of power testifies most eloquently to the theoretical bankruptcy of postmodern dissidence.

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Chapter Literature and Ideology

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In 1966, one year before the spectacular appearance of Derrida's first three books, Pierre Macherey published his *Theory of Literary Production* (English translation, 1978). This work was already, in Terry Eagleton's words, a "fully-fledged piece of deconstructionist theory . . . violently dismembering texts . . . to discern within them certain symptomatic absences and aporia, those points at which texts begin to unravel themselves in ambiguous encounter[s] with their deceptively homogeneous power systems" (Eagleton 1981, 141). Macherey, Eagleton points out, refused the illusion of unified texts, sought to explore and explain the contradictions and aporia of literary discourse, and, most significantly, attempted to relate the production of literary discourse to its social context. However, Macherey's book had only a fraction of the impact of Derrida's work, especially in England and the United States. It is possible that the discrepancy was less a matter of politics than merit, Eagleton wryly observes, but the fact that Macherey was a member of the French Communist Party and that his book drew its inspiration directly from the work of Althusser undoubtedly had a negative effect on the book's reception. The discourse that Macherey sets out to deconstruct was labeled "ideological" rather than "logocentric," a materialist emphasis considerably less acceptable in Anglo-American critical circles than was the postmodern iconoclasm of Derrida. Despite its comparative obscurity, however, Macherey's book has proven to be an influential text. It was the point of departure for a small

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but significant body of work, produced in England and France, that has investigated cultural phenomena (primarily literature and film) using Althusser's ideology as a starting point. The result has been a new concept of the nature and function of art and an innovative approach to criticism and the history of literature. This new approach is based on the twofold character of ideological practice as formulated by Althusser: its representational mechanisms and cognitive effects, and its material inscription in determinate institutions and practices whose primary function is interpellating subjects and inculcating a practical relation of *savoir faire* between subjects and certain privileged objects.

Macherey's book focuses on the former aspect. *A Theory of Literary Production* is concerned with literature as an objectively distinct form of discourse and with the analysis of literature with respect to its formal mechanisms and its ideological nature. Macherey's view of literature underwent a significant change after Althusser's 1967 lectures, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, and the publication of "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" in 1968. Aligning himself with the more empirical approach to nineteenth-century French literature and linguistic practices developed by Renée Balibar and her associates in *Les français fictifs* (1974) and *Le français national* (1974), for which he coauthored the theoretical introductions, Macherey rejected his earlier objectivist concept of literature in favor of a relativist view that identified literature—the category of the literary—on and with class-based ideologies of reception and the interpellation process of the

schools. In apparent contrast to the trajectory of Macherey's development, British critic Terry Eagleton published, in 1976, an important theoretical work entitled *Criticism and Ideology*, which drew on, criticized, and extended Macherey's initial problematic. In the same year, French philosopher and linguist Michel Pêcheux published *Language, Semantics, and Ideology* (English translation, 1982), a study of language as a discursive practice that lent further credibility to the project of building on, rather than abandoning, the conceptual framework of Macherey's first book. In short, two tendencies are at work within the Structural Marxist camp, corresponding, more or less, to the two responses to Althusser's critique of the theoreticism of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. In addition to surveying both of these tendencies, I will argue that the apparent conflict between them—that is, between a theory of literary production and a theory of literary reception—is pernicious and unwarranted.¹³

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Pêcheux: The Concept of Discursive Practice

In his "Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre" (in Althusser 1971), Althusser speaks of the peculiarity of art in terms of its ability to "make us see, make us perceive, make us feel something which *alludes* to reality. . . . What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of 'seeing,' 'perceiving,' and 'feeling' (which is not the form of *knowing*) is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes" (Althusser 1971, 222). For Althusser, art is thoroughly ideological; it is a form of ideological practice, grounded in the immediate, lived experience of subjects, yet somehow different from this ideological background. At the same time, the way art "alludes" to its ideological materials is clearly distinct from the way science perceives them. Unfortunately Althusser's terminology is vague, and terms such as *seeing*, *perceiving*, *knowing*, and *alludes* raise questions that must be answered before his argument can be assessed. Restricting myself to the specific example of literature, I will attempt to develop Althusser's insights in a more rigorous fashion.

Perhaps the proper place to begin is with the problem of discourse itself. Literature "alludes" but doesn't "know," Althusser contends, yet it nonetheless makes us "see, feel, and perceive." The possibility of such a paradox results, presumably, from two sets of differences, the difference between ideological discourse and scientific discourse on the one hand and the difference between literary discourse and other types of ideological discourses on the other. Michel Pêcheux, in *Language, Semantics, and Ideology*, undertakes what he calls a materialist theory of discourse, which is both a Structural Marxist critique of the dominant forms of contemporary linguistics and an attempt to specify the interrelationship between language and its social environment.¹⁴ Pêcheux focuses on the semantic element of linguistic practice because, in his opinion, semantics is a source of contradiction for both Saussurean linguistics and Chomskyan "generative grammar": Saussurean linguistics is unable to explain historical changes to the linguistic system (*langue*), the relation of this system to the social formation as a complex whole, the nature of individual utterance (*parole*), or the existence of the subject who speaks; Chomsky's generative grammar attempts to derive all semantic possibilities from syntactic "deep structures," but this move eliminates social factors altogether. We cannot pursue the details of Pêcheux's critique here; however, his proposal for a new theory of discourses, discursive practices, and discursive formations and his discussion of the relation of these to the "subject-form" and the

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interpellation of subjects are essential to our investigation of ideological, scientific, and literary discourses.

The major difficulty with existing approaches to these problems, Pêcheux observes, is their uncritical assumption of a pre-given subject who speaks. The self-evidentness of the subject, which Pêcheux identifies as the "spontaneous philosophy of linguists," must be rejected in favor of analyses of the "subject-form (and specifically the subject of discourse) as a determinate effect of a process without a subject" (Pêcheux 1982, 51). To accomplish this task, Pêcheux makes a distinction between discourse (semantic elements) and language (syntax, enunciation). Discourse presupposes language but is not determined by it; discourse is rather a function of historical determinations on semantic processes. As a discursive practice, language (like any ideological practice) does not have its source in the speaking subject; rather, it finds its product in individuals constituted as speaking subjects. Discourse, in other words, interpellates subjects, and it is this insight that informs Pêcheux's investigation of the subject-effect of language and the possibility and nature of meaning. "All my work," Pêcheux explains, "links the constitution of meaning to that of the constitution of the subject which is located in the figure of interpellation" (Pêcheux 1982, 101). For Pêcheux, ideology supplies the self-evidentness of meaning—while at the same time masking the relationship of meaning and interpellation by means of the "transparency" of language.

The "material character of meaning" is a function of what Pêcheux calls *discursive formations* and *interdiscourse*. He offers the following two theses by way of explanation:

1. The first consists of the proposition that the *meaning* of a word, expression, proposition, etc., does not exist "in itself" . . . but is determined by the ideological positions brought into play in the socio-historical process in which words, expressions and propositions are produced. . . . [W]ords,

expressions, propositions, etc. change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them, which signifies that they find their meaning by reference to those positions, i.e., by reference to the ideological formations . . . in which those positions are inscribed. . . . I shall call a *discursive formation* that which in a given ideological formation, i.e., from a given position in a given conjuncture determined by the state of the class struggle, determines "what can and should be said." . . . I shall say that individuals are "interpellated" as speaking-subjects (as subjects of *their* discourse) by the discursive formations which represent "in language" the ideological formations that correspond to them.

2. Every discursive formation, by the transparency of the meaning constituted in it, conceals its dependence on the "complex whole in dominance" of discursive formations, itself imbricated with the complex of ideological

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formations . . . I propose to call this "complex whole in dominance" of discursive formation "interdiscourse," with the qualification that it too is subject to the law of unevenness-contradiction-subordination . . . characterizing the complex of ideological formations. (Pêcheux 1982, 111-13)

The interpellation of subjects is realized within interdiscourse by means of two mechanisms that Pêcheux identifies as *aspreconstruction* and *articulation*. The preconstructed corresponds to the "always already there" quality characteristic of all ideological interpellation. Ideology interpellates the individual as the subject of discourse, yet the interpellation is impenetrable to the subject, who appears to himself or herself as always already a subject. Pêcheux calls this the "Munchausen effect" after the immortal baron, who proposed to extricate himself from a swamp by pulling on his own hair. The preconstructed element of discursive practice is always already there, Pêcheux contends, because it is a function of interdiscourse itself and not of any particular discourse.

It is the preconstructed element in discourse that creates the subject's identification with himself. The second element, articulation, creates the relationship of the subject to other subjects and to the Subject. Articulation, for Pêcheux, refers to the linear system of discourse: the system of co-references that clarify the operation of discourse with respect to itself (what I am saying now in relation to what I said before) such that a "thread of discourse" is established as the discourse of a subject and, as such, is recognizable by other subjects. Because this is an operation of discourse in relation to itself, Pêcheux refers to it as *intradiscourse*. Intradiscourse, he explains, "crosses and connects together" the discursive elements constituted by preconstruction which are the raw material, the primary stuff of discourse. However, the mechanisms of this process are such that the primacy of the preconstituted is reversed; rather than appearing as determined by interdiscourse, intradiscourse "forgets" this determination and appears autonomous. "The subject-form (by which the subject of discourse identifies with the discursive formation that forms him) tends to absorb-forget interdiscourse in intradiscourse, i.e., it simulates interdiscourse in intradiscourse" (Pêcheux 1982, 117). As a result of this simulation, what should be at issue, namely, the stable identity of the subject (or other referents), comes to be guaranteed by the thread of the discourse that connects them.

By all of these mechanisms, discourse simultaneously produces an identification of the subject with himself or herself and an identification of the subject with the other subjects. Pêcheux refers to these identifi-

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cations as the *subject effect* and the *inter-subjectivity effect* wherein, respectively, the subject is self-evident, and individual subjects recognize and ratify one another as a mirror image guarantees the existence of the reflected object. Thus discourse masks its own determinative action under the guise of the autonomy of the subject. Subjects cannot recognize their subordination to the Subject because this subordination-subjection is realized in subjects in the form of autonomy: the freedom of speaking subjects to say whatever they want. It is in this way that in language, as in other ideological practices, the process without a subject creates-constitutes-realizes the subject: the subject is created by "forgetting" the determinations by which he or she is produced.

We may now return to our original question concerning the distinctions between literary, scientific, and ideological discourses and reformulate the question more precisely in terms of the subject-form. If ordinary discourse, the basic everyday form of ideological discourse, operates in the manner we have just discussed, how does it differ from literary and scientific discourses? With regard to the first, it is certain that literary discourse is also deeply indebted to the coincidence between the subject and self and between the subject and other subjects. Indeed, Pêcheux goes so far as to argue that literary fiction represents "the pure idealist form" of the subject effect and that the "novelistic effect of presence finds its origin in the subject-form and, as a result of it, is able to mask the materiality of aesthetic production" (Pêcheux 1982, 119). However, despite its reliance on the subject-form, literary discourse remains distinguishable from ordinary discourse by virtue of the fact that it is a second level of discourse—one that assumes the basic preconstruction-articulation relation of ordinary ideological discourse and produces another new discourse from it. What Pêcheux's remarks fail to make clear is the process whereby ordinary discourse becomes, as it were, the preconstructed for this new discourse, the "always already there" of literature, which is "forgotten" in the very "creative" process which is its effect. As in the case of ordinary discourse, this invisibility leaves its mark, what Derrida calls its "trace," but the shadow of this absence falls somewhere outside literary discourse. This explains why even the most self-conscious and determined of literatures, Brecht, for example, cannot break the illusion of presence at its fundamental level, the level of the subject-form. At most it is able only to break with or undermine presence at the second level, the level of literary discourse itself, while relying even more strongly on the illusion of presence at the first level in order to achieve this effect.

We shall return to literary discourse shortly, but perhaps things will

be clearer if we turn for a moment to scientific discourse. If, as Althusser claims, ideology has no outside for itself, how can it be, as he further contends, nothing *but* outside for science? What can a scientific discourse be? Pêcheux's method excludes several unsatisfactory approaches: the use of the subject form to break out of subjective discourse either by an individual effort (Husserl) or by a collective one (Habermas); the use of symbolic logic to guarantee absolute knowledge either positively (Carnap, the Vienna Circle) or negatively (through falsifiability, as in Popper); treating scientific discourse pragmatically as the most convenient ideology at a given moment and in a given circumstance, convenience being posited in the form either of a "game" (Wittgenstein) or a "paradigm" sanctioned by the consensus of scientists (Kuhn). Pêcheux contends that the concept of the epistemological break, taken in conjunction with Althusser's thesis that all practice takes place through subjects and therefore in ideology, provides the point of departure for an alternative explanation.

At the level of the history of science(s), Pêcheux asks, how is it that science emerges from the historical process? He begins with the recognition that there is no pre-scientific "state of nature" where knowledge effects are completely absent from the field of discourse (Pêcheux 1982, 129-37). However, "what is peculiar to the knowledges (empirical, descriptive, etc.) prior to the break in a given epistemological field is the fact that they remain inscribed in the subject-form, i.e., they exist in the form of a meaning evident to the subjects who are its historical supports, through the historical transformations that affect that meaning. The result of this for discursivity . . . is that, this being so, the knowledge effect coincides with a meaning effect inscribed in the operations of a discursive formation . . . that constitutes it" (Pêcheux 1982, 136). The historical process that opens up the conjuncture of an epistemological break is characterized by Pêcheux as the gradual formation of a "block" such that, within the complex of a particular discursive formation, the identity of knowledge and meaning no longer "works." Contradictions within this identity accumulate and begin to repeat themselves in a circular manner until "the very structure of the subject-form (with its circular relation of subject/object) becomes the visible 'limit' of the process" (Pêcheux 1982, 136). In short, the historical moment of the break inaugurating a particular science is necessarily accompanied by a challenge to the subject-form and the "evidentness" of meaning that is part of it. "What is specific to every break is . . . that it inaugurates, in a particular epistemological field, a relationship be-

tween 'thought' and the real in which what is thought is not, as such, supported by a subject" (Pêcheux 1982, 137).

It is the absence of the subject-form that distinguishes scientific concepts from ideological representations (or "meaning" in the strict sense of an articulation between preconstituted subjects). Concepts of science do not have *ameaning* for Pêcheux; rather, they have a *function* in a process without a subject of meaning or knowledge. "In the conceptual process of knowledge, the determination of the real and its necessity, a necessity independent of thought, is materialized in the form of an articulated body of concepts which at once *exhibits* and *suspends* the 'blind' action of this same determination as subject effect (centering-origin-meaning)" (Pêcheux 1982, 137). This is what Althusser implies when he characterizes scientific practice as a process without a subject. This result is startling at first, for Pêcheux seems to be denying the existence of scientific discourse—at least in the sense of a discourse between the subjects of science. Of course, he does not deny that scientists as well as others discourse about science, that is, speak "scientifically," and communicate knowledge effects. They do so, however, only on the condition of returning to the discourse of the subject-form, the essential condition of all discourse. However, the appropriation of concepts by discourse introduces a contradiction into the latter, what Pêcheux calls *disidentification*. Disidentification is not the abolition of the subject-form, which is impossible, but a "transformation-displacement" of this form; in effect, disidentification is an interpellation of a new type. The ideological mechanism of interpellation does not disappear, of course—there is no "end of ideology" as a result of science—but it does begin to operate in reverse, on and against itself, through the "overthrow-rearrangement" of the complex of ideological formations and the discursive formations that are imbricated with them. In short, Pêcheux maintains that the appropriation of scientific concepts by the subject-form tends to undermine ideological identification in a way that other ideological discourses, for example, literature, cannot since they are trapped within a field of representation-meaning constituted by and for the subject-form.

We should not, Pêcheux cautions, conclude that the process of disidentification occurs automatically or necessarily: "The disidentification effect inherent in the subjective appropriation of knowledges is achieved in different ways (and may in the limit case not be achieved at all) according to the nature of the discursive formation which provides this effect with its raw material" (Pêcheux 1982, 163). Since no subject

can be established by science, where representation-meaning is suspended, the conflict between identification and

its opposite always takes place in ideology and, in theoretical form, in philosophy. Precisely because of the natures of science and ideology, science can never break with ideology "in general" but only and always with a specific ideology. Furthermore, this break inaugurates a continuous struggle that is never over or won. At the level of discursive practices, the subjective appropriation of scientific concepts is continually threatened by the subject-form of discourse and by the ideological apparatuses that interpellate all social subjects.

The conceptual-experimental (scientific) operation, [which] in forms specific to each branch of the production of knowledges materializes necessity-real as necessity-thought (and to that extent locally forecloses meaning and the subject-form), never exists "in a pure state," in a form disjunct from its notional-ideological counterpart. Consequently the appropriation of the real by thought cannot consist of a de-subjectification of the subject, but presupposes a work of subjective appropriation in and on the subject-form, i.e., amongst other determinations in and on the subject-form of discourse. (Pêcheux 1982, 191)

The ideological effect of conceptual knowledge consists, then, of an interpellation, but of a distinct and different type since it works to undermine existing interpellations, at least locally, at the level of discursive practice itself. We must keep in mind that contradictions at the discursive level are neither the most important contradictions on which the possibility of social change hinges, nor are they the only contradictions at work within the social formation or even in the ideological instance. If they are arguably the most fundamental contradictions, in the sense that all social practice rests on the subject-form, they are nonetheless overdetermined by other relations, in the last instance by struggles between classes. The complex, overdetermined nature of interpellation explains why its "success" in subjugating the individual to the status quo can never be complete even at the level of discourse. The uneven development of ideological interpellation produces new contradictions at the same time that it reproduces the contradictions of the existing relations of domination. This is why ideology must be defined in terms of the transformation as well as the reproduction of social relations and why the conflict between identification and disidentification in discourse, like all ideological conflicts, is determined by relations of power outside its local terrain.

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Macherey and Eagleton: Literary Discourse as Ideological Practice

Let us now return to the problem of literary discourse. If it is true that both the work of art, in our case a literary text, and ordinary ideological discourse rely on the representation-meaning effect of the subject-form and not on scientific knowledge, it does not follow that we are unable to distinguish between them. In the first work of Structural Marxist criticism, *A Theory of Literary Production*, Pierre Macherey introduces distinctions between discourses of illusion, fiction, and theory, which roughly correspond to those we have put forward as ideological, literary, and scientific. Fictional discourse, Macherey contends, is based on the discourse of illusion but is not simply the expression of the latter (its *mise-en-mots*); it is rather an independent production of the language of illusion (its *mise-en-scène*): "The text is not a tissue of illusions which has to be merely unravelled if we wish to understand its power. An illusion that has been *set to work* becomes more than just an illusion, more than a mere deception. It is an illusion *interrupted, realized, completely transformed*" (Macherey 1978, 62).

In *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton expresses the relationship between literature and ideology in the following way:

The text . . . is a certain *production* of ideology, for which the analogy of a dramatic production is in some way appropriate. A dramatic production does not "express," "reflect" or "reproduce" the dramatic text upon which it is based; it "produces" the text, transforming it into a unique and irreducible entity. A dramatic production is not to be judged by its fidelity to the text, in the sense that a mirror-image can be judged faithfully to reflect the object; text and production are not commensurable formations to be laid alongside one another, their distance or relation measured as one measures the distance between two physical objects. Text and production are incommensurate because they inhabit distinct real and theoretical spaces. (Eagleton 1976, 64)

Art is, in relation to ideology, a production of a production, or as Eagleton puts it, "ideology to the second power." For our part, this notion of "ideology to the second power" captures precisely the difference between literary discourse and ordinary discourse that Pêcheux fails to specify. Pêcheux does speak of the poetic *mise-en-scène* as the purest form of "presence," that is, the purest example of the ideological form of discourse, but he fails to go on to distinguish between this "purest" form and ordinary discourse in a way that Eagleton's formu-

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lation permits, even though it is precisely the *mise-en-scène* quality that constitutes the difference. If in ordinary discourse intradiscourse "forgets" its determination by interdiscourse and instead, simulates-forgets interdiscourse in intradiscourse, literary discourse takes the process one step further. Literature (like art generally) takes over the mechanism of ordinary meaning as its own interdiscourse and "puts it to work" in a new process of articulation-intradiscourse that duplicates the "forgetting" mechanism of ordinary meaning but on a different and higher level. As a result, literary discourse is, as discourse, one degree removed from the original preconstructed "self-evidentness" of meaning and thereby purports to speak of the real, not immediately or "directly" as is the case with ordinary discourse, but indirectly, as a different type of discourse—that is, as fiction.

In much the same way that ordinary discourse assumes the "freedom" of the speaking subject, literary

discourse assumes "freedom" from the factual world of subjects. This relative autonomy of aesthetic discourse accounts for the fact that aesthetic images are bound to the totality of the work of art for their effect and cannot be transferred from one discourse to another without breaking the second-level "thread of discourse" that gives them meaning. "The components fused in the literary text," Macherey explains, "can have no independent reality . . . they are bound to a specific context which defines the only horizon with respect to which they can be read. It is within the framework of the particular book that they gain their power of suggestion and become representative: they are impoverished by any kind of displacement" (Macherey 1978, 56). Of course, this second-level discourse continues to speak by means of images, that is, representation-meaning, but it is no longer the same representation-meaning, nor does it have the same effect. At the ordinary, everyday level of discursive practice, the representation-meaning effect of ideology aims at direct, relatively precise communication between subjects; at the aesthetic or literary level, however, the representation-meaning effect is more ambiguous, more symbolic in nature. Because the reality it evokes is always already ideological, literary discourse elicits a recognition from the reader, a "reality effect" that is experientially valid and communicable, but because this reality effect is a second-order ideological production, it is also one of distancing and disorientation. An ambiguity, in other words, is introduced into the intersubjectivity of discourse by literature (and art generally), an ambiguity called the "alienation effect" (*Verfremdungseffekt*) by Brecht and "defamiliarization" (*ostran-*

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nenie) by Shklovskii. By means of its distancing mechanisms—mechanisms that are objectively there in the text and not simply an effect of its reception—literary discourse achieves the effect, noted by Althusser, that makes us "see," "feel," and "perceive" in ways different from those of ordinary discourse. At the same time, its effect differs from that of scientific discourse, for, unlike scientific discourse, literary discourse is addressed to *us* and relies on our ideological experience of the world as subjects. Because it participates, so to speak, in our subjective reality, that is, because it is of the same ideological nature as our experience, literature appears, despite its elusiveness and ambiguity, more real to us than science does. "Unlike science, literature appropriates the real as it is given in ideological forms, but it does so in a way which produces an illusion of the spontaneously, immediately real," Eagleton explains. "It is thus more removed from the real than science, yet it appears closer to it" (Eagleton 1976, 101).

The literary text also appears to take on a critical function with respect to ideology. Literary discourse, Macherey notes, "gives an implicit critique of its ideological content, if only because it resists being incorporated into the flow of ideology in order to give a determinate representation of it" (Macherey 1978, 64). This "determinate representation" is itself ideological, of course, but because of the peculiar nature of literary discourse, its blatantly advertised illusionary quality has been frequently mistaken for a higher truth. Even when correctly identified, as, for example, by the Russian Formalists, the nature of literary production has often been detached from the material world and assigned an independent existence determined exclusively by its own internal laws. The major advance of Macherey and Eagleton over the Russian Formalists has been their ability to link the mechanism of "estrangement" to the material world—not in the mode of a reflection, the traditional Marxist explanation, but in the mode of a production. For Structural Marxism, history "enters" the text not directly but indirectly; it enters the text as ideology, in Eagleton's words, "as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences." The text, Eagleton continues, takes as its object, "not the real, but certain significations by which the real lives itself," and within the text itself, "ideology becomes a dominant structure, determining the character and disposition of certain 'pseudo-real' constituents" (Eagleton 1976, 72).

For Macherey and Eagleton, the literary text, produced by a discursive articulation that takes ideological discourse as its preconstructed, has as its signified not reality but rather an ideological "pseudo-reality,"

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which is the imaginary situation that the text is "about." This pseudo-real is not directly correlated with the historical real; it is rather an effect or aspect of the text's whole discursive process. Certain literary genres, the realistic novel, for example, may appear to approach the real more closely than do others, say, lyric poetry; however, the difference between the two is not fundamental. Both the realistic novel and the lyric poem refer to certain modes of ideological signification rather than to a real object. Taking *Bleak House* as an example, Eagleton argues that while "Dickens deploys particular modes of signification (realism) which entail a greater foregrounding of the 'pseudo-real' . . . we should not be led by this to make direct comparisons between the imaginary London of his novel and the real London. The imaginary London of *Bleak House* exists as the product of a representational process which signifies, not 'Victorian England' as such, but certain of Victorian England's ways of signifying itself" (Eagleton 1976, 77). This relationship holds, I would add, not only for realism and lyric poetry but for all literary production, including the modern novel, which, while foregrounding its techniques in a way antithetical to the realist novel, continues nonetheless to rely on the same general mode of producing signification through its discourse.

While the text cannot be conceived as independent of ideology (and thus of history), this dependence does not imply that it has no relative autonomy with respect to ordinary, everyday ideological representation-meaning.

Indeed, because it is a production of ideology and not its reflection, the literary text may actively extend and elaborate ideology as well as reproduce it. It is also capable of becoming a constituent element of ideological self-reproduction, even though the literary text "defines, operates and constitutes that ideology in ways unpremeditated, so to speak, by ideology itself" (Eagleton 1976, 80). In short, literary practice is both limited and relatively autonomous with respect to other ideological structures. It is limited, in the last instance, by ideology much as the dramatic production is limited, in the last instance, by the dramatic text. Being a production of ideology and not its reflection, the literary text has the capacity, in Althusser's words, to "make us see (but not know) in some sense from the *inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which it is held" (Althusser 1971, 222). In contrast to Lukács, Goldmann, and all forms of reflectionism based on mirror images, homologies, or typicality, Structural Marxist criticism insists that literature never gives us access to real history but only to the ideology by which history presents itself as "lived experience."

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This is not an unimportant attribute, however. Because art and literature are grounded, through ideology, in real history, they may perform, as Ernst Bloch forcefully insists, an anticipatory and creatively utopian function—representing the as yet unrealized potential of the past and pre-figuring real possibilities from the present to the future. Conversely, works of art and literary texts are rich historical documents; because they are grounded in a determinate ideological instance, they are invaluable indices of the social formations from which they emerged.

According to Althusser, the basic distinction between art and science is not a function of their respective subject matter: "art does not deal with a reality *peculiar* to itself, with a *peculiar domain* of reality in which it has a monopoly whereas science deals with a *different* domain of reality" (Althusser 1971, 223). If this were the case, not only would it be impossible to examine literary texts as documents produced under determinate conditions in concrete social formations, but it would also be impossible even to conceive the possibility of their existence—except perhaps as transcendent gifts of genius. It is much more plausible to argue, as Althusser does, that "the real difference between art and science" lies not in the different objects of their discourse but rather in "the specific form in which they give us the same object in different ways" (Althusser 1971, 223). Ultimately, for Althusser, this object is history, and the difference in form is that between images and concepts. Art and literature appropriate history as it is offered up as "lived experience" by other ideological practices. It produces and reproduces the world of lived experience in an independent discourse of images, but the history it represents remains imaginary because it negotiates only a particular ideological experience of real history. A historical novel, for example, may speak of real history, but it remains fictive—subject to the laws of textual production—even if it maintains a scrupulous accuracy with regard to the historical facts.

"Literature," Eagleton says, "is the most revealing mode of experiential access to ideology that we possess" (Eagleton 1976, 101). This is not to say, *pace* Lukács, that literature forces ideology against the wall of history and thereby reveals the truth lurking behind the facade—a view that reduces ideology to "falseness" and therefore not only mistakes the imaginary nature of the subject-form for an epistemological category but, even worse, implies that art is something like science, the product of science plus style. If art is linked to its social formation, it is not so by virtue of a correspondence to history or "typicality." For Structural Marxism, the insights that literature may provide are not a

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function of its truth value but of its mode of signification: "the truth of the text is not an essence but a practice—the practice of its relation to ideology, and in terms of that to history. On the basis of this practice, the text constitutes itself as a structure; it destructures ideology in order to reconstitute it on its own relatively autonomous terms, in order to process and recast it in aesthetic production, at the same time as it is itself destructured to variable degrees by the effect of ideology upon it" (Eagleton 1976, 98-99).

It is not a question of "authenticity," nor is it a question of a more "knowledgeable" text necessarily achieving more valuable perceptions. On the contrary, as Eagleton observes a propos the novels of Jane Austen, "their value thrives quite as much on their ignorance as on their insight: it is because there is so much the novels cannot possibly know that they know what they do in the form they do" (Eagleton 1976, 70-71). If literature is an index to history, it is because the illusion it produces is a determinate illusion. Even though literary discourse deforms and distances reality, it is not thereby the mere play of an illusion, an objectless message—"writing degree zero" in Barthes's famous phrase—whose substance is reducible to the internal codes that formulate and communicate it. It is the determinate nature of its signification process that permits the text to be a document for the science of history. "If the literary work can be seen as an ideological production to the second power, it is possible to see how that double production may, as it were, partly cancel itself out, invert itself back into an analogue of knowledge. For in producing ideological representations, the text reveals in peculiarly intense compacted and coherent form the categories from which these representations are produced" (Eagleton 1976, 85). The final step toward conceptualizing art as a discourse is to ground the work of art in its specific historical location, rendering its "illusion" into a particular determinate illusion and its "ideology" into a historically specific articulation of ideologies.

Macherey: Scientific Criticism and the Question of the Text

In *A Theory of Literary Production*, Macherey attempts to develop a scientific literary criticism in the form of a realist and materialist concept of literary practice. Such a criticism, he insists, must address two basic questions: the question of what the work says and "the question of the question," that is, what the text does not say and why. The first

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question reveals the work as an expression, as a structure; the second reveals the condition of this effect—conditions of which the work has no awareness. If the first question may be compared to the question of the manifest content of the text, the second question is the question of its unconscious. "The critical problem," as Macherey sees it, lies "in the conjunction of the two questions; not in a choice between them, but in the point from which they appear to become differentiated." The complexity of the critical problem, in other words, is "the articulation between the two questions" (Macherey 1978, 90). A realist and materialist criticism must (a) define a general concept of literary practice (the literary effect as a particular form of ideological production with its own relative autonomy) that establishes the theoretical object of inquiry for criticism and (b) account for the production and reception of literary texts in terms of their determinate historical contexts (the place and function assigned to the literary effect by the social formation as a complex whole), thus establishing criticism as a regional theory of historical science and a subfield of the theory of ideology. Macherey takes as his point of departure Althusser's discussion in his "Letter on Art" of the possibility and the necessity of a scientific criticism of art: "in order to answer most of the questions posed for us by the existence and specific nature of art, we are forced to produce an adequate (scientific) *knowledge* of the processes which produce the 'aesthetic effect' of a work of art. . . . *Therecognition* (even the political recognition) of the existence and importance of art does not constitute a *knowledge of art* Like all knowledge, the knowledge of art presupposes a preliminary *rupture* with the language of *ideological spontaneity* and the constitution of a body of scientific concepts to replace it." (Althusser 1971, 225-26).

Following Althusser, Macherey insists that criticism and its object—in his case, the literary text—be firmly distinguished: science is not the duplication of its object but rather the constitution of its object, as a theoretical object, from a perspective outside of the object and capable of knowing it as it cannot know itself. Macherey contrasts this view with two other critical strategies, "normative" and "empirical" criticism, which must serve as negative reference points for scientific criticism. According to Macherey, empiricist criticism tends to accept the text as a "given" that offers itself spontaneously to the inspecting glance; normative criticism, by contrast, tends to measure the text against a model of what it might be—to refuse the text as it is in order to "correct" it against an ideal object that precedes it. In both cases,

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Macherey insists, the text is treated as an object of consumption, and the apparent opposition between the two methodologies is, in actuality, a simple "displacement" of this commodity form: empiricist criticism receives the work as an immediately given object of consumption while normative criticism treats and modifies this object so that it can be better or more "profitably" consumed.

Criticism claims to treat the work as an object of consumption, thus falling into the empiricist fallacy . . . because it asks only how to *receive* a given object. But this first fallacy is closely followed by a second, the normative fallacy, in which criticism proposes to modify the work in order to assimilate it more thoroughly, denying its factual reality as being merely the provisional version of an unfulfilled intention. The second fallacy is no more than a variety of the first, a displacement of it. In fact only the empirical characteristics of the work are transposed, by being attributed to a model—that fixed and independent entity which exists alongside the work, guaranteeing both its consistency and its readability and making it accessible as an object of judgement. The normative fallacy proposes a transformation of its object only within previously defended limits. It is the sublimation of empiricism, its ideal image, but based ultimately on the same principles. (Macherey 1978, 19)

Macherey criticizes the passivity of empiricist criticism with respect to the literary text. In the case of empiricism, he argues, the distance between the object of criticism and the knowledge of this object is reduced, and criticism collapses into the submissive reception and consumption of "literature"—a mysterious essence imposed on criticism from without and whose meanings define the horizon of critical knowledge. In contrast to such a passive and self-limiting reception of the text, Macherey insists on criticism as an active and autonomous enterprise. If criticism has as its domain the study of literature, this domain does not necessarily constitute the object of criticism, nor does it delimit, in advance, the entire field of critical knowledge: "knowledge is not the rediscovery of hidden meanings, it is newly raised up—an *addition* to the reality from which it begins" (Macherey 1978, 6). Thought about the object is never identical to the actual object, Macherey reminds us, and empiricist criticism merely destroys the autonomy of its own practice when it "unites" with the literary work through the "discovery" of the latter's "truth." Such criticism, because it takes the text as a given, immediate object, can neither explain it nor formulate the concepts or laws of its production. Normative criticism, which adds a previously given model that is taken to be the truth of the text's phenomenal essence, merely adds a superficial complexity to this same pro-

cess. In both cases, Macherey concludes, criticism has been reduced to axiology, a matter of judgment and description, a set of practical rules of taste and value.

Macherey's criticism of empirical and normative approaches may be extended to include many of the critical practices that have dominated the twentieth century. For example, it speaks directly to the hermeneutics of Gadamer as well as the aesthetic historicism of Jaus and Iser, the so-called *Rezeptionästhetik*.^[23] In varying degrees these methodologies valorize the "authority of tradition" and the "horizon of expectations" of successive ages as principles of textual interpretation capable of consciously, albeit indirectly and incompletely, bringing forth the "reality" of art, that is, the "phenomenal essence" of art that persists through time precisely because it is an essence. Such a view marries a mythology of literary production (the creative genius) to an equally mythologized notion of literary reception (the value judgments of critics), a shotgun marriage designed to propagate cultural elitism (the canon) and present, as virtue itself, the illicit relation uniting literary production and reception (the class bias embedded in the text-reality relationship). The hermeneutic notion of an "ongoing totalization" of the past through the "aesthetic experience" denies the objectivity of both the past and the text, while the idea of a general theory of "literariness" elaborated within the constraints of hermeneutics is an idealist evasion of the task of producing a scientific concept of the literary effect. In contrast to the irrationalist and ultimately conservative appeal to "tradition" endemic to hermeneutics, the Structural Marxist concept of literature as an ideological practice grounds the production and the reception of literary texts in real history and at the same time produces real knowledges of literary production and reception—knowledges that are neither the slaves of the past nor the tools of the status quo.

Macherey's scientific criticism also raises powerful objections to the methods of structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies. For Macherey, the structuralist critical enterprise revolves around the decipherment of the "enigma of text" in order to disengage from it a cryptic but nonetheless coherent sense (Macherey 1978, 136-56). The text is posited as a message, and the function of the structuralist critic is to isolate the transmitted information in order to extract the truth of the text from its inner space and to reveal this truth as the timeless "combinatory" of immutable semiological forms. The language system is not only the sole condition of literary production, it is also an ahistorical condition. The text's production, therefore, can only be the appearance

of a production for structuralist criticism, since its true object always lies behind it. In Macherey's view, structuralist criticism is simply another form of empiricism—an adequation and conformation of knowledge to its privileged object, in this case the art of transmitting and interpreting messages.

Poststructuralism, which develops out of that aspect of structuralism that sees meaning as a diacritical, elusive, absent center of discourse—the perpetual and relational discrepancy between signifiers that both supports and eludes centering—presents a somewhat different problem for Macherey since he himself is as critical of the idea of a single "meaning" of a literary text as is any deconstructionist. Indeed, the attempt to reduce the diversity of the work to a single signification, what Macherey calls "interpretive criticism," constitutes a third negative reference point to be explicitly rejected by scientific criticism. Interpretive criticism, Macherey explains, rests on a number of related fallacies: "it locates the work in a space which it endows with its own depth; it denounces the spontaneously deceptive character of the work; finally, it presupposes the active presence of a single meaning around which the work is diversely articulated. Above all, it confirms the relationship of interiority between the work and its criticism: commentary establishes itself at the heart of the work and delivers its secret. Between knowledge (critical discourse) and its object (the literary work) the only distance is that between power and action, meaning and its expression" (Macherey 1978, 76-77).

However, poststructuralist criticism, by basing itself on the infinite openness of meaning, the indefinite multiplicity of the text, collapses writing into reading and abolishes even the memory of production. By making production a secret, a mystery whose processes cannot even be mentioned, the text becomes the accomplishment of the reader—a valuable insight, no doubt, when directed against crude axiologies of immanent value, but one that Macherey insists has nothing to do with the real complexities of the text, which stem from its character as a determinate ideological production of a determinate historical matrix: "Under the pretence of identifying the theoretical incompleteness of the work, we must not fall into an ideology of the 'open text': by the artifice of its composition, the work constitutes the principle of its indefinite variation. It has not one meaning but many: although this possible indefinite multiplicity, a quality or effect accomplished by the reader, has nothing to do with that real complexity, necessarily finite, which is the structure of the book. If the work does not produce or contain the prin-

ciple of its own closure, it is nevertheless definitively enclosed within its own limits (though they may not be self-appointed limits)" (Macherey 1978, 80).

For Macherey, the work is finite because it is incomplete, a paradox that stems from the ideological origins of the text and its character as an ideological production. The incompleteness of the work must be understood, Macherey explains, not in terms of its consumption but in terms of its production. Macherey introduces two concepts to clarify his meaning: *dissonance* (the decentered, contradictory nature of the text) and *determinate absence* (the inherent incompleteness of the text). Literary texts are internally dissonant, he argues, not as a function of their reception (that is, the reader) but because of their peculiar relationship to their ideological origins. Since the dominant ideology functions to call social subjects into existence, place them in positions within existing social relations, and reproduce those positions and relations, it manifests an inherent tendency to mask social contradictions by a process of distortion, exclusion, and omission. In a sense, the dominant ideology exists because there are certain things that must not be spoken of, things that are visible only as limits of ideological discourse.

Such silences in ordinary ideological discourse also obtrude into second-order ideological productions such as fiction, in which, Macherey contends, their presence-absence takes a determinate form that is the true object of criticism. "By interrogating an ideology, one can establish the existence of its limits because they are encountered as an impossible obstacle; they are there, but they cannot be made to speak. . . . Even though ideology itself always sounds solid, copious, it begins to speak of its *own absences* because of its presence in the novel, its visible and determinate form" (Macherey 1978, 132). The text, by putting ideology into determinate form, bears within it the marks of certain determinate absences that twist its various significations into conflict and contradiction. "The necessity of the work is founded on the multiplicity of its meanings; to explain the work is to recognize and *differentiate* the principle of this diversity. . . . [W]hat begs to be explained in the work is not that false simplicity which derives from the apparent unity of its meanings but the presence of a relation, or an opposition, between the elements of the exposition or levels of the composition" (Macherey 1978, 78-79). This determinate absence, which is the principle of the work's identity, cannot be explained in terms of a unified meaning; it is not some extension of meaning but is instead "generated from the incompatibility of several meanings" that consti-

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tute "the bond by which it is attached to reality, in a tense and ever-renewed confrontation" (Macherey 1978, 80).

According to Macherey, the distance that separates the work from its ideological origins embodies itself in an "internal distance," which, so to speak, separates the work from itself and forces it into a ceaseless difference and division of meanings. In "putting ideology to work," the text necessarily illuminates the absences and begins to "make speak" the silences of that ideology. The absences, the "not said" of the work, are precisely what bind it to the ideology from which it emerged. This being the case, Macherey argues, the task of criticism cannot be, as normative or empirical criticism would have it, to situate itself within the same space as the text, allowing the text to speak or completing what it leaves unsaid. On the contrary, criticism must install itself in the incompleteness of the work in order to theorize what is unsaid: in order to become a theoretical object, the work must be transformed. However, the number of possible transformations is not unlimited; Macherey insists that the ideology from which it emerges renders the text determinate and thus finite. "If the work does not produce or contain the principle of its own closure," Macherey says, "it is nevertheless definitively enclosed within its own limits" (Macherey 1978, 80). Because the relationship between the work and what it cannot say is a determinate one, Macherey characterizes textual absences as structural contradictions and holds them to be constitutive of the text. Structural contradictions are internal to the text, not external, part of a process of internal concealment to which Althusser refers as the "inner darkness of exclusion" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 26). Only by breaking with all spontaneous, lived relation to the text—that is, by refusing the discourse of the text as the ground of ratification and by establishing it instead as an object of knowledge within a theoretical practice entirely foreign to the text itself—only then, Macherey insists, can we come back to the text and "see" those visible absences that mark its peculiar relationship to ideology.

Representation and Figuration in Verne's Mysterious Island

Macherey puts his method to work in an extended essay on Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island* (Macherey 1978, 159-240). He demonstrates how a contradiction emerges from the ideological materials and processes that constitute Verne's text, a contradiction between *represen-*

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tation (the "ideological project" or what the text "wants" to show: in this case, the human conquest of nature) and *figuration* (the "fable" of the text itself, what it effectively does show by means of images, objects, places, and attitudes). At the level of manifest content, Verne's work attempts to represent the ideology of the colonizing French bourgeoisie of the Third Republic as a linear narrative of progress: a scientific voyage, overcoming obstacles to penetrate and dominate nature's extremities. This vision of direct and certain progress through the heroic conquest of nature by humanity is, at any rate, how the project of a colonizing bourgeoisie "tells itself." However, Macherey argues, in Verne's works something happens to the narrative such that, on the level of figuration, this

ideology is "told" in a way that limits it and reveals its internal contradictions. The two otherwise coherent levels of representation and figuration are rendered incompatible, and in the passage from the first to the second the ideological theme undergoes a "complete modification": the futuristic novel turns into a retrospective narrative; the initial forward-looking project of conquest dissolves into a repetition of the past (the explorers always find they are following the path of one who has gone before them); the myth of genesis, the island as origin, becomes a loss of origins and a return to the father; liberating, technological mastery of "virgin" territory by "humanity" obliquely draws attention to an excluded portion of humanity, the island's "natives"; and so on.

Linking Verne's work to the "myth of origins" of the Robinson Crusoe legend—which masks the real history of colonialism—Macherey emphasizes how the text undermines the myth by presupposing the real history that it suppresses. Verne does not, Macherey argues, oppose this myth of origin by recording the real history of colonization or by "reflecting" the latent contradictions inscribed within its ideology. Because ideology masks its contradictions, they can be revealed only from without, and thus Macherey insists it is only by "putting the ideology to work" that Verne is able to put it into contradiction: only through the mechanisms of production inherent in literary practice is the seamless web of ideology rent asunder. The literary text achieves its "truth" by putting ideology to work, which in turn creates a tension between project and realization—the incapacity of the text to maintain the discursive task it had assigned itself.

At the source of ideology we find an attempt at reconciliation. Also, by definition, ideology is in its way coherent, a coherence which is indefinite if not imprecise, which is not sustained by any real deduction. In this case, the

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discord is not *in* ideology but in its relation with that which limits it. An ideology can be *put into contradiction*: it is futile to denounce the presence of a contradiction in ideology. Also, the ideological project given to Jules Verne constitutes a level of representation which is relatively homogeneous and consistent, linked internally by a kind of analogical rigour; the *flaw* is not to be sought in the project. Similarly, the inventory of images and their insertion into the chosen fable is in itself perfectly consistent. Verne begins with an ideology of science which he makes into a mythology of science: both the ideology and the mythology are irreproachable in their authority. It is the path which leads from the one to the other which must be questioned: it is in this *in between*, which . . . has its marked place in the work, that a decisive encounter occurs. In the passage from the level of representation to that of figuration, ideology undergoes a complete *modification*—as though, in a critical reversal of the gaze, it were no longer seen from within but from the outside: not from its illusory and absent center . . . but from the limits which hold it in check and impose upon it a certain shape by preventing it from being a different ideology or something other than ideology. (Macherey 1978, 194)

It is clear that the work does not "reproduce" ideology in a way that would make its own contradictions reflect historical conditions. On the contrary, for Macherey the contradictions within the text are the product of the ideologically determined absence of such a reflection of real contradictions. According to Macherey, the work's problematical relationship to ideology produces its internal dissonances. In the text, ideology begins to speak of its absences and manifest its limits, not in the Lukácsian sense that the work's aesthetic powers allow it to over-reach ideological mediations and achieve a direct encounter with historical truth, but because, in transforming rather than merely reproducing ideology, the text necessarily illuminates the "not-said" that is the significant structure of what is said: "the literary work is simultaneously (and it is this conjunction which concerns us) a reflection and the absence of a reflection: this is why it is itself contradictory. It would therefore be incorrect to say that the contradictions of the work are the *reflection* of historical contradictions: rather they are the consequences of the absence of this reflection" (Macherey 1978, 128). As a mirror, the text is blind in certain respects, but it is a mirror for all its blindness. "In this sense literature can be called a mirror: in displacing objects it retains their reflection. It projects its thin surface on to the work and history. It passes through them and breaks them. In its train arise the images" (Macherey 1978, 135).

For Macherey, the problem of criticism is to meet a double exigency, to conceptualize the relative autonomy of the literary text (its irreducibility to other signifying practices) without losing sight of its determi-

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nate production (its dependence on other ideological practices and real historical conditions). The concept of literature as ideological production serves this purpose admirably. It allows a critical inquiry that avoids the twin pitfalls of accepting the text as "spontaneously available" (the empiricist fallacy) or replacing the text by a model or a meaning (the normative and interpretive fallacies). By placing the theory of literary production outside the text in the domain of the science of history—specifically, within the region of ideological practice—literature as a theoretical object becomes possible. However, *A Theory of Literary Production* is not without certain serious problems. One deficiency, noted by Claude Bouché (1981), is that, despite its title, the book specifies the general conditions of literary practice, or rather its principle, instead of the material aspect of its production, the totality of its objective determinations. This is a serious omission, but one that is readily correctable. A more serious flaw, in my opinion, stems from the monolithic and unified view of ideology on which so much of the book's conceptual development rests. Ideology, Macherey insists, "cannot sustain a contradictory debate, for ideology exists precisely in order to efface all trace of contradiction" (Macherey 1978, 131). Such a view may be justly accused of failing to properly differentiate the dominant ideology from other, rival ideologies; moreover, it fails to recognize the contradictory nature of interpellation itself—the internal tension against which even the dominant ideology is always struggling and which makes of all ideology a force not only for the reproduction of the existing relations of production but for their transformation as well.

From such a monolithic view of ideology, and the corresponding notion that only a second-level discourse

such as literature may be said to be contradictory, it is a relatively short step to reducing ordinary ideology to a "false" discourse and raising literary discourse to a negative analogue of "truth." In this way Macherey slips subtly from the idea of literature as a production of ideology to the idea that this distancing, this *mise-en-scène*, is necessarily and automatically subversive, and from this view into a negative reflectionism: what the text doesn't say is true, and what it does say is false. The question of truth or falsity, authenticity or inauthenticity, is not the issue. Ideology may agree or disagree with what science says about a certain fact or event, but as we have shown, this is not its point, nor is it the point of literary discourse. Just as surely as it can subvert an existing ideology, a text can underwrite it, reproduce it, impoverish it, or revitalize it, yet these capacities find no place in Macherey's framework.

While retaining the concept of the text as an ideological production,

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we must also acknowledge the fact that not all texts are thrown, invariably, into internal disarray by their relation to ideology; we must acknowledge as well the fact that a literary text, like any ideology, may contain "true" as well as "false" elements. It is one of the advances of Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* to have pointed out that literary texts work sometimes with and sometimes against the historically mutable valences of the ideological formation: "finding itself able to admit one ideological element in relatively unprocessed form but finding therefore the need to displace or recast another . . . the text disorders ideology to *produce an internal order which may then occasion fresh disorder* both in itself (as an ideological production) and in the ideology" (Eagleton 1976, 99). Such a complex movement cannot be adequately captured by a formulation that insists that the literary text reproduces the structure of ideology, either positively or negatively. The literary text can be grasped, Eagleton insists, only as a "ceaseless reciprocal *operation* of text on ideology and ideology on text, a mutual structuring and de-structuring in which the text constantly overdetermines its own determinations. The structure of the text is then the product of this process, not the reflection of its ideological environs" (Eagleton 1976, 99).

Eagleton: Aesthetics as Class Struggle in Culture

By producing a realist and materialist concept of literary practice, Structural Marxists are able to draw a firm distinction between *criticism* (the production of knowledge) and *aesthetics* (the judgment or axiology of value). That "taste" should have insinuated itself at the very heart of non-Marxist theories of literature is not really surprising—we shall return to this phenomenon later—but this tendency is also at work, astonishingly, in many Marxist attempts to reconcile history and aesthetic value. Even when the text is taken to be an expression of the history that produced it—it matters not whether this expression is conceived as a mirror image, mediated by the "class position" occupied by the author, or as a homology between the form and/or content of the text and the social formation—often an implicit normative judgment also takes place, one that equates "great" art with its "authenticity" or historical "truth." This normative judgment has brought with it a false problem, the reconciliation of "great" art and history, a problem that has dominated much of twentieth-century Marxist aesthetics. The pervasiveness of the problem is nowhere more evident than in the well-

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known debates among Lukács, Bloch, Brecht, Adorno, and Benjamin (collected in R. Taylor 1977), which can be seen, retrospectively, as being less about the relationship of art and social reality than about the definition/production of "authentic" art and the possibility/impossibility of disseminating it to the masses.

Debates over the value of expressionism and such questions as "modernism or realism" or "Kafka or Thomas Mann" yield less explanation than they might by virtue of being cast in terms of historical authenticity and political correctness. Other "problems," such as reconciling Balzac the reactionary ideologue with Balzac the great novelist, lose much of their urgency with the realization that "greatness" is an ideologically determined class-based category. Solutions proposed to these "problems"—for example, Lukács's argument that Balzac is a great novelist because his oppositional ideology makes him a "realist" in spite of himself; Goldmann's attempt to defend the "greatness" of the young Malraux simply because he is a Marxist—may be said to conflate art, politics, and science, and to do so in an unsatisfactory and unproductive manner. The commonly held assumption that art should be "authentic" unites the participants in these debates in affirming the "greatness" of this or that work of literature, however violently they disagree about what exactly this "authenticity-greatness" may consist of. For all of them, the idea that art is somehow "true" leads to the valorization of certain works as "great." Reflection theory, no matter how subtle, leads directly to its own form of axiology. All novels are true—to their ideological origins—and for Marxist critics to defend novels on the basis of their conformity to the truth of history is simply to say that they afford Marxists a certain ideological satisfaction. The problem, of course, is that such satisfaction is impossible to distinguish from the personal pleasure obtained by cultivated aesthetes from the "sublime" and the "beautiful" or from the self-righteous bliss that conservatives derive from the "canon" of white, male, self-absorbed, and elitist European literature. The recognition of this fact moves Macherey to insist that it is "a contemporary necessity to show that a concept of art which sees it is an image of reality is by no means specific to Marxism; it is, indeed

totally foreign to Marxism, and can only be appropriated by Marxists as the result of a misapprehension" (Macherey 1976, 54-55).

Eagleton, whose *Criticism and Ideology* mounts the most sustained argument against axiology from within the Althusserian camp, observes that whenever the greatness of literature becomes an issue,

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Marxism finds itself trapped within bourgeois categories that are foreign to it. The problem of greatness cannot be resolved scientifically because it is always already ideological. Literary value, Eagleton insists, has nothing to do with "great works" as humanist criticism has attempted to define them since "great texts," those which are considered "great" at any time or for any length of time, are so considered simply because their "ideology of the text" exerts powerful ideological significations for the social formation that deems them great. The key to understanding value or greatness (which is always a question of class-based reception/consumption) lies outside the realm of criticism and in the realm of a history of literary effects. If the text is limited by the ideological instance in its production, this is even more the case with its reception: "The literary text is a text because it is read," Eagleton tells us, and "reading is an ideological decipherment of an ideological product" (Eagleton 1976, 62). There is no immanent value—no value that is not transitive. "Literary value is a phenomenon which is produced in that ideological appropriation of the text, that 'consumptional production' of the work which is the art of reading . . . for the literary text is always the text-for-ideology [whose] ideological effect, i.e., 'ideology of the text' is selected, deemed readable and deciphered by certain ideologically governed conventions of critical receptivity to which the text itself contributes [but which it does not determine]" (Eagleton 1976, 166-67).

Eagleton does not deny the objective existence of the literary effect, nor is he denying that literary representation-meaning is grounded, via ideology, in objective reality, nor, finally, is he denying that authors communicate determinate meanings to historically specific readers. The point he is trying to make is simply this: even though there are finite limits to the number of possible readings a text may offer, as well as a finite number of readings a social formation will allow, knowledge of either or both gives us no objective criterion of value. "The finite number of possible readings defined by the conjuncture of the text's proffered modes of producibility and the possible reception of the reader's ideological matrix constitute a closed hermeneutical circle with regard to the problem of value. By moving outside the mutual ideological complicity of text and reading we can have the basis for scientific analysis—on the level of the text's own historical self-production in relation to its ideological environs" (Eagleton 1976, 166-67). For these reasons Eagleton contends that we must reconsider the question of value, not from the site of its expression of reality or the site of its beauty, but from the

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site of its production. Literary production, not literary diffusion, is the site of an adequate theory of criticism, and such a theory depends on a theory of ideology. "The guarantee of a scientific criticism is the science of ideological formations. It is only on the basis of such a science that such a criticism could possibly be established—only by the assurance of a knowledge of ideology that we can claim any knowledge of literary texts" (Eagleton 1976, 96). This is not to say that literary criticism is merely an application of the theory of ideology; it is rather "a particular element of the theory of superstructures" whose task is "not the study of the laws of ideological formation, but the laws of the production of ideological discourse as literature" (Eagleton 1976, 96).

For Eagleton, what can be scientifically said of the text pertains to its ideological origins and its specific effectivity as an ideological production; traditional aesthetics, with its debates over authenticity, value, truth, and so on, is simply the site of a class struggle in art. It is necessary, Eagleton maintains, to take a materialist position in aesthetics, to refuse all "moralism" of literary value, and instead "unite the question of the work's quality with the question of its conditions of possibility" (Eagleton 1976, 187). Certainly some works are debased even from this perspective, Eagleton acknowledges, at least in the sense that they simply appropriate existing ideologies, transforming them little if at all in the course of their textual production. By contrast, other texts produce complex, compact, variegated ideological significations that may renew, construct, modify, occlude, or extend ideology by virtue of the second-order signifying power of their textual operations. In this limited sense, Eagleton continues to subscribe to the aesthetic dictum "all texts signify, but not all texts are significant" (Eagleton 1976, 185). This formulation, however, smacks of axiology itself. As Francis Mulhern has pointed out, Eagleton's own analysis of specific works amounts to a "de facto ratification" of the already constituted "tradition" of English literature as defined by established literary criticism (Mulhern 1978, 86). Eagleton rejects this view, but with an interesting qualification.

It is certainly possible to produce a Marxist analysis of George Eliot, it is even necessary. But any "Marxist criticism" that defines itself in terms of such analysis has once again failed to effect a decisive break with the bourgeois ideology. Such a criticism, far from staking out a new theoretical space that may make a practical difference, merely addresses new answers to the same question. The production of Marxist analysis of traditional artifacts is an indispensable project: such artifacts, after all, are the grounds on which

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the ruling class has elected to impose its hegemony, and thus one of the grounds on which it must be contested. But such contestation cannot be the primary object of a Marxist criticism. If that primary object is difficult to define, it is largely because it does not as yet properly exist. (Eagleton 1981, 97)

Two points need to be addressed here. First, with regard to the specific charge of elitism, Mulhern is correct to defend a Marxist position in *aesthetics* that refuses the class-based concept of a "great tradition." However, as Eagleton notes in his reply, Marxist *criticism*, by specifying mechanisms of complexity at work within the "great tradition," is not thereby obliged to subscribe to the notion that complexity constitutes aesthetic value. In fact, the reverse seems more accurate: Marxist criticism provides the theoretical ammunition by which Marxist aesthetics may attack the "great tradition" for what it is, in addition to being simply literature, namely, an ideological category produced by class-based educational and cultural apparatuses. In contrast to traditional aesthetics, Marxist criticism permits, even encourages, the recovery of "secondary" or "alternative" texts from the dustbin of history and accords them the serious study usually reserved for "classics." Because Marxist criticism is applicable to every literary text, its very existence subverts the canonical status of the "great tradition" as being the only texts worth examining. However, Marxist aesthetics is in rather the same position as Marxist philosophy: it has no choice but to engage in axiological debates over the "value" of specific works of art because, like philosophical debates over the "truth" of idealism and materialism, they are part of a class struggle that must be engaged or conceded. In aesthetics, as in all philosophy, there is always a political stake invested in every theoretical position. Second, with regard to Eagleton's ambiguous reference to the "primary object" of an "as yet improperly existing" Marxist criticism, it needs to be explicitly pointed out that, whatever Eagleton happens to think about it now, this object does already exist; it is precisely a scientific explanation of the text. As Eagleton suggests in his reply, even when analyzing "great works" scientific criticism intends neither to idealize the text nor to cultivate the reader; rather, its purpose is to know the text and to inform the reader. Why Eagleton chooses to refer to Marxist criticism as not yet "properly existing" is unclear. Whatever his reasons, the idea that Marxist criticism is somehow improperly constituted is, to say the least, contestable, and on this particular issue Eagleton finds his own work effectively mobilized against him.

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Macherey: Scientific Criticism Versus a History of Aesthetics

Literary criticism focuses necessarily on the relationship between the form and content of the text and its historical and ideological context. However, the existence of a literary text as a social production by no means exhausts either its historical significance or the interest of Marxism in literature as a historical phenomenon. If *production* is the key to a realist and materialist concept of literature, its mechanisms do not directly determine or sufficiently explain the *reception* of the text, that is, its ideological impact (although they remain a necessary condition of such an explanation). In *A Theory of Literary Production*, Macherey largely ignores the concrete historical existence of literature, in the sense of literature as a practice that "lives" only by a process of interaction with particular readers. This tactic was necessary, of course, if Macherey was to demonstrate effectively the fact that the relationship between the text and reality has nothing to do with what contemporary readers felt about the text. Marxism is not obliged to accept outside judgments regarding a text's value in order to use it as a historical document; nevertheless, a general theory of history must be able to account for the text's reception and its ideological effectivity as well as its production and ideological origins. It is my position that a synthesis between criticism, the science of literary texts as social products, and what I will call a history of literary effects is necessary, but such a synthesis is possible only on the condition that the concept of literary discourse developed in the preceding pages is retained.

My position strongly contrasts with the trajectory of Macherey's own development, which since *A Theory of Literary Production* has taken a dramatic turn away from the concept of literature as a particular type of discursive practice. In making this move, Macherey seems to have been decisively influenced by Althusser's rejection of "theoreticism" in *For Marx and Reading Capital* and by his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In response to Althusser's shift of emphasis from ideology as a system of imaginary relations and the distinction between ideology and science toward a greater concern with ideology as a material force inscribed in material institutions and constituting social subjects, Macherey has come to reject any possible continuity or compatibility between the two projects. In a 1976 essay, "Problems of Reflection," Macherey insists that "for historical materialism, ideology must cease to be considered as a system of representa-

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tions, of facts of consciousness, of ideas, as a discourse. . . . From a materialist point of view, ideology is constituted by a certain number of ideological state apparatuses" (Macherey 1976, 50). However, as I have argued, an underlying coherence unites Althusser's early and later works—a coherence organized around his unflinching commitment to scientific realism. With Macherey, unfortunately, this is not the case. In his more recent work Macherey has not only turned to the problem of the material effect of literature, that is, the history of literary

effects, but has also gone so far as to redefine literature exclusively in terms of its historical reception, a project that denies, if not the legitimacy of a scientific concept of literary practice, at least its utility: "A study of the literary process is no longer an investigation into what literature is produced from, into the basis of its existence, but an attempt to identify the effects which it produces" (Macherey 1976, 51).

By reducing literature to the historical effect of its reception, Macherey has not simply rejected theoreticism; he has also rejected the very project of a science of history, a position that brings him closer to Hindess and Hirst than to Althusser. Macherey has rejected a realist and materialist concept—by which literary practice could be explained functionally by virtue of its distinct discursive nature (not by its authenticity or value, about which scientific criticism can have nothing to say)—for an irrationalist, *gauchiste* position that renounces the project of objective, scientific criticism and embraces the historicist, relativist denial of a general concept of literary production. This volte-face does not answer the "materialist" question of reception, as Macherey seems to think; it only casts doubt on the very possibility of such a materialist understanding. Unable to synthesize the "text-reality" relationship and the "text effect" relationship, Macherey posits a false antithesis between them: either literature is an objectively distinct discourse (and thus exists in a theoretically distinct relationship to the real by way of its ideological origins and its mode of production), or it is a historically relative discourse that functions to interpellate subjects (and thus exists exclusively as a function of the ideological apparatuses that determine its reception). Macherey eliminates the antithesis by rejecting the reality of the text's production in order to affirm the reality of its reception, but he can produce no "materialist" understanding of reception because he can have no concept of what it is that is being received: the objective existence of the literary text simply dissolves into a postmodern, hermeneutic fog of subjective interpretation.

The question of the concept of literature no longer has any meaning

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for Macherey: "Literature is a practical material process of transformation which means that in particular historical periods, literature exists in different forms. Literature with a capital 'L' does not exist; there is the 'literary,' literature or literary phenomena within social reality and this is what must be studied and understood" (Macherey 1977, 3). The question of the relationship between literature and ideology, he maintains, must be posed in terms that escape the "confrontation of universal essences in which many Marxist discussions have found themselves enclosed" (Macherey and Balibar 1974, 30). Disingenuously ignoring the fact that there are distinct levels of theoretical discourse ranging from the abstract-general to the concrete-specific, Macherey imperiously dismisses the "illusion that literature in general exists . . . that literature is something, that is to say a whole united around a coherent system of principles which ensure its conformity to a fixed and immutable essence" (Macherey 1976, 51).

There is no reason to accept the terms of Macherey's false antithesis between the production and reception of literary discourse. What is actually going on beneath the surface of Macherey's argument is a misguided attempt to combat the class-biased aesthetic judgments about literature by taking an idealist and irrationalist position with respect to art ("criticism is an ideological effect of class struggle") as opposed to a materialist and realist position ("aesthetics is class struggle in culture"). In an attempt to defend Macherey's position, Tony Bennett puts the problem this way:

What is in dispute is not the material existence of texts but the contention that, in any part of their objective and material presence they declare themselves to be "literature." Written texts do not organize themselves into the "literary" and "non-literary." They are so organized only by the operations of criticism upon them. This contention is fully substantiated by the history of the term "literature" which finally achieved the range of meaning [we now give the term] only during the nineteenth century, side by side with the consolidation of literary criticism and aesthetics as autonomous and academically entrenched areas of inquiry. (Bennett 1979, 7)

This line of argument graphically reveals the incoherence of Macherey's reduction of literature to its reception. Most certainly texts do not "organize themselves" into the "categories of their reception." But this does not mean that all "criticisms" that "organize the reception" of literary texts are the same; that there is no vital difference between axiological aesthetics and scientific criticism. By denying the possibility of a general concept of literature, Macherey and Bennett have put his-

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torical materialism in the awkward position of uncritically accepting concepts of literary practice that it is supposed to be explaining. If there is no distinction between a scientific analysis of a literary text and any other interpretation, by extension there can be no distinction between a scientific analysis of any historical phenomena and any other interpretation of those phenomena. Of course, such a critique completely cuts the ground out from under any knowledge of history, making nonsense of any attempt at "studying and understanding" literary phenomena even as unique, concrete objects. When Bennett attempts to persuade us that "what is needed is not a theory of literature as such but a historically concrete analysis of the different forms of fictional writing and the ideologies to which they allude," he is, strictly speaking, talking nonsense. What is fictional writing? What are ideologies? Without a conceptual problematic—that is, without concepts—one cannot say. To speak of a "historically concrete analysis" without concepts of the historical practices being analyzed is to assert blithely the existence of historical science while denying its theoretical conditions of existence.⁴³

In opposition to the idea of knowledge without concepts, we must insist that without concepts the knowledge

effect of criticism becomes theoretically indistinguishable from the ideological effect of reception. I do not wish to deny the class-biased nature of reception, but I do protest the reduction of criticism (a scientific practice) into a class-biased form of aesthetics (ideological reception), which is the ultimate effect of the historicism espoused by Macherey and Bennett. Rather than seeing criticism as a scientific practice with political effects, criticism itself becomes merely a political act: "The task which faces Marxist criticism is not that of reflecting or bringing to light the politics which is already there, as a latent presence within the text. . . . It is that of actively politicizing the text, of making politics for it" (Bennett 1979, 167-68). Such statements hopelessly muddle the distinction between criticism and aesthetics; the task of Marxist criticism is precisely to explain the presence of "politics" within the text as well as the "politics" of its reception, while the task of Marxist aesthetics, presumably what Bennett means by the term criticism, is to combat the *already* politicized system of valorizations and exclusions that surround the text and constitute the field of its reception. A Marxist position in aesthetics is not advanced at all by denying the possibility of a scientific knowledge of literary discourse (on which any Marxist aesthetic position must necessarily be based). Macherey and Bennett seem to have succumbed to voluntarist political pressures to emphasize class struggle to

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such an extent that they reduce literary criticism and the concept of literature to functions of a rigid, simplistically conceived class polarity and to the equally reductionist effects of direct class domination.

In order to valorize the function of literature as an ideological apparatus, Macherey goes so far as to deny its autonomy as an ideological production. Not only is he no longer interested in the signifying power of the text, but he also seeks to empty the text of any and all cognitive relation to the real: "to analyze the nature and the form of the realization of class positions *in* literary production and its outcome ('texts,' those 'works' recognized as literary), is at the same time to define and explain the ideological modality of literature. . . . [T]his problem should be posed as a function of a theory of the history of literary effects" (Macherey and Balibar 1974, 19). The project of a history of literary effects, an important and necessary project in its own right, has become the beginning and the end of all knowledge of literature. Certain essential facts—that the aesthetic effect signifies something, that the signifying effect of this "something" stands in a determinate relation of production to its ideological origins, and that this "something" is knowable (and worth knowing)—have disappeared completely from Macherey's later work. In fact, it is the text itself that has disappeared. Urging that the concept of the "text" or the "work" that has for so long been the mainstay of criticism should be abandoned, Macherey advances the argument that there are no such things as works or texts: "the materialist analysis of literature rejects on principle the notion of the 'work'—i.e., the illusory representation of the unity of a literary text, its totality, self-sufficiency and perfection. . . . More precisely it recognizes the notion of the 'work' (and its correlative 'the author') only to identify both as the necessary illusions inscribed in the ideology of literature that accompanies all literary production" (Macherey and Balibar 1981, 49). The literary effect is reduced by Macherey to three dimensions of a monolithic process of ideological domination: "(1) as produced under determinate social relations; (2) as a moment in the reproduction of the dominant ideology; and (3) consequently as an ideological domination effect in itself" (Macherey and Balibar 1981, 54).

Such a simple-minded reduction of literature to its modes of reception not only betrays the very project of producing knowledge about literature but also subverts the materialist position in philosophy, the class struggle in theory, and in aesthetics, the class struggle in culture. By contrast, defending the complementary nature of scientific criticism and the history of aesthetic reception—and defending as well the con-

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cept of ideological practice by which scientific and literary discourse and literary production and reception become comprehensible—affirms a materialist and realist position in both philosophy and aesthetics. Inserting literature into the social formation, studying its role as an ideological apparatus and its relationship to the reproduction of the dominant ideology and the existing relations of production, is not only a legitimate activity but an essential one as well. What is at issue here is not the legitimacy of this enterprise but rather the proposition that such an activity has as its corollary the rejection of a concept of literature and the relative autonomy of the text as a signifying discourse. This is demonstrably not the case. It is possible to analyze literary effects as ideological apparatuses only on the condition that we have a concept of literature as an ideological production—that is, a concept of literature as signifying *something*—as well as a theory of the "text-reality" relationship that specifies what that something is. It is, after all, only by virtue of the text's peculiar relation to ideology that the relatively autonomous field of reception is opened up. Without a concept of literature, the "minimum generality" necessary to constitute a text as a theoretical object, the very basis of reception itself becomes incomprehensible.

Renée Balibar: Class Domination and the Literary Effect

It is impossible to say more about Macherey's rejection of criticism and the concept of literature without introducing the work of Renée Balibar and her associates, whose historical investigations of literature, language,

and education in France are used by Macherey to illustrate and justify his new position.^[2] Like Macherey's theoretical shift, the work of Balibar emerges from Althusser's concept of the "ideological state apparatus." In *Les français fictifs*, which studies the functioning of literary texts within the French educational system in the nineteenth century, and in *Le français national*, which studies the development of a uniform national language in conjunction with that of the unified schooling system during and since the French Revolution, literature, language, and the schools are treated as ideological apparatuses and, as such, are shown to be in a close and necessary interrelationship. Balibar's thesis is that in the context of the development of a uniform national language the production of certain texts as "literary" together with their re-

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stricted use within the education system was a manifestation of class struggle in the sphere of language, a tactic by which the bourgeoisie created its "cultural revolution" and created for itself a position of hegemony. The objective existence of literature is held by Balibar to be inseparable from given linguistic practices (if there is a "French" literature, it exists only because there is a linguistic practice of "French" as a national language). This formulation means, as well, that literature is inseparable from an academic or schooling practice that defines the conditions for both the consumption and production of literature; by connecting the objective existence of literature to this ensemble of practices one can define the "material anchor-points" that make literature a historical and social reality.

In *Le français national* (1974), Renée Balibar and Dominique Laporte demonstrate the double relation to language that the bourgeoisie has maintained in France since the Renaissance. In the period before the French Revolution, the *noblesse de robe* discovered a source of power in the emerging political structure of the nation-state and the emerging ideological field of nationalism, whose embryonic form sprang into existence as the "democratic" idea of a national language. The decision of Francis I in 1538 that all juridical-political acts were to be written in the language of "the people" and no longer in Latin was particularly significant, Balibar and Laporte maintain, because it greatly increased the power of the recently ennobled bourgeoisie, the "nobility of the robe," over the older *noblesse d'épée*, the "nobility of the sword." As a result of the king's decree, the nobility of the robe became the intermediary between the fragmented dialects of the countryside and the central state apparatus, a state of affairs that greatly facilitated the decline of the traditional nobility of the sword. At the same time, Balibar and Laporte point out, this ostensibly "democratic" reform set the bourgeoisie over the population as a whole by virtue of the fact that they became the sole mediators between a mass of speakers and an elite of writers.

According to Balibar and Laporte, at the time of the French Revolution there appeared a double exigency that seemed to threaten the privileged position of the bourgeoisie. Under pressure from the popular masses, there was a call for the elimination of the class languages of the ancien régime—the French of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie on the one hand and the popular dialects or *patois* of the masses on the other—and, at the same time, a call for a single system to replace the plurality of establishments of the monarchical era—bourgeois and aris-

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tocratic colleges and the so-called *petites écoles* conducted by the church for the benefit of the lower classes. These notions, conceived under the revolutionary nationalism of the Jacobins, were a double-edged weapon to the bourgeoisie. On one side they constituted a necessary precondition for the full development of capitalism—for a national economy, the development of a unified legal system based on contracts between equal subjects, a unified political system of citizens able to participate directly in public affairs, and a unified ideological system based on the identification of individuals with "the nation." On the other side, the egalitarian tendency of these reforms was an undeniable threat not only to the aristocratic privileges acquired by the bourgeoisie through submission to feudal forms of power and status but also the nascent hegemony of private property and educated competence being created by the nationalist bourgeoisie. According to Balibar and Laporte, this contradiction between elitist and egalitarian nationalism accounts for the fact that the single school system was not achieved in France until nearly a century after the French Revolution (with the establishment by Jules Ferry of free education in 1881 and secular, obligatory education in 1882), and then only after considerable vicissitudes and after the bourgeois cultural revolution was achieved (thus making the new school system a necessary apparatus of bourgeois hegemony).

Following a line of investigation opened up by Structural Marxist sociologists Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet (Baudelot and Establet 1971; see also Baudelot, Establet, and Malemort 1981), Balibar and Laporte insist that the homogeneity of the bourgeois school was (is) a facade concealing the existence of antagonistic academic practices previously manifested in the form of distinct institutions (schools for the rich and schools for the poor) but that have now taken the form of two integrated schooling networks; primary education (*le réseau primaire-professionnel*) and secondary education (*le réseau secondaire-supérieur*), which, respectively, produce/reproduce the relations of domination and exploitation within the social formation. The existence of these two networks, Balibar and Laporte argue, is reflected at the level of language itself by two types of linguistic practice. As the division in schooling, which reproduces the division of society into social classes, is veiled by the assertion of a pseudo-egalitarian national community, so a linguistic division emerges between different practices of the same national languages, between "basic" exercises of *réduction* (a simple exercise in "correct" usage and the

tion-explication de textes (so-called creative work, which presupposes the use and imitation of literary materials). Within the primary schools, Balibar and Laporte point out, the sons and daughters of the lower classes receive their education in the national language in the form of an administered grammar, a set of formal rules learned mechanically from texts inherited from the old regime, while the generative schema of this grammar, derived from an understanding of the rules of Latin, is withheld. It is retained, however, as an invisible background in the secondary schools, which are populated primarily by the children of the bourgeoisie. Because education for the dominated does not result in mastery of the linguistic code, it imposes an *effect of submission* on all individuals educated at the primary level (the only level of instruction of the future exploited classes). As a corollary, education for the privileged minority, founded on the active mastery of language, produces a class-based *effect of dominance*. Apprenticeship in the "advanced" language not only opposes that in the "basic" language but also encompasses and surpasses it, bestowing on its enrollees a qualitatively superior mastery of the language and power over those excluded from such mastery.

In *Les français fictifs*, Balibar extends this line of argument to include literature. She analyzes several literary texts—Flaubert's "Un coeur simple," two narratives by Péguy, a Surrealist *comptine*, and Camus's *The Stranger*—under the assumption that the *literary effect* they produce can be grasped only in relation to the process of education in the schools and the contradictory linguistic practices developed there. The basic mechanism at work in these texts, she argues, is the unconscious reconciliation, or more properly the imaginary or fictional reconciliation, of the contradiction between "elementary" French, the language of the primary schools, and the literary or "fictive" French of the secondary schools. For Balibar, literary texts are "essentially sublimations of the conflicts lived out in the practice of language" (R. Balibar 1978, 42). It is the particular function of literature to resolve, through sublimation and by the production of a unique linguistic form, the insoluble contradictions existing in other ideological formations and related social practices—specifically, contradictions stemming from the existence, in the schools, of antagonistic linguistic practices—so as to render them soluble in non-literary ideological discourses (philosophy, politics, religion, and so forth). The literary text constitutes a "language of compromise" proclaiming otherwise irreconcilable class positions to be their own imaginary solution.

Literary texts, in effect, unconsciously reproduce the original opera-

tion by which elementary French is dominated by advanced French, that is, the process by which the latter incorporates the former (which remains nevertheless plainly visible) while simultaneously transcending it by unusual usages and creative constructions. The fact that this process of incorporation and transcendence is accomplished in one and the same national language further disguises the existence of domination, an ideological effect Balibar calls a *compromise formation*. Far from seeing literary practice as an activity that makes visible the operations of the dominant ideology by putting it to work, she contends that literary practice constitutes an operation of masking and unification, attempting thereby to heal or placate class and ideological contradictions inscribed within linguistic practice itself. Compromise formations may include both practices of French, but Balibar insists that the presence (more or less dissimulated) of advanced French produces the literary effect, the "aesthetic pleasure of reading," via the domination of the elementary language by the advanced. Constituted by a contradiction within language, the literary text is structured by an interplay between the level of ordinary grammar and that of its own distinctively literary language. The "effect of the text"—although never completely successful—is to overlay or soothe this contradiction, to preserve the fiction of "one language." This disguised/repressed evocation of elementary French by advanced French (the compromise formation), a process that is at the same time a reproduction and a deformation, constitutes the literary effect.

For Balibar, the invocation and domination of elementary by advanced French explains, in material terms, the phenomenon of *style*. For example, she describes the initial sentence of Flaubert's "Un coeur simple" as a juxtaposition of verbal material drawn from elementary grammatical exercises (then in use at the primary level) and a *construction périodique* peculiar to Greco-Latin rhetoric (as it was practiced in the upper levels of secondary school)—a juxtaposition of a simple, stripped-down vocabulary and certain lexical improprieties (e.g., the word *bourgeoises*) or certain subtleties of agreement impossible to grasp other than in terms of Latin grammar. Conversely, Balibar finds Péguy's unfinished manuscript *Pierre, Commencement d'une vie bourgeoise* unsuccessful because it attempts to combine two styles (*rédaction primaire* and *composition secondaire*) without producing a unified style capable of encompassing both primary and secondary styles or, more important, establishing the primacy of the latter over the former. This impasse, Balibar argues, is not dissimilar to the plight of the major

protagonist, a disoriented candidate for the Ecole Normale who is brought to a personal crisis when he tries to comprehend his own life and thoughts by reminiscing about his childhood and his primary school experience. Péguy's *Note conjointe*, by contrast, is a successful attempt to combine notions derived from primary school lessons of things and "philosophical-literary" discourses of secondary school. The success of this combination, Balibar explains, hinges on the dominant position of the secondary discourse, whose particular devices (which she calls *scholarismes*, that is, figures of discourse such as Latinisms, neologisms, and vulgarisms whose superficially striking effects invest the basic elementary language with an ideal aura) mask both the contradictions of the combination and the domination effect.

The style of *The Stranger*, according to Balibar, hinges on a juxtaposition of simple sentences and intentionally trite, affected sentences in "cultivated" French. In the case of Camus's novel the mechanism of the literary effect is particularly interesting because what seems to be happening is the valorization of the elementary sentences, which appear to dominate the literary ones rather than being dominated by them. Balibar argues this apparent effect is consistent with Camus's conscious intention to expose the inadequacy of the illusion of objectivity inherent in the chronological-logical discourse of the past perfect tense, a task Camus accomplishes by revealing the deformations that result from employing this tense in complex sentences. However, Camus's reversal of the primary relationship of domination is only superficially successful. Because both linguistic practices incorporate the past perfect tense, this particular tense serves unconsciously as a compromise formation, erasing the conflict between elementary and fictive French under the sign of a unified French grammar. Moreover, Balibar points out that Camus's style continues to reproduce the domination of elementary French by literary French because the effect he desires is achieved only on the condition that the intended deformations are perceived as such. Such subtleties are, of course, apparent only to those who participate in Camus's mastery of the French language.

In all of these cases the source of the literary effect resides in an unvarying linguistic contradiction that Balibar posits between elementary and literary French. The literary effect, which is the author's style, cannot exist without this contrast, yet by its very existence as a discourse written in the national language, it promptly "forgets" the contradiction from which it originates, masking it under the illusion of a unified language. In this sense, the literary text does not have an effect

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opposed to that of the dominant ideology. It acts rather as a privileged region of ideology within which, by concealing its contradictions as they manifest themselves at the level of language, the entire system of the dominant ideology is reproduced, preserved intact as an ongoing system in spite of the tensions with which it is racked. Furthermore, the motifs, themes, and situations that the literary text introduces into the fiction are, in Balibar's view, of little value in understanding the mechanisms of the literary effect of the texts she is analyzing. These elements are merely a facade, the *facade of the text* whose role it is to distract attention from the linguistic conflict, the real source of the literary effect and the sole precondition of the text. Such narrative elements (social mores in Flaubert, philosophical content in Péguy and Camus) are somehow "mobilized" by the fiction to "downplay" the presence of contradictory linguistic practices in the literary text; thus, what the reader assesses as significant in the fictional text—materials taken from scientific observation, philosophical reflection, history, or, more simply, information or topical events—is in fact a screen intended to hide the underlying class-biased production of the work of fiction.

The final implication of Balibar's work is that literature is inherently and irrevocably inscribed in the mechanisms of linguistic domination. Because of this, literary works cannot be subversive, for their very existence as literature is contingent on their exploitation/participation in the linguistic contradiction that is the source of all literary style. The texts of Flaubert, Péguy, and Camus are not usually considered buttresses of capitalistic relations of production, but as Balibar convincingly shows, this is exactly what they have become: Flaubert's "Un coeur simple" appears in manuals and vanguard journals of pedagogy as a lesson on how to write in a limpid style and how to perceive "narrative technique" or "point of view"; Péguy's undoing of the bourgeoisie in *Pierre* erases the ideology of middle-class education in order to valorize its predecessor—education controlled by the Catholic church. In *The Stranger*, Camus reproduces the writing lessons of North African children who had to learn "proper" verbal usage in order to achieve *l'effet du français* (entire passages of the novel replicate exercises of description found in secondary school manuals), hoping thereby to undermine the illusion of certainty they produce; yet, in effect, the novel merely readapts and promotes their continued use today. At the level of discursive practice, it would be wrong to categorize this process as simply co-optation or alienation, for it is more insidious and more powerful than these: it is the inexorable and cumulative logic of ideological

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domination and the expanded reproduction of the hegemony of the ruling class.

Machery and Etienne Balibar: Marxism Against Literature?

Renée Balibar and her associates have made an important contribution to our understanding of the relationships between culture and class domination. They have revealed the historical connection between literature and the public school system and between both of these and ideological hegemony. By focusing on the determinate institutional origins of literature, they have extended the materialist theory and analysis of literary production and corrected the excessively "intrinsic" methodology characteristic of Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production*. Nevertheless, their work is not without certain serious problems, problems that emerge most clearly in the theoretical introduction to *Les français fictifs* provided by Macherey and Etienne Balibar.

Macherey and Etienne Balibar wholeheartedly endorse the reduction of literature to a single linguistic mechanism, the compromise formation, itself exclusively determined by a single contradiction, the contradiction between literary and common language. For them, literature is a one-dimensional process, masking social contradictions by providing "imaginary solutions" to them: "a literary formation is a solution to ideological conflicts, insofar as they are formulated in a special language which is born different from the common language and within it (the common language itself being the product of an internal conflict), a formation which realizes and masks, in a series of compromises, the conflict which constitutes it by displacing the entire ensemble of ideological contradictions into a single one, or a single aspect—that of linguistic conflicts" (Macherey and Balibar 1981, 51). All other elements of textual production are of only secondary importance; it is the compromise formation that "invests the manifest ideological themes and organizes their effectivity according to constraints which, borrowing a concept of Freud's, one might call a 'secondary elaboration,' and thereby confers on them the order of a narrative facade—romanesque, allegorical, or abstract" (Macherey and Balibar 1974, 35). The contradiction between common and literary language originates in the ideological apparatuses of the schools; therefore, "literature is inseparable from an academic or schooling practice that defines the conditions for both the consumption and production of literature" (Macherey and

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Balibar 1981, 46). Literature is completely determined by the educational apparatus both in its origins and effects, Macherey and Balibar maintain, since it is the reception/consumption of literature that gives discourse whatever "literary" quality it possesses: "The text is literature and is recognized as such precisely when and to the extent that it provokes interpretations, criticisms, 'readings.' This is why it is quite possible for a text to actually cease to be literature or become such under new conditions" (Macherey and Balibar 1974, 44).

Macherey and Balibar have replaced Macherey's earlier view of literature as putting ideology to work for a more ominous vision of ideology putting literature to work. In making this move, Macherey and Balibar abandon a realist and materialist concept of literary production for a concept of literature indistinguishable from the historically variable aesthetic ideologies and apparatuses that define and control the reception of literature. In effect, the concept of literature is being defined by its reception and no longer by its production. Scientific criticism, the analysis of the production of literary representation-meaning, loses its *raison d'être* from the perspective of a "materialism" that passively accepts the judgments of aesthetic ideology in order to condemn them (and with them literature itself) as inherently oppressive. Macherey and Balibar deny literary production any relative autonomy whatsoever and completely reject any general concept of literature that would define "fiction" in terms of a "text-reality" relationship:

All general definitions of literature as fiction involve, as a first element, reference to a story which is an image or analogue of life. . . . To define literature as fiction means taking an old philosophical position . . . linked with establishing a theory of knowledges, and confronting the fictional discourse with a reality—even and especially when it gives reality an image different from the immediate perception of daily life and common experience. . . . The category of reflection, which is central to the Marxist problematic . . . is not concerned with [such] realism but with materialism, which is profoundly different. Marxism cannot define literature in general as realism, nor can it define literature in general as fiction. (Macherey and Balibar 1981, 51-52)

A strange text indeed that speaks of materialism while at the same time denying the possibility of realism! As stated, the argument leaves us with a conception of literature that has not only severed any direct link between the significations of the text and reality (reflectionism) but has also denied the possibility of any indirect link (ideology to a second power) as well. What remains? Apparently nothing at all, merely a

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philosophical feint that posits the existence of the literary but only as the shadow of its reception, the latter being, somehow, the substance of this very effect.

By a complex process, literature is the production of a certain reality, not indeed (one cannot overemphasize this) an autonomous but a material reality. . . . Literature is not, therefore, fiction but a production of fictions . . . fiction and realism are not concepts for the production of literature, but, on the contrary, notions produced by literature. This leads to remarkable consequences, for it means the model—the real referent "outside" the discourse which both fiction and realism presuppose—has no function here as a non-literary, nondiscursive anchor point previous to the text. . . . But its [reality] does function as an effect of discourse. It is literary discourse which induces and projects in its midst the presence of the "real" in the manner of an hallucination. (Macherey and Balibar 1981, 52-53)

A material effect, the reception of the text as real, emerges from nowhere—an immaculate reception, if you will—since there is no "fiction," only an "effect of fiction," which is really the process of reception; from an effect of reception we get the reception of an effect. Such a formulation is more absurd than "complex," and its absurdity stems directly from Macherey and Balibar's determined rejection of a concept of literature as a distinct form of representation-meaning whose ideological nature constitutes the principle of intelligibility of both its production and

reception.

At least part of the problem originates in an obsessive desire to reduce literature to domination. Macherey and Balibar subordinate literature to the educational apparatuses of the schools in order to define literary practice in terms of a single, direct relation of class domination: the domination of elementary language by literary language.

The literary effect is always an effect of domination: the subjection of individuals to the dominant ideology and the domination of the ideology of the dominant class. . . . If literature is able to serve, indeed must serve in the primary school as the means to fabricate and, at the same time, dominate, partition, and repress the "elementary" French of the dominated classes, it is on the condition that elementary French is itself present, in literature, as one of the terms of its constitutive contradiction, more or less deformed and masked, but also necessarily betrayed and exhibited in fictional reconstructions. And this is the case because the literary French realized in literary texts is both *distinct* from the "common language" (and opposed to it) and *internal* to it. In its constitution and its historical evolution within the educational system, literary French has been determined by the material requirements of a developing bourgeois society. This is why we are able to affirm that the place of literature in the education process is only the inverse of *the*

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place of the education process in literature . It is the structure and historical function of the school, the truly dominant ideological state apparatus, which constitutes the base of the literary effect. (Macherey and Balibar 1974, 46-48)

There is a powerful element of truth here. I do not dispute the fact that literature functions as an integral part of class-based domination in the schools, nor do I take exception to the fact that, given the class contradiction within schools between two linguistic practices, there is an overdetermined *tendency* for literary practice to reproduce this contradiction while masking it. I do object, however, to the reduction of literature to just this class bias and just this reproductive function; I object, in short, to the manner in which Macherey and Balibar posit this particular aspect of literary practice as if it exhausted the concept of literature. Such a view of literature simply anticipates the gloomy essentialism of Foucault's concept of knowledge/power. Let us remember from our critique of Foucault that ideological interpellation is never evenly developed; it creates contradiction as well as integration, and it constitutes social subjects whose practices at least potentially disrupt as well as reproduce existing social relations. Because they see ideology otherwise, as a one-dimensional relation of class domination (thereby accepting, as objectively real, the monolithic coherence that the dominant ideology seeks to project), Macherey and Etienne Balibar emphasize only those aspects of Renée Balibar's concept of the compromise formation that pertain to the reproduction of the existing relations of domination.

For Macherey and Balibar, the literary text is a unified, non-contradictory whole, which by means of the compromise formation always achieves its intended effect of subjugation. It achieves it, they maintain, through a mechanism of identification that persists despite any literary attempts to subvert or eliminate it. The key element of this oppressive process of identification is that necessary property of the compromise formation, its ability to provide, by the mere fact of its existence, imaginary solutions to real ideological problems: "literature 'begins' with an imaginary solution to implacable ideological contradictions, or rather with a representation of just such a solution. However, the solution that literature presents, by means of *figuration* (through images, allegories, symbols or arguments) is not an actually existing solution pre-existing its literary representation (to repeat, literature is produced precisely because such a real solution is impossible). The literary solution exists only in the sense of a 'mise en scène'—*the*

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representation as the solution " (Macherey and Balibar 1974, 53). The incongruous terms of a contradiction may be presented on the same stage, but only at the cost of a greater or lesser number of more or less complex displacements and substitutions. For there to be literature, the terms of the contradiction (and hence the contradictory ideological elements of the figuration) must be rendered commensurable at the level of discourse. "From the very outset, they must be enunciated in a special language, a language of 'compromise,' realizing *in advance* the fiction of their forthcoming reconciliation. Better: a language of 'compromise' makes the reconciliation appear 'natural' and ultimately necessary and inevitable" (Macherey and Balibar 1974, 33).

This imaginary solution provokes from the reader an effect of *identification* , which is at the same time a process of ideological interpellation acting on the reader:

[Literary French] is a case of expressions which always diverge in one or more salient details from those used in practice outside literary discourse, even when both are grammatically "correct." These are linguistic compromise formations, reconciling usages that are socially contradictory in practice, and hence mutually exclusive in tendency. In these formations there is an essential place, more or less disguised but *recognizable* , for the reproduction of "simple" language—ordinary language . . . which "speaks to everyone," reawakening or reviving memories . . . which produces the effect of 'naturalness' and 'reality.' . . . [L]iterature unceasingly produces *subjects* on display for everyone. . . . In its own way [it] endlessly transforms (concrete) individuals into subjects and endows them with quasi-real hallucinatory individuality. The realistic effect is the basis of this interpellation which makes characters or merely discourses "live" and which provokes readers to take a stand in literary conflicts as they would in real ones, albeit with much less risk. (Macherey and Balibar 1981, 53-54)

Such a view of the literary effect is perfectly correct, as far as it goes. What is objectionable in Macherey and Balibar's account is neither the process of identification they describe nor their assertion that this process is overdetermined by class struggle; what is objectionable is their assumption that the identification process has no internal contradictions and as a result is inherently and necessarily oppressive. For Macherey and Balibar, literary practice is not so much riven with class struggle as it is itself a consequence of class struggle and therefore a manifestation of class dominance. Literature is not dominated by the ruling class; it is an attribute of ruling-class

domination. Under such circumstances it is pointless to criticize class-biased aesthetic judgments

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regarding literature; rather, it is a matter of abolishing literary practice altogether.

This draconian solution follows from the series of reductions by which Macherey and Etienne Balibar, following Renée Balibar, reduce literature to style, the compromise formation, and style to a grammatical-syntactical process (inherently deformed by the class-based distinction between everyday and literary language in the schools) devoid of representational-semantic significance (content and meaning, which might contest class-biased criteria and mechanisms within literature itself). This approach places an impossible burden on literary style, which all by itself is supposedly capable of producing the identification effect. It is forced to shoulder this burden because Macherey and Balibar have summarily dismissed all semantic elements as epiphenomena: literary and common linguistic practices are distinguished by different usages of the same unified semantic base, and thus the contradiction between them is never a matter of content or meaning but of grammar and syntax. Semantic considerations (themes, ideas, characters) are reduced to a "facade" whose monolithic unity within the common language precludes, by definition, a variegated or complex (much less a contradictory or disruptive) reception.

This excessive privileging of syntax over semantics has pernicious consequences. If literary style is solely a function of grammar, then differences in content, for example, between the representation of women in Virginia Woolf and August Strindberg are either illusory or, at best, insignificant. Correlatively, if themes, ideas, and other literary elements are merely a facade, writers with similar styles, for example, Dos Passos and Céline, must be saying the same thing or at least producing identical interpellative effects. To eliminate the absurdity of such claims, we must eliminate the theoretical reductions on which they rest and admit that the contradictions within literary practice involve more than just formal characteristics: semantic narrative elements are more than just a facade through which literary style disguises its workings; they refer to ideology and through ideology to reality, and as such, literary production is a complex, contradictory social practice with emancipatory as well as subjugating dimensions.

Literature does interpellate subjects, and literary practice is determined, at least in part, by class-based ideological practices and apparatuses. However, literary practice does not achieve its identifications simply or solely by masking social contradictions, nor is class domination always or necessarily realized in literary texts. We can escape such

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simplistic generalizations only by recognizing literary practice for what it is, a second-order production of representation-meaning that is open-ended and contradictory precisely because it is based on the subject-form of ideology and the subjective-ideological experience of the world. Literary practice does indeed "dominate" ordinary ideology, but the result is not necessarily oppressive or obfuscatory since ordinary ideology is itself riven with class-based contradictions rooted in objective reality. Literary production is overdetermined by the class struggle, which assigns it a place and a function within the social formation, but literary representation-meaning nevertheless possesses a relative autonomy that cannot be reduced to the disciplinary delusions of knowledge/power. Despite the fact that it is articulated from within a class-based system of power, literary practice may, under certain circumstances, expose as well as legitimize class domination. Literature cannot transcend the subject-form, of course, but precisely because the subject-form is unevenly developed and contradictory, the mechanisms of identification peculiar to the literary text may promote opposition as well as conformity. Finally, literary style, like all discursive practice, is caught up in a network of semantic as well as syntactical relations. By virtue of its semantic elements, literary style has interpellative possibilities that overflow the class-biased grammatical practices that seek to contain them.¹⁶³ It is Renée Balibar's contribution to have shown how, in the conjuncture of nineteenth-century France, the interpellative character of literary discourse was caught up in a class-based structure of ideological domination in a fashion that her concepts of style and compromise formation illuminate. Her error, which is magnified in the essays of Macherey and Etienne Balibar, is to have demonized and homogenized these phenomena and to have made them the very "essence" of literary practice.

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Chapter Class Struggle, Political Power, and the Capitalist State

6

The preceding chapters have attempted to demonstrate the explanatory power of Althusser's concepts of structural causality and ideological interpellation. Chapters 1 and 2 show how structural causality and contradiction provide a new theoretical foundation for the concept of a mode of production and a modernist, non-essentialist explanation of economic determination (in the last instance) and the relative autonomy (specific effectivity) of economic as well as non-economic structures and relations. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 shift their focus to the domain of ideology and the constitution of social subjectivity through processes of psychological identification and subject-centered discursive practices, the bounded yet open-ended structure of practice within a given habitus, and finally the material power of institutions and rituals to (re)produce social subjects "who know their place." This chapter turns to the political instance. In particular, it elaborates the Structural Marxist concept of political power and explains the relative autonomy of the state in contemporary capitalism. We will also situate the "regional" domain of the political into the general framework of structural causality, economic determination, and ideological interpellation. Central to this discussion will be an elaboration of concepts of class and class struggle (terms we have as yet left unspecified) within industrial capitalist societies.

The present chapter is largely concerned with the work of Nicos

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Poulantzas, a Greek Communist who lived in political exile in Paris during the sixties and seventies until his suicide in 1979. Although he remained aloof from the politics of Althusser and his circle, Poulantzas was profoundly influenced by Althusser's theoretical work.¹⁰ In a series of important books written between 1968 and his untimely death—*Political Power and Social Classes* (1973), *Fascism and Dictatorship* (1974), *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1975), *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* (1976a), and *State, Power, Socialism* (1978)—Poulantzas produced the basic texts of Structural Marxist political theory. In the following pages, we will examine Poulantzas's important concept of social class as the matrix effect of a mode of production, his interpretation of the political instance as a "nodal point" where the contradictions of a given mode of production are "condensed" or concentrated, his concept of the "power bloc" and the relationship between class power and the state, and finally his brilliant analysis of the capitalist state and class struggle in relation to the internationalization of capitalism in the twentieth century. Poulantzas has had a decisive influence on Marxist political theory, and his wide-ranging work has provided a fruitful point of departure for many empirical and theoretical works. My discussion, however, is necessarily restricted to those aspects of Poulantzas's thought most relevant to our present concerns and to the works of others—Erik Olin Wright, Michel Aglietta, and Göran Therborn—only insofar as they supplement, criticize, and extend Poulantzas's problematic.

Wright: Modes of Determination Within Structural Causality

I begin by defining with greater precision the concept of structural causality, in particular, by specifying qualitative differences in the relations of determination that may exist among the different instances articulated as the complex whole of a social formation. In *Class, Crisis, and the State*, American sociologist Erik Olin Wright has suggested that structural causality is a global concept that may be broken down into six distinct forms of causality or *modes of determination* (Wright 1978, 15-25):

1. *Structural limitation* is a pattern of determination in which some social structure establishes limits within which some other structure or process can

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vary and which establishes probabilities for the specific structures or processes that are possible within those limits.

2. *Selection* constitutes those social mechanisms that concretely determine ranges of outcomes or, in the extreme case, specific outcomes, within a structurally limited range of possibilities. In a sense, selection is a second-order form of limitation: the setting of limits within limits. Wright specifies two complementary forms of selection, positive (mechanisms that determine specific outcomes among those that are possible) and negative (mechanisms that exclude certain possibilities).

3. *Reproduction/non-reproduction* refers to the facilitation/inhibition of change within one structure by a second. To say that one structure functions to reproduce another implies that the reproducing structure prevents the reproduced structure from changing in certain fundamental ways. This process differs from limitation, Wright maintains, since in the case of limitation, there is no presumption that the determined structure would necessarily change, whereas in the case of reproduction such changes would normally occur. In addition, reproduction/non-reproduction is a variable relation of determination since it implies that the determining structure may become non-reproductive vis-à-vis the determined structure.

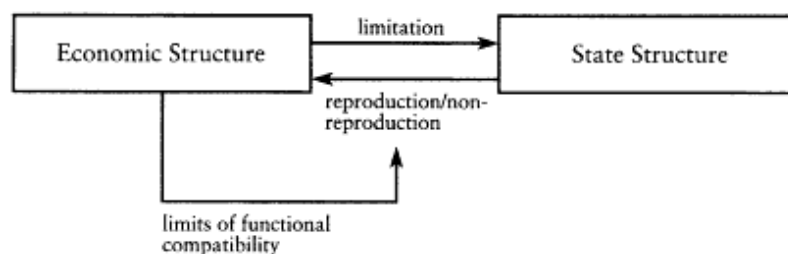
4. *Limits of functional compatibility* specify the mechanisms by which structural forms will be functional with respect to other structural forms and in what ways—in other words, which forms will be reproductive and which non-reproductive.

5. *Transformation* refers to a mode of determination by which class struggle (practice) directly affects the processes of structural limitation, selection, and reproduction/non-reproduction.

6. *Mediation* defines a mode of determination in which a given social process shapes the consequences of other social processes. In other words, it is a "contextualizing variable" that shapes the very nature of the relationship between two other variables.

Wright's modes of determination lend greater precision to general concepts such as overdetermination, structural causality, relative autonomy, determination in the last instance, and structure in dominance. Because his terms are capable of greater specification, Wright believes that they are more open to empirical verification as hypotheses and considerably enrich our ability to grasp theoretically a wide variety of concrete social formations. As we have repeatedly insisted, the method of Structural Marxism is not rationalist or idealist; concrete social relations cannot be deduced or read off from abstract concepts. Structural Marxism is neither reductive nor essentialist. It does not dogmatically eliminate the particular by means of the general; rather, it grasps the particular through the general and revises the general in light of the

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Figure 1.

The relationship between the economy and the state (Wright 1978, 20).

particular. It is realist and materialist in the sense that structural relationships are held to have an objective, real existence and that we can obtain objective knowledge of them.

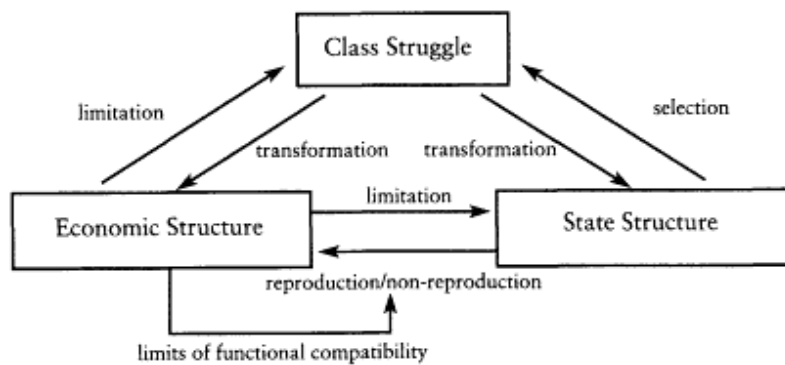
Structural relationships have material effectivities that are not only qualitatively distinct but also quantitatively unequal, stratified by their relative determinative significance or dominance. Unfortunately, as Wright explains them, the various modes of determination lack any hierarchical relationship to each other. Because they lack determinative weights themselves, or

more accurately because the economic, political, and ideological instances whose articulation they define are devoid of relations of dominance, the modes of determination described by Wright exist in a circular or feedback relationship whereby everything somehow causes everything else. For example, Wright posits the reciprocal relationship between the economy and the state as shown in figure 1.

While one may agree with Wright's description of the relationship between the economy and the state as reciprocal—the economy determining the state by a relation of limitation; the state determining the economy by a relation of reproduction/non-reproduction—it remains unclear which structure, and therefore which relation, is dominant. The problem is compounded as Wright proceeds to add "class struggle" to his model, as shown in figure 2. Now we are faced with the question of the causal priority between relations of transformation and limitation that obtain among "class struggle," the economy, and the state.

Wright attempts to escape the problem by recourse to the "dialectical character of patterns of determination," but this is less an explanation than an admission of confusion: "class struggle, which is itself structurally limited and selected by various social structures, simultaneously

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[Full Size]

Figure 2.

The relationships among the economy, the state, and class struggle (Wright 1978, 22).

reshapes those structures. The word 'simultaneously' is important in this formulation: social structures do not first structurally limit and select class struggle, after which class struggle transforms those structures. Class struggle is intrinsically a process of transformation of structures, and thus the very process which sets limits on class struggle is at the same time transformed by the struggles so limited" (Wright 1978, 21). The use of "simultaneously" in this passage is obfusatory and begs the question of structural dominance. The fact that different modes of determination are simultaneously at work is no argument for their equality. Wright also slips from structural to transitive causality and ends up focusing on an endless chain of cause and effect, unable to advance beyond a superficial description of patterns of events. Such a transitive "dialectic" is incapable of discerning the existence of generative structural mechanisms beneath patterns of events, mechanisms whose unequal effectivities determine precisely why certain patterns occur and not others. Finally, Wright's description of class struggle as a process that sets limits "at the same time [that it is] transformed by the struggles so limited" blurs the significant distinction between the irreversible, or intransitive, articulation of structural forces constituting

social subjects (and every possible practice) with the interactive, open-ended, or transitive, practices of individuals (invested with and constrained by social powers).

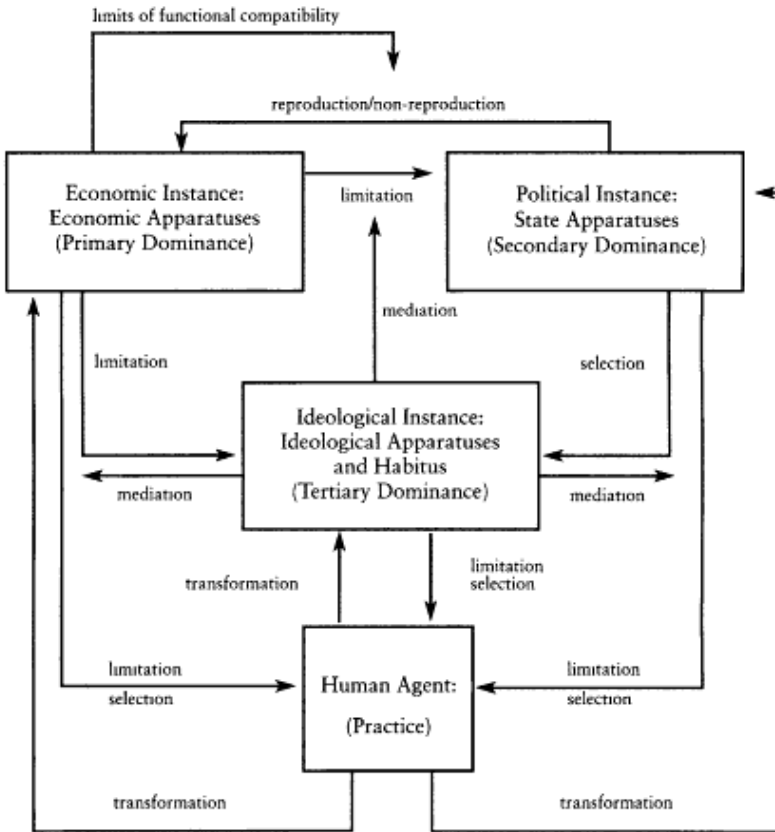
To eliminate the circular, transitive causality implied by Wright's model and transcend the classic hermeneutic fallacy of theoretical hu-

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manism (and political voluntarism) that underlies his conception of "class struggle," it is necessary to insist on the hierarchical stratification, in descending order, of the economic, political, and ideological instances. I will not repeat arguments already made regarding the primacy of the economic instance and the tertiary effectivity of the ideological field of institutional apparatuses, social subjects, and the habitus, nor will I anticipate the discussion of the intermediate effectivity of the political instance that is the subject of the present chapter. Here I wish only to clarify the term *class struggle*, which in its present form obscures rather than illuminates the relationship between structural determinations and the practice of social subjects. In Wright's usage the concept of class struggle is an empty generalization because he excludes the ideological instance and thus the very processes by which social subjects are constituted as class subjects. Wright evades, in effect, the central question of what class struggle actually is in order to assert not only its existence but also its primacy, that is, its transformative effect on political and economic structures.

In posing the question of class struggle, it is necessary to represent the field of practice not, as Wright does, as self-evidently inscribed with economic determinations and political values yet at the same time independent and coequal with respect to political and economic structures, but rather, following Althusser and Poulantzas, as the "matrix effect" of the articulation of economic, political, and ideological structures on the capacity of social subjects to act. That the field of practice is, in the last instance, a field of *class* practices and *class* struggle follows from the primacy of economic relations within the articulation of the instances whose matrix effect the field of practice is. In other words, practices are class practices insofar as they are activities of social subjects interpellated by the hierarchical articulation of the economic, political, and ideological instances, as members of what Poulantzas defines as social (as opposed to simply economic) classes. Similarly, the field of practice, what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "social space," is a *class* field insofar as the structure of positions and powers that constitutes it is the matrix effect of this same articulation. The concept of social class will be discussed at greater length in a moment. I introduce it now to explain why, in figure 3, the concept of the ideological instance, composed of ideological apparatuses and the habitus, is used in place of the term class struggle employed by Wright. This change requires yet another since it is now necessary to add the human agent to the model in

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[Full Size]

Figure 3.
Modes of determination in contemporary capitalism.

order to distinguish the ideological instance from individual human beings interpellated as social class subjects.

Modes of Determination in Contemporary Capitalism

Figure 3 schematically depicts the articulation of instances characteristic of contemporary capitalism. As in every social formation, the economic function is primary and determinant in the last instance; however, in capitalist modes of production (unlike lineage and feudal modes) the relations and forces of production are formally combined within a distinct complex of economic institutions comprising the eco-

conomic instance. Because the function of economic ownership resides in the economic instance, the latter is the dominant instance of a capitalist mode of production. In figure 3, the dominance of the economic instance is qualitatively expressed as a relation of limitation wherein the economic instance limits the range of possible variations of the political and ideological instances, although it does not directly transform them. Furthermore, because it exercises the ownership function—that is, it controls access to the means of production and the distribution of

the social product—the economic instance defines the limits of functional compatibility of the modes of determination exercised by the state on itself—the extent to which the economy can be reproduced or not reproduced (facilitated or inhibited) by the state. Of course, the relations of limitation and the limits of functional compatibility exercised by the economy over the state are not coordinated directly. The absence of direct coordination (reflecting the relative autonomy and uneven development of the social formation) makes it possible, even inevitable, that contradictions between the state and the economy—for example, political practices that are non-reproductive with respect to the economy—will emerge. The economy also exercises an ideological function. By the mode of selection the economic instance determines social subjectivity; it interpellates individuals with respect to their "place" in the forces and relations of production, while the nature and number of available places sets an objective limitation on the practice of interpellated social subjects.

The relative autonomy of the capitalist state is manifested in the formal separation of the political function from the economic instance and from the direct control of the dominant economic class. Although operating within limits imposed by the dominance of the economy (limits that specifically include separate political and economic instances), the capitalist state must have considerable powers not only to reproduce the basic conditions of capitalist accumulation as in the "nightwatchman" state of classical liberalism but also, with the transition to monopoly capitalism, to "regulate" and actively intervene in the economy. Subordinate to the economic instance, the political instance is dominant with respect to the ideological instance. The capitalist state functions as the organizer of the hegemony of the dominant class and class fractions, and by means of its legal code and administrative apparatuses, it limits the practice of human agents to a range of activities compatible with that hegemony. The state determines ideological apparatuses insofar as it declares them legal or illegal, supervises or regulates their

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operation, and gives or withholds support (financial and otherwise). By this more specific relation of selection exercised by the state on the various ideological apparatuses, the state indirectly determines the interpellation of social subjects and thus the practice of human agents.

The state directly determines the practice of human agents through the interpellative effects of its own apparatuses, particularly the public school system, where individuals become "good citizens" and patriotic members of the "nation." However, like the economy, the political instance has a polarizing as well as an integrative influence on social subjectivity. While the economy polarizes agents around relations of exploitation and cooperation (ownership of means of production, control over organizational positions and skills, and so forth), politics polarizes social subjects around relations of representation and domination. These bipolar and contradictory interpellations may be specified, following Poulantzas, as "the people" and "the power bloc." Struggles for political power take place in terms of "rights" and "justice" and thus assume a "popular-democratic" rather than an economic-class character.

The ideological instance and the habitus limit the human agent by their objective existence as the social space within which all practice must occur, and select the human agent as a social subject with a unique, often contradictory combination of roles, identities, and capacities. The relations of determination exercised by the economy, the state, and the ideological apparatuses on the human agent are no more directly coordinated with the relations of transformation emanating from the latter than was the case with the relations between the economy and the

state. This condition is precisely what makes transformation possible. The human agent—the interpellated effect of the contradictory articulation of instances—is the social subject of all practice, whether antagonistic or non-antagonistic with respect to the dominant mode of production. Thus, the mode of determination of the human agent is always and exclusively transformation.

Economic and political structures define positions or places within social space, and they interpellate human agents on the basis of the positions and places they occupy. However, economic and political relations do not completely define the social space, nor do they exclusively define concrete human individuals who are the agents of all political and economic practice. This tension means, on the one hand, that the effectivity of the ideological instance with respect to the individual agent cannot be reduced to economic or political forms. Although subordinate to both the economic and political instances, the ideological

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instance not only mediates relations among itself, the economy, and the state—it is only through the values, meanings, and strategies formed within the habitus that the economy and the state can function at all—but it also interpellates social subjects who are more than simply citizens or workers. On the other hand, the ideological field is limited and selected by the dominance of economic and political structures. As a result, the capacity of a social subject to act within the fields of economic, political, or ideological relations is always already structured insofar as its condition of existence is the intransitive articulation of the instances and their distinct and unequal effectivities. Given the primacy of the economic instance within the social formation, the practice of social subjects is always already a class-structured practice.

To prevent a serious misunderstanding, I should point out that each of the instances depicted in figure 3 (and thus their various modes of determination) is assigned its place and function by the historical matrix of the structure as a whole. In other words, the intransitive effectivity of the articulation of the instances, what Althusser calls the "matrix effect of a mode of production," determines the transitive effectivities, the distinct and unequal modes of determination of the economic, political, and ideological structures. Similarly, the articulation of the instances, as internalized by social subjects and manifested as social space (the field of practice), defines all possible practices and gives to them a determinate class-based character. It is Poulantzas's original achievement to have identified this indirect, intransitive, and overdetermined class relationship and to have given it a name: social class. Poulantzas has also clarified an important distinction between economic and social class relations about which we must be absolutely clear. *Economic* class relations, defined by the forces and relations of production, exert direct or transitive determinations on the political and ideological instances (as depicted by the arrows in figure 3); *social* class relations, defined by the historical matrix, exert an indirect or intransitive effectivity that is *always already there* with respect to economic (as well as political and ideological) relations as their *assigned place and function* within the complex whole (depicted in figure 3 as the relative dominance of the instances and the qualitative character of their modes of determination). Thus economic class relations are always already social class relations, but it is as economic (social) class relations that they exert their dominance over political and ideological (social class) relations in capitalist modes of production.

Similarly, by means of the matrix effect of the articulation of in-

stances, the capitalist state is always already a class state insofar as it has been assigned a place and a function by an articulation dominated by the capitalist mode of production. It acts as a class state because its apparatuses are limited by the primacy of the economy. It remains a class state to the extent that social class relationships, actualized within the social space and the habitus by social class subjects, remain polarized around the objective economic class interests of the dominant class(es) and not the exploited class(es)—the extent, in other words, to which the ideological discourse of the ruling class is hegemonic within the field of ideological interpellations, thereby producing agents whose practice reproduces the existing relations of production and the existing structure of the state. The state's ability to fulfill its structural function of reproducing the "rule" of the ruling classes depends on its ability to minimize the contradictions between domination and execution within the state itself and mask their interpellative effects, that is, the distinction between the power bloc and the people. Although the capitalist state is not the source of the power it wields (power has its ultimate source in the forces and relations of production), it has acquired, by means of its separation from the economy and the resulting ideological consequences of this separation, the exclusive right to power. The power of the state is particularly difficult to undermine not simply because it has acquired its own coercive apparatuses and monopolized the means of violence but also because its relative autonomy effectively conceals the economic taproot of political power behind a mask of popular-democratic forms.

The modes of determination depicted in figure 3 are provisional. While the economic, political, and ideological instances—combined within a single institutional framework (a lineage) or taking separate institutional forms (a state, an enterprise)—and their hierarchy are constant social facts, their modalities are presented here as hypotheses, not axioms. I do not seek to limit dogmatically the modes of determination to just the six forms described by Wright, nor to imply that these forms might not be revised considerably in light of substantive variations of the economic, political, and ideological instances in different modes of production and social formations. Here I have sought only to demonstrate how political practice and the capitalist state might be explained in terms of economic determination without being reduced thereby to reflections of the economy.

Poulantzas: The Specificity of the Political Instance

In *Political Power and Social Classes*, completed on the eve of the events of May 1968, Poulantzas sets out to develop a "regional theory" of the political instance in capitalist social formations. In particular, he seeks to resolve one of the most perplexing theoretical problems of Marxist social theory: how the capitalist state can be both a class state yet at the same time formally distinct from the economy and the direct control of the capitalist class—in other words, how class power, the product of a vast network of social struggles that are in the last instance economically determined, is concentrated in and deployed by the political apparatuses of a

capitalist state that is typically popular-democratic. The key to Poulantzas's solution to this important and difficult problem, indeed, the central insight on which his entire body of work is built, is a creative application of Althusser's concepts of structural causality, overdetermination, dominance, and economic determination in the last instance, reformulated by Poulantzas as the concept of the "matrix effect" of a mode of production, "the articulation of social instances on the basis of a dominant mode of production" (Poulantzas 1973, 15).

By the term *mode of production*, Poulantzas refers essentially to what I have previously defined as an extended mode of production, that is, not only the forces and relations of production proper (what I have called a restricted concept of a mode of production) but also those political and ideological relations indirectly determined by the economic instance and essential for the reproduction of the latter. "By mode of production," Poulantzas explains, "we shall designate not what is generally marked out as the economic (i.e., relations of production in the strict sense), but a specific combination of various structures and practices which, in combination, appear as so many instances or levels, i.e., as so many regional structures of this mode. . . . The type of unity which characterizes a mode of production is that of a *complex whole* dominated, in the last instance, by the economic. The term *determination* will be reserved for this dominance in the last instance" (Poulantzas 1973, 13-14).

Although he does not himself use the term *extended mode of production*, Poulantzas clearly distinguishes the structure of the forces and relations of production and their specific effectivity (the transitive mode of determination exercised by the economy on the political and ideo-

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logical instances) from the combined or overdetermined effectivity of the articulation of the economic, political, and ideological instances peculiar to the capitalist mode of production (the matrix effect that constitutes the intransitive determination by the structured whole on the specific effectivity of each instance). Moreover, both the forces and relations of production proper to the economic instance and their matrix effect on the social whole are necessary for an adequate concept of a mode of production. "What distinguishes one mode of production from another and consequently specifies a mode of production is the particular form of articulation maintained by its levels: this articulation is henceforth referred to by the term *matrix* of a mode of production. So to give a strict definition of a mode of production is to lay bare the particular way in which determination in the last instance by the economic is reflected inside that mode of production: this reflection delimits the index of dominance and overdetermination of this mode" (Poulantzas 1973, 15).

Thus when Poulantzas refers to the concept of the political as a "regional instance" that is "specifically political," he is speaking not only of the relative autonomy of the political, that is, what distinguishes political practices and apparatuses from those that are economic or ideological, but also, and with even greater emphasis, of the "*place and function* [of the political] in the particular combination which specifies [the] mode of production" (Poulantzas 1973, 17). Because the matrix effect of a mode of production "governs the constitution of its regional instances" and "defines the *extension* and the *limits*" of each regional instance (Poulantzas 1973, 17), Poulantzas's well-known emphasis on the "relative autonomy" of the state in capitalist social formations—the formal separation of political from economic apparatuses characteristic of capitalism—must be understood not in terms of the independence of the state from the capitalist mode of production but rather as the particular place and function assigned to the state by the

structure of a capitalist mode of production.²³

The specificity of the political instance is defined by Poulantzas in terms of its "global function" of maintaining (or transforming) the unity of a social formation. "The state has the particular function of constituting the factor of cohesion between the levels of a social formation." The state is "a factor of 'order' or 'organizational principle' of a formation," Poulantzas maintains, "in the sense of the cohesion of the ensemble of the levels of a complex unity, and as the regulating factor of its global equilibrium as a system" (Poulantzas 1973, 44-45). The

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state is able to exercise this function (which I have further broken down into the modes of determination of reproduction/non-reproduction, selection, and limitation) by virtue of the fact that the political instance is the central "nodal point" where power is "condensed," that is, formally concentrated and legitimized, and the site from which power is deployed throughout the entire social formation.

While the state is the site where power is formally concentrated, it is not the source of the power that flows through it. Poulantzas defines power not in terms of a function located in a particular institutional apparatus but rather as a relation of forces, a structured force field that is the product of social struggles overdetermined, via the matrix effect, by economic class relations' and practices. All social struggles, and thus all power relationships, have a class character that is both explicit and implicit, directly and indirectly determined by the mode of production. The condensation of power in the state apparatuses in no way alters the class nature of power and its economic taproot. Even though the state cannot be said to have any power of its own, Poulantzas insists that political power is "primordial" insofar as the institutionalized power of the state "constitutes the field" where the unity of the formation is either maintained or transformed.

The fact that power originates in social struggles overdetermined by economic class relations and practices means that the condensation of power in the political apparatuses of the state cannot be a neutral process. Whatever the degree of formal separation between political and economic apparatuses, in class societies state power is always class power. In a given mode of production the state may exercise apparently representative or technical economic, administrative, judicial, and legislative functions, but these "local" functions are always overdetermined by the matrix effect and by the "global" function of the political instance, which organizes and maintains the unity of the social formation. Because cohesion always reflects the political interests of the dominant class, this global political function marks the class character of the state in all class societies, including those dominated by capitalist modes of production:

the state's economic or ideological functions correspond to the political interests of the dominant class and constitute political functions, not simply in those cases where there is a direct and obvious relation between (a) the organization of labor and education and (b) the political domination of a class, but also where the object of these functions is the maintenance of the unity of a formation, inside which this class is the politically dominant class.

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It is to the extent that the prime object of these functions is the maintenance of this unity that they correspond to the political interests of the dominant class. (Poulantzas 1973, 54)

That they constitute the point where power is condensed and deployed, as well as the site where the cohesion of social formation is maintained or transformed, is another way Poulantzas expresses the fact that the political apparatuses of the state reflect the articulation of a social formation as "*the nodal point where the contradictions of the various levels of a formation are*

condensed in the complex relations governed by overdetermination and by their dislocation and uneven development" (Poulantzas 1973, 41). Because the state constitutes the "strategic point where the various contradictions fuse," political practice, whose object is to maintain or transform the unity of a formation, must have the political structures of the state as its point of impact and specific strategic objective: "the specificity of political practice depends on its having state power as its objective" (Poulantzas 1973, 43). Given the place and function of the political instance, political practice must be considered "the motive force of history."

[The political instance is] the place in which we find reflected the index of dominance and overdetermination which characterizes a formation or one of its stages or phases. The state is also the place in which we can *decipher* the unity and articulation of a formation's structures. . . . It is from this relation between the state as the cohesive factor of a formation's unity and the state as the place in which the various contradictions of the instances are condensed that we can decipher the problem of the relation between politics and history. This relation designates the structure of the political both as the *specific level* of a formation and as the *place in which the transformations occur*: it designates the political struggle as the "motive power of history" having as its objective the state, the place in which the contradictions of instances (dislocated in their own time sequences) are condensed. (Poulantzas 1973, 45)

Social Class, Social Relations, and Class Struggle

The concept of the matrix effect of a mode of production, when applied to the concept of class struggle, yields a promising solution to yet another long-standing problem of Marxist social theory, the relation between class determination and class practice. In working out his concept of class struggle, Poulantzas seeks an alternative to subjectivist and objectivist concepts of class. In opposition to subjectivist views, which

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define class by the consciousness of the agents as members of a class, Poulantzas conceptualizes class as an objective field of structural relations or "class determinations," not as a subjective field of consciously chosen "class positions." While class determinations are held to "fix the horizon of the class struggle," Poulantzas rejects the notion of a rigid and precise correspondence between objective class interests and subjective class positions. Therefore, in opposition to objectivist views that equate class with places in the forces and relations of production in order to reduce consciousness to a reflection of class interests, Poulantzas insists on a concept of class that acknowledges and explains discrepancies between objective economic determinations and conjunctural political and ideological positions.

Poulantzas recognizes a hierarchy of dominance within the capitalist mode of production—the primacy of the economy and the secondary and tertiary effectivities of the political and ideological instances. However, he insists that classes must be defined in terms of the social formation as a complex whole, the "ensemble of structures," and not in terms of the economy alone: *social classes* are not merely economic classes.

Marx's analysis of social classes never refers simply to economic structures . . . but always to the ensemble of structures . . . and to the relations which are maintained there by the different levels. Let us anticipate and say that everything happens as if social classes were the result of an ensemble of structures and of their relations, firstly at the economic level, secondly at the political level and thirdly at the ideological level. A social class can be identified either at the economic level, at the political level, or at the ideological level, and can thus be located with regard to a particular instance. Yet to define a class as such and to grasp it in its concept, we must refer to the ensemble of levels of which it is the effect. (Poulantzas 1973, 64)

By virtue of the matrix effect, economic class relations are never purely economic, and political and ideological relations are always invested with a social class character. It is helpful to remember that the adjective "social" is always used by Poulantzas to distinguish the in-transitive effectivity of the matrix effect of a mode of production from the transitive effectivity exercised by any particular instance on another. The matrix effect of the mode of production in the field of social relations is referred to by Poulantzas as the social division of labor and is organized by relations of social class. According to Poulantzas, "social classes do not present themselves as the effect of one particular structural level on another structural level: i.e., as the effect of the economic

structure on the political or ideological structures; hence they do not manifest themselves inside the structure, but entirely as the global effect of the structures in the field of social relations which, in class societies, themselves involve the distribution of agents/supports to social classes" (Poulantzas 1973, 64).

Like the economic, political, and ideological instances, the interpellated social subject is also a product of the matrix effect in the sense that individual agents identify with and internalize the complex whole as a structured system of roles and relations. Poulantzas refers to this global system of relations as *social relations* (as opposed to economic, political, or ideological structures and relations), and he insists that it cannot be represented within the social formation because it is always already there, manifested or actualized as the structure of social space, the habitus, and the consciousness of social subjects.

Social class is a concept which shows the effects of the ensemble of structures, of the matrix of a mode of production or of a social formation on the agents which constitute its supports: this concept reveals the effects of the global structure in the field of social relations. In this sense, if [social] class is indeed a concept, it does not designate a reality which can be placed in the structures: it designates the effect of an ensemble of given structures, an ensemble which determines social relations as class relations. . . . There is no theoretical homogeneity between the concept of class, denoting social relations, and those concepts denoting structures. (Poulantzas 1973, 67-68)

To put the same thing a bit differently, Poulantzas is saying that a double order of class determination is at work: a global, historical, indirect, and intransitive determination and a regional, contemporary, direct, and transitive determination. The intransitive effectivity of a capitalist social formation, that is, social class relations or the "social division of labor," has indirectly interpellated agents as social subjects of capitalism even as the transitive effectivities of economic, political, or ideological structures of the social formation interpellate them as, say, proletarians, citizens of Texas, and wives and mothers. The regional instances of capitalism define places and relations that are objectively real and whose material effectivity is selective with respect to the interpellation of social subjects and limiting with respect to their practice. However, the regional political, ideological, and economic structures always already bear the mark of the complex whole that has assigned them a place and a function; they are thus always already capitalist social relations and never only just political, ideological, and economic relations.

We clearly distinguish [regional] *structures* and *social relations* . . . the latter designating the distribution of supports [interpellated subjects] to social classes. These two fields are covered respectively, at the economic level, by the concept of relations of production . . . and by that of social relations of production. . . . [W]e can also speak in all strictness of political "social" relations and of ideological "social" relations. These social relations, as class relations, isolated here with respect to the instances of the political and the ideological, manifest themselves as the effect of the political and ideological structures on social relations. (Poulantzas 1973, 65-66)

For Poulantzas, class struggle is the global effect, in the field of social relations, of the contradictions and uneven development of the social formation as a whole. As the constitution of social classes is related not to the effectivity of the economic instance alone but to the matrix effect of the ensemble of the instances, within which economic determinations are primary, so the field of social relations, structured by the ensemble, assigns a social class function and power to each and every practice. While economic class relations exercise direct determinations on political and ideological relations, Poulantzas calls our attention to the even more pervasive influence of the indirect determination of the matrix effect and social class. Directly, but even more significantly, indirectly, the social space is a field of class struggle: "the organization of instances in economic, political and ideological levels is reflected, in social relations, in economic, political and ideological class practices and in 'struggle' between the practices of the

various classes. Since social relations are a field-cum-effect structured from the system of structures, the levels of class struggle are related in the same kind of way as the instances of the matrix" (Poulantzas 1973, 69).

Social classes are necessarily antagonistic. Social space, reflecting the articulation of economic, political, and ideological structures and relations, constitutes a unity, the field of class struggle, but a unity that is dislocated by relations of dominance and subordination determined, in the last instance, by economic structures and relations.

Social relations consist of class practices in which social classes are placed in *oppositions*: social classes can be conceived only as class practices, these practices existing in oppositions *which in their unity, constitute the field of the class struggle* Class practices can be analyzed only as conflicting practices in the field of class struggle, composed of relations of opposition, i.e., of relations of contradiction in the simplest sense of the term. At every level the relation of conflict of the practices of different classes, "struggle" between classes, the very existence of classes themselves, are the effect of the relations of the structures, the form assumed by the contradictions of the structures in social relations. They define *at every level* fundamental connec-

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tions of *domination and subordination* of classes (class practices) which exist as particular contradictions. (Poulantzas 1973, 86)

Pertinent Effects, Class Power, and the Predominance of Politics

By means of his concepts of social class and social relations, Poulantzas has demonstrated how class struggle exists in political and ideological relations typically viewed as unrelated to class conflict or at best related to it by historical accident (elective affinity). He has also reformulated the traditional Marxist thesis of primacy of class relations without slipping into reflectionism or essentialism. However, the fact that economic relations are always already social class relations does not vitiate the fact that it is as economic class relations that they exert their modes of determination within the social formation. It is in this sense that Poulantzas does acknowledge a kind of reflection or "presence" of the economic within the other instances. The presence of economic class interests may be discerned in what Poulantzas calls the *pertinent effects* of economic relations on political and ideological structures and relations.

The "bearers" of pertinent effects are non-class relations and functions—for example, state bureaucracy, academia, media journalism—which Poulantzas defines as *social categories*. The concepts of social categories and pertinent effects make it possible to distinguish, within political or ideological fields, between relations and functions that are generically political or ideological and those that "reflect" the presence of economic class interests within the political or ideological instances. Pertinent effects reflect the primacy of economic modes of determination and their externality, the fact that the political or ideological structure in question would not in and of itself produce these effects. "The reflection of the place in the process of production on the other levels constitutes a *new element* which cannot be inserted in the typical framework which these levels would present without this element. This element thus transforms the limits of the levels of structures or of class struggle at which it is reflected by 'pertinent effects,' and it cannot be inserted in a simple variation of these limits" (Poulantzas 1973, 79).

Poulantzas also distinguishes between economic classes and *class fractions*. Whereas economic classes are distinguished by the predominant relation of exploiter-exploited, class fractions are defined as "sub-strata" of classes distinguishable by a combination of secondary economic criteria (for example, the size or nature of enterprises) and the

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different political and ideological effects produced by such combinations. In other words, secondary economic distinctions produce class fractions precisely insofar as they generate pertinent effects. The capacity of agents acting as members of class fractions to produce and reproduce pertinent effects constitutes class relations of power and class fractions as "social forces."

Since all social relations are overdetermined by the matrix effect of the dominant mode of production, all power is indirectly class power. The classic Weberian definition of power is thus redefined by Poulantzas as "the capacity of a social class to realize its specific objective interests" (Poulantzas 1973, 104). Economic class relations are relations of power, Poulantzas argues, not in the sense that one is the foundation of the other but in the sense that they are constituted in a "homogeneous field," the field of social relations or simply the class struggle. Moreover, as the specific effectivity of each instance is organized by the matrix effect of the mode of production that gives it a place and a function, so power is, in the last instance, an effect of the intransitive complex whole of the social formation and not of the transitive effectivity of any particular instance intervening in the field of another.

Class relations are no more the foundation of power relations than power relations are the foundation of class relations. Just as the concept of class points to the effects of the ensemble of the levels of the structure on the supports, so the concept of power specifies the effects of the ensemble of these levels on the relations between social classes in struggle. *It points to the effects of the structure on the relations of conflict between the practices of the various classes in "struggle."* In other words, power is not located in the levels of structures, but is an effect of the ensemble of these levels, while at the same time characterizing each of the levels of the class struggle. (Poulantzas 1973, 99-100)

The class power deployed by social subjects engaged in economic, political, or ideological practice is always already structured by the intransitive matrix effect of the mode of production such that the concept of power cannot be applied to any one level of the structure. Even in the case of state power, Poulantzas insists that the indirect, social class structure of power precedes and determines its direct deployment. "When we speak for example of state power, we cannot mean by it the mode of the state's articulation and intervention at the other levels of the structure; we can only mean the power of a determinate class to whose interest (rather than those of other social classes) the state corresponds" (Poulantzas 1973, 100).

If the foundation of power is intransitive, power is nevertheless

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"globally distributed" throughout the social formation such that its deployment is always transitive. Each application of power directly or indirectly reflects the opposition of class interests and, therefore, an intervention in the field of class struggle. Because power always designates the capacity of a social class or class fraction to realize its objective interests, class power is always relational or differential: it can be defined only with respect to other relations of force constituting the class struggle. "The degree of effective power of a class depends directly upon the degree of power of other classes, in the framework of the determination of class practices in the limits set by the practices of the other classes. Strictly speaking, power is identical with these limits to the second degree" (Poulantzas 1973, 108).

Poulantzas provides a compelling alternative to both "voluntarist" and "reflectionist" views of political practice. Given that the state is the place where class struggle is "concentrated and reflected," Poulantzas argues that political struggles have a predominant place and function within the field of social relations. However, the *predominance of the political* is itself determined by the primacy of the economic as refracted through the matrix effect.

To the extent that the political superstructure is the overdetermining level of the levels of the structure by concentrating their contradictions and by reflecting their relation, the political class struggle is the overdetermining level of the field of class struggles (i.e., social relations), concentrating their contradictions and reflecting the relations of the other levels of class struggle. This is so to the extent that the political superstructure of the state has the function of being the cohesive factor in a formation, and to the extent that the objective of political class struggle is the state. (Poulantzas 1973, 76-77)

At this point it is perhaps useful to summarize Poulantzas's brilliant but admittedly difficult

argument. Poulantzas, following Althusser, argues for economic determination "in the last instance," the primacy of the economic function and economic relations that is always already there in the matrix effect of the complex whole. The primacy of economic modes of determination within the ensemble is no more a function of the economy alone than the condensation of power in the political apparatuses of the state is a function of politics alone. With respect to political power, Poulantzas argues not for the *primacy* but the *predominance* of politics. Power is not so much monopolized by the state as assigned to it by the matrix effect of the mode of production. Poulantzas insists not only that all power is relational but also that the field of

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power, the social space, is always already a field of social class struggle. Given the central place and function of the political instance with respect to the concentration and deployment of power, struggles for political power are not only social class struggles: they are the predominant form of social class struggle. At the same time, because the predominance of political practice within the field of social class struggles is determined by the matrix effect, conventional political practice tends to reproduce existing class relations, not bring them into question. Because the state is not the source of the power it deploys, Poulantzas's insistence on the predominance of political practice cannot be equated with political voluntarism. If the contradictions between the political and the economic instance become critical, it can only be as a result, in the last instance, of developments within the economy. No less than its conventional counterpart, revolutionary politics is the art of the possible, and even revolutionary practice, which must have state power as its objective, can never succeed by means of state power alone.

The Relative Autonomy of the Capitalist Class State

Poulantzas also seeks to explain how the capitalist state directly serves the interests of the capitalist class while being formally separated from the economy and from the direct control of the capitalists. Poulantzas's concept of the capitalist state is premised on its *relative autonomy* with respect to the economy and the fact that "it is this autonomy which, as a constant invariant, regulates the variations of intervention and non-intervention of the political in the economic, and of the economic in the political" (Poulantzas 1973, 143). The general concept of a class state, Poulantzas reminds us, does not require that the state be the direct instrument of the dominant class but only that it legitimize and reproduce the conditions and relations of domination and exploitation by which the ruling class is constituted. In capitalist social formations these conditions are defined by the existence of surplus value and the irresistible impetus to accumulate it that occurs when private property exists and labor power is completely commodified. Furthermore, in capitalist social formations, the members of the dominant class are in economic competition with each other, and their competing interests render them incapable of governing directly or with unanimity. Their only common

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interests, Poulantzas concludes, are that the exploited class be politically fragmented and that the existence of propertyless laborers "free" to sell their labor power be perpetuated.

Poulantzas argues that the peculiar characteristics of the capitalist mode of production do not require a state that directly represents the economic interests of the ruling classes; rather, they require a state that represents their political interest. However democratic a capitalist state may appear to be, Poulantzas maintains that it always functions as "the dominant class's political power center, the organizing agent of their political struggles" (Poulantzas 1973, 190). The state accomplishes this function by redefining agents of production, distributed in classes, as political subjects, distributed as individuals. The result is an effect of "individual isolation" that is then projected back, via the legal system, from the political realm into the economy to mask the existence of class relationships. The capitalist state is both the source and guarantor of the "rights" of isolated political subjects and thus of its own function of representing the unity of these isolated relations, that is, the body politic of "the people" and "the nation." In other words, "the state represents the unity of an isolation which because of the role played by the ideological, is largely its own effect. This double function of isolating [individuals] and representing [their] unity is reflected in the internal contradictions in the structure of the state" (Poulantzas 1973, 134).

By means of its *isolation effect* on class struggles, the capitalist state provides the dominant classes with a unique mechanism, the national-popular state, capable of constituting their political interests as general interests and organizing their hegemonic power over the masses:

By its effect of isolation on the socio-economic relations, this state presents itself as the strictly political public unity of the particular, private, economic antagonisms of the ensemble of society. The institutionalized power of the capitalist state presents *its own unity* in its relations to socio-economic relations (the economic class struggle) in so far as it represents the unity of the people/nation, composed of agents set up, as subjects, as individual/political persons, i.e., in so far as it represents the political unity of an economic isolation which is its own effect. On the level of the relations of the state to the political class struggle, this leads to a result which seems paradoxical but which in fact constitutes the "secret" of the national-popular class state: the institutionalized power of the capitalist class state presents its own class *unity*, precisely in so far as it can pose as a national-popular state, i.e., as a state which does not represent the power of one or several determinate classes, but which represents the power of the political unity of private agents. (Poulantzas 1973, 276)

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While it is clear enough how the capitalist state, by means of its national-popular form, functions to disorganize the dominated classes by denying their existence as classes and relating itself to them as their representative, it is less clear, at least to many of Poulantzas's commentators, how the capitalist state necessarily acts in the political interests of the dominant class.³ Such critics contend that the very concept of the relative autonomy of the state precludes a necessary or "reflectionist" relationship between the state and the dominant class. Poulantzas has responded that his critics have misunderstood him by mistakenly emphasizing the notion of the relative autonomy of the state while ignoring the concept of the matrix effect and the view of class power that accompanies it. The autonomy of the capitalist state, Poulantzas insists, is relative to its place and function in the ensemble of instances, and the power it deploys is only the "condensation" of struggles between the different social classes. At the same time, however, the indirect and intransitive determinations of the matrix effect on the political instance make it impossible to say that the dominant classes directly control the actions of the state. Thus the autonomy of the state must be viewed "as a 'resultant' [of the] relations of power between classes within a capitalist formation—it being perfectly clear that the capitalist state has its own institutional specificity (separation of the political and the economic) which renders it irreducible to an immediate and direct expression of the strict 'economic corporate' (Gramsci) of this or that class or fraction of the power bloc, and that it must represent the political unity of the power bloc under the hegemony of a class or fraction of a class" (Poulantzas 1976, 73).

The capitalist state is a class state because it is the condensation of social class relations and social class power. It is in this sense that the very existence of state power necessarily corresponds to the interests of the hegemonic class or class fraction. With respect to the ruling

classes, the capitalist state is a class state insofar as it organizes their class powers into a political unity and insofar as it creates and maintains their political hegemony over the dominated classes. "With regard to the dominant classes and fractions, the capitalist state *presents an intrinsic unity*, combined with its relative [specific] autonomy, not because it is the tool of an already politically unified class, but precisely because it is the *unifying factor* of the power bloc. . . . The unity of state power is, in the last analysis, to be found in the state's particular relation to the hegemonic class or fraction, i.e., in the fact of the *univocal corre-*

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spondence of the state to the specific interests of that class or fraction" (Poulantzas 1973, 300-301).

Poulantzas defines the "participation of several classes and class fractions in political domination" by the concept of *apower bloc*. There are two noteworthy things about this concept. First, Poulantzas defines the power bloc as a "contradictory unity of dominant classes or fractions" whose interests are antagonistic rather than monolithic. Second, the power bloc is dominated internally by a hegemonic class or fraction that politically polarizes the economic interests of the other classes or fractions of the bloc in order to establish its own economic interest as the least common denominator in the political field and to make itself the representative of the general common interest of the power bloc as a whole. From this privileged position within the power bloc, the hegemonic class or fraction indirectly reproduces its own privileged place within the relations of economic exploitation and political domination *pari passu* with the exploitation and domination of the masses by the power bloc as a whole.

Poulantzas defines the hegemony of the dominant class or fraction in terms of "class alliances" and the "unity of state power." Following Gramsci, he maintains that the hegemonic class or fraction exercises class leadership and holds political power: political power is neither shared nor distributed within the power bloc. The non-hegemonic elements of the power bloc are "incapable (through their own organizational means) of transforming their specific interests into the political interest which would polarize the interests of the other classes and fractions of the power bloc" (Poulantzas 1973, 297-98). Because the classes and fractions that make up the power bloc have contradictory interests, they cannot "raise themselves" to the level of a political "unity," where power is shared among the various classes and fractions, but only to the level of a political "alliance," where power is held as a unity by the hegemonic class or fraction. In short, the relations between the various classes or fractions of the power bloc "cannot consist of a *sharing out* of institutionalized political power, such that the hegemonic class or fraction simply possesses a more important share than the others" (Poulantzas 1973, 297).

By means of the concept of the power bloc, Poulantzas has established the class basis of the capitalist state. However, his description of hegemony and the political power of the hegemonic class or fraction comes very close to eliminating the relative autonomy of the state altogether. By referring to the state as the "univocal expression of the dom-

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inant fraction within the power bloc," for example, Poulantzas seems to have reduced the specific effectivity of the state to the pertinent effects of economic class. In *Political Power and*

Social Classes, everything of importance seems to occur outside the state and, perhaps even more significant, independently of the practices of the exploited and dominated classes. This latter point is clearly brought out in the distinction Poulantzas draws between *political practice* (a concept pertaining to the power bloc) and the *political scene* (a concept pertaining to the state apparatuses, that is, political parties and the state bureaucracy).

The concept of the power bloc is so important for Poulantzas that for all practical purposes its practices exhaust the field of state power: "the concept of the power bloc is related to the political level and covers the field of *political practices*, in so far as this field concentrates within itself and reflects the articulation of the ensemble of instances and levels of class struggle in a determinate state" (Poulantzas 1973, 234). The power bloc exists outside the state, yet its pertinent effects seem to determine the very structure of the state; the two are so strongly identified that the dissolution or transformation of the power bloc necessarily entails the transformation of the form of the state itself. The power bloc constitutes the field of political practice and political power, while the state proper, that is, the actual state apparatuses and their structured relationships, exists as a distinct yet distinctly secondary field of political representation: "It [the state] is covered by a series of concepts which indicate class relations in parties, situated in that particular space generally described by Marx as the *political scene*, in which the direct action of classes operate. We can precisely delimit the dislocation between (i) the field of political class practices (the power bloc) in a form of the state and (ii) the representation of classes by parties in a form of a regime" (Poulantzas 1973, 234).

Despite its tendency to devalue the political scene, Poulantzas's notion that the class power of the power bloc limits the particular rhythms of the political scene (political parties and organizations of class representation) has undeniable explanatory power. Among other things, it explains why political regimes may change in capitalist societies without a significant change in the power bloc and perhaps more important, why the dominant fraction of the power bloc need not correspond to the class (or fraction) that is actually the "ruling" class on the political scene (for example, how a petty bourgeois movement occupies the dominant place in the political scene under the Nazi regime while monopoly capital is nevertheless able to organize itself as the new hege-

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monic class).⁴⁹ By means of his concept of the power bloc and its pertinent effects on the political scene, Poulantzas is able to explain how agents on the political scene (politicians and bureaucrats) may end up acting in the interests of the power bloc even when such actions run counter to their own objective class interest (if they are not themselves members of the hegemonic fraction).

Having posited the power bloc as separate from the political scene and yet hegemonic within the field of political practice, Poulantzas is able to explain the existence of contradictions between political positions taken at a given conjuncture and objective class interests without slipping into either reflectionism or voluntarism. Because of the way the dominant class or fraction projects its interest as the interest of the power bloc as a whole, because of the pertinent effects exerted by the power bloc within the political scene, and because of the isolating effect and unifying function of the state within capitalist social formations, Poulantzas insists that a distinction be made between *class interest* (the objective effect of the ensemble of structural determinations) and *class position* (the conjunctural place defined by a specific instance or

practice, in this case the political scene):

A social class, or a fraction or stratum of a class may take up a class position that does not correspond to its interests, which are defined by the class determination that fixes the horizon of the class's struggle. The typical example of this is the labor aristocracy, which in certain conjunctures takes up class positions that are in fact bourgeois. This does not mean, however, that it becomes, in such cases, a part of the bourgeoisie; it remains from the fact of its structural class determination, part of the working class. . . . In other words its class determination is not reducible to its class position. (Poulantzas 1975, 15)

Class Struggles Within the Democratic State

The most noteworthy development in Poulantzas's thinking in the ten years separating *Political Power and Social Classes* from *State, Power, Socialism* is his increasing attention to the political scene and to the existence and importance of class struggles within it. In the former work, Poulantzas emphasizes the externality of the power bloc and the realm of political practices with respect to the state apparatuses and the political scene. Poulantzas implies that the state apparatuses are not affected internally by class contradictions: "This [capitalist] state possesses institutions within which the economic existence of classes and the political class struggle are absent" (Poulantzas 1973, 276). In *Polit-*

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ical Power and Social Classes, Poulantzas defines the state bureaucracy in terms of social categories, not social classes, implying that bureaucracies qua bureaucracies are free of class distinctions and class antagonisms. Bureaucracies, he maintains, reflect the pertinent effects of class power, but they lack real power of their own: "so-called 'bureaucratic power' is in fact the mere exercise of the state's functions. . . . [T]he bureaucracy has no class power of its own, nor does it directly exercise the power of the classes to which it belongs" (Poulantzas 1973, 336). Finally, the forms of the political regime are clearly of secondary importance in Poulantzas's initial framework. Shifting power relations between the legislative (parties) and the executive (bureaucracy) reflect shifts within the power bloc, but the predominance of either does not affect the nature of state power.

Poulantzas continues to defend the essence of his initial position in *State, Power, Socialism*, and there is no basis for claiming that he abandons his earlier problematic in his last work. However, he does come to realize that his initial framework was inadequate insofar as it ignored the impact of the dominated classes on and within the state, failed to recognize the presence of class struggles within the political scene, and emptied the state of any real significance. Poulantzas corrects these deficiencies not by repudiating his previous view but by expanding his concept of the pertinent effects of class relations on the political scene in such a way as to insert class struggle into the very heart of the state's apparatuses:

The state is the condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions such as these express themselves in a necessarily specific form, *within the state itself*. In other words, the state is through and through constituted-divided by class contradictions. . . . The executive and parliament, the army, the judiciary, the various ministries, regional, municipal and central apparatuses, the ideological apparatuses—all of these, which are themselves divided into distinct circuits, networks and vantage points, are often the pre-eminent representatives of the diverging interests of one or several fractions of the power bloc. (Poulantzas 1978, 132-33)

The excessively monolithic character of hegemony that predominates in *Political Power and Social Classes* is qualified significantly in *State, Power, Socialism*. First, within the realm of the power bloc, the leadership of the hegemonic class or fraction is no longer viewed as having the capacity to exclude the pertinent effects of other classes and fractions from the political scene. Class contradictions within the power bloc, Poulantzas now maintains, are also active within the state.

Indeed, they are active to such an extent that the autonomy of the state is "concretely manifested in the diverse contradictory measures that each of these classes and fractions, through its specific presence in the state and the resulting play of contradictions, manages to have integrated into state policy" (Poulantzas 1978, 135). Contradictions within the power bloc "take the form of internal contradictions between, and at the heart of, [the state's] various branches and apparatuses" (Poulantzas 1978, 132-33). Second, the structure and practice of the state no longer correspond as directly and precisely to the hegemony of the power bloc as is the case in *Political Power and Social Classes*. In a direct reversal of his earlier position, Poulantzas specifically includes popular struggles within the domain of the state and insists that such struggles no longer be viewed as strictly external and oppositional with respect to the state apparatuses: "in reality . . . popular struggles traverse the state from top to bottom and in a mode quite other than penetration of an intrinsic entity from outside" (Poulantzas 1978, 141).

In recognizing the presence of contradictions and popular struggles within the state apparatuses, Poulantzas by no means abandons the thrust of his original position: that state power is unified, that it represents the interest of a power bloc organized under the hegemony of the dominant class fraction, and that it has a specific autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant class.

The state does not constitute a mere assembly of detachable parts: it exhibits an *apparatus unity* which is . . . related to the fissiparous *unity of state power*. This finds expression in the fact that its global polity is massively oriented in favour of the hegemonic class or fraction—today in favour of monopoly capital. But the unity of state power is not established through the cohesive will of the bearers of monopoly capital or through their physical hold over the state. Unity-centralization is written into the capitalist state's hierarchic-bureaucratized framework as the effect of the reproduction of the social division of labor within the state. . . . It also arises from the state's structure as the condensation of a relationship of forces, and from the predominance over other classes or fractions of the power bloc that is commanded within the state by the hegemonic class or fraction. (Poulantzas 1978, 136)

Poulantzas continues to insist that the ruling class rules indirectly and structurally by reproducing existing relations of exploitation and domination through state power. It is the structured effectivity of the state—that is, the functions and modes of determination assigned by the ensemble of structures—and not the direct control of the power

bloc over it that "destines" the state to organize and reproduce the hegemony of the dominant class or fraction. The essential condition of this process is the separation of workers from the struggle over the means of production, and Poulantzas continues to maintain that the predominance of the popular-democratic form of the state within capitalist social formations stems from the fact that this form and no other reproduces this separation most successfully. For Poulantzas, as Martin Carnoy acutely observes, "the state is neither just political nor just juridical in the sense that it reproduces or enforces the legal bases of capitalist exchange. Rather it is fundamental to the conditions under which the bourgeoisie can accumulate and control capital, displacing struggle and conflict to the political from the economic sphere" (Carnoy 1984, 112).

For all these reasons the presence of the dominated classes within the state does not imply that they share or participate in political power or that the existing state apparatus may be reformed from within rather than destroyed from without. Indeed, Poulantzas rejects both of these positions in *State, Power, Socialism* :

The dominated classes exist in the state not by means of apparatuses concentrating a *power of their own*, but essentially in the forms of opposition to the power of the dominant classes. [They can never] lastingly hold power *without a radical transformation of the state* [for their subordination is inscribed in] the very material structure of the state, comprising as it does internal mechanisms of reproduction of the domination-subordination relationship: this structure does indeed retain the dominated classes within itself, but it retains them precisely *as dominated* classes. . . . The action of the popular masses within the state is a necessary condition of its transformation, but is not itself a sufficient condition. (Poulantzas 1978, 142-43)

In *State, Power, Socialism*, the dominant classes continue to predominate within the field of political power, and the repressive apparatuses of the state remain the ultimate expression of this power. Poulantzas points out that the repressive apparatuses of the capitalist state (the army,

the police, and so forth) are relatively unaffected by the democratic or dictatorial nature of the regime; in both cases they perform precisely the same function—undergirding by force the mechanisms of separation by which the capitalist state reproduces the existing forces and relations of production. In all capitalist social formations "state monopolized physical violence permanently underlies the techniques of power and mechanisms of consent: it is inscribed in the web of disci-

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plinary and ideological devices; and even when not directly exercised, it shapes the materiality of the social body upon which domination is brought to bear" (Poulantzas 1978, 81).

The Political Deflection of Class Struggle

Poulantzas concedes that the capitalist state, despite its ultimate appeal to violence, works its separation of workers from the struggle for economic power through processes that are not overtly repressive. In *State, Power, Socialism*, he discusses four of these processes: individualization, the law, the nation, and the division between manual and intellectual labor. The concept of *individualization* adds little to Poulantzas's earlier notion of the isolation effect. It is the process by which the capitalist state separates individuals from their production-based class identities in order to constitute them as "free and equal" citizen-individuals and unify them again under the aegis of the state. The capitalist state remains, as before, the source and guarantor of the very existence of its citizens and therefore the essential precondition for totalitarianism and democracy alike. There is, however, one very significant modification to his earlier framework: Poulantzas now recognizes the fact of the existence of citizen-individuals as a "decisive limit" to the hegemony of the power bloc and the development of a totalitarian capitalist state. This limitation occurs because the process of individualization produces, sooner or later, irresistible pressures toward representative democracy.

Although the individual-private [sphere] has no intrinsic essence opposing absolute external barriers to the state's power, it limits that power through being one of the privileged modern representations of the class relationship *within* the state. The nature of this limit is well-known: it is called *representative democracy*. However truncated by the dominant classes and by the materiality of the state, it still constitutes a mode whereby popular struggles and resistance are inscribed in that materiality; and while not the only limit to the power of the state, it is nevertheless decisive. (Poulantzas 1978, 73)

The idea that the political power of the dominant classes is limited, at least to some extent, by representative democracy reflects a heightened awareness of the contradictions created when the dominated' classes and their struggles are inserted into the political scene. A similar tendency is observable in Poulantzas's discussion of *the law*. Poulantzas retains his earlier view, which linked law and repression: "law in every state is an integral part of the repressive order and the organization of

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violence and . . . there is no fundamental opposition between law and repression in the capitalist state" (Poulantzas 1978, 77). He also insists that the legal separation of economic property from political power serves the interests of the dominant classes by codifying the process of individualization. However, *State, Power, Socialism* explicitly recognizes the fact that the law, by the mere fact of its existence, opens up a struggle for power within the state—a struggle which, if it cannot be *won* within the state, at least provides some possibility of limiting the formal exercise of power against the dominated classes.

Modern law does not intervene against violence; rather, it organizes the exercise of violence, taking into account the resistance of the popular masses.

It is precisely through a system of general, abstract and formal rules that law *regulates* the exercise of power by the state apparatuses, as well as access to these apparatuses themselves. . . . By thus giving order to their mutual relations within the state, it allows a changed balance of forces in the ruling alliance to find expression at state level without provoking upheavals. Capitalist law, as it were, *damps down* channels political crises, in such a way that they do not lead to crises of the state itself. . . . However, the capitalist legal system also takes the dominated classes into account in regulating the exercise of power. Faced with working-class struggle on the political plane, law organizes the structure of the compromise equilibrium permanently imposed on the dominant classes by the dominated. . . . [W]e need to stress the fact that this juridical system, these "formal" and "abstract" liberties are also conquests of the popular masses. In this sense and this alone does modern law *set the limits* of the exercise of power and of intervention by the state apparatuses. (Poulantzas 1978, 91-92)

The *nation* (as opposed to the state) is a third mechanism for separating political and economic practices within capitalist social formations. The capitalist state actively seeks to establish ideological identifications that are "national." In contrast to the traditional Marxist argument, which views nationalization in terms of the historical process of unifying internal markets to facilitate capitalist economic development, Poulantzas views nationalization as a massive reconstitution of social subjectivity and a process of ideological integration.¹⁵ The traditional economic argument is inadequate because it stops short of explaining why the economically determined process of unification takes precisely the form of a nation. For Poulantzas, the development of the nation stems from a social-psychological need to unify new individualistic social relations and new conceptions of space and time

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that are separated, controlled, broken down, and rendered discontinuous by the transition to capitalism.

This need for unity is political and economic as well as ideological. The modern nation redefines "inside" and "outside" and imposes a new "historicity" of linear, progressive time to provide a goal and a meaning to human existence fractured and segmented by capitalist relations of production. The dramatic transformation of space and time characteristic of capitalism is not simply a matter of thinking and representation. "In reality . . . transformations of the spatio-temporal matrices refer to the materiality of the social division of labor, of the structure of the state, and of the practices and techniques of capitalist economic, political and ideological power; they are the *real substratum* of mythical, religious, philosophical or 'experiential' representation of space-time" (Poulantzas 1978, 26). The national state redefines territory and time as part of the process of individualization, realizing the "historical" unity of individuals by the very act of separating them from their real history—older identifications with family, village, religion, and so forth, which are modified or destroyed. The historicity of nationalism is thus a kind of temporal homology of the law that functions to abstract individuals from their traditional social space and reunify them in terms of the contemporary social space of the nation.

Poulantzas's insights into the social nature of space and time provides yet another perspective on the significance of the nation-state for the capitalist mode of production:

To be sure, *the state is not the subject of real history*: for this is a process without a subject, the process of the class struggle. But we can now understand why the modern nation-states constitute the focal points and basic moments of that real history. This becomes clearer if we bear in mind that the state establishes the peculiar relationship between *history* and *territory*, between the spatial and the temporal matrix. In fact, the modern nation makes possible the intersection of these matrices and thus serves as their point of junction; the capitalist state marks out the frontiers when it constitutes what is within (the people-nation) by homogenizing the before and the after of this enclosure. National unity . . . becomes *historicity of a territory and territorialization of a history*. . . the markings of a territory become indicators of history that are written into the state. (Poulantzas 1978, 114)

The fourth mechanism by which economic class struggle is deflected by political means is the *separation of mental and manual labor*. Poulantzas contends that this separation is a direct result of an organic relation between knowledge and power in capitalist societies. Capitalist

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relations of production, he argues, separate intellectual work from manual work not out of

technological necessity, the commonly accepted rationale, but as a way of permanently keeping the masses at a distance from the centers of decision making. This separation is accomplished by the various state-supported institutional devices that monopolize the transmission and certification of knowledge in such a way that the popular masses are effectively excluded from it and thus from the ranks of the professional middle class. The educational system is, of course, primary in this regard, but Poulantzas also calls our attention to the fact that the division of mental and manual labor is incorporated into all of the apparatuses of state, not simply those associated with education:

It is within the capitalist state that the organic relationship between intellectual labor and political domination, knowledge and power, is realized in the most consummate manner. . . . In their capitalist forms of army, law-courts, administration and police (not to mention the ideological apparatuses) these state apparatuses involve the practical supremacy of a knowledge . . . from which the popular masses are excluded. . . . In fact, these functions are centralized through their specific separation from the masses: in this way, intellectual labor (knowledge-power) is materialized in state apparatuses, while at the other pole, manual labor tends to be concentrated in the popular masses, who are separated and excluded from these organizational functions. It is equally clear that a number of institutions of so-called indirect, representative democracy (political parties, parliament, etc.), in which the relationship between state and masses is expressed, themselves depend on the same mechanism. (Poulantzas 1978, 56)

Therborn: The Organizational Technology of the Capitalist State

More than any of Poulantzas's previous books, *State, Power, Socialism* focuses on the structured effectivity of the capitalist state and its internal contradictions. However, even in this his last work, Poulantzas fails to provide a concrete analysis of the bureaucratic organizational forms of the state apparatuses, nor does he attempt to explain the mechanisms by which such organizational forms insure representation of the interests of dominant classes sufficient to mask the contradiction between domination and representation within the popular-democratic state. In short, Poulantzas lacks a theory of the state apparatus as a formal organization. Thus Göran Therborn's *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* (1978)—an ambitious comparative study of the feudal, capitalist, and socialist states from the perspective of organizational

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theory—fills an important gap within Structural Marxist political theory. Only by studying the state in terms of its organizational tasks, personnel, resources, and organizational technology, Therborn insists, can we lay any claim to an explanation of its class character. "If we conceive of organizations as processes formally structured by specific mechanisms of input, transformation and output, we can relate them directly to the ever advancing social processes of reproduction and change which provide the inputs and receive the outputs. The class character of an organization may then be determined by the way in which the input, transformation, and output processes are traversed and shaped by the class struggle" (Therborn 1978, 38).

While agreeing that Poulantzas correctly identifies the class basis of the capitalist state, Therborn maintains that he understates the contradictory effects of the distinction between class power and political power in capitalist social formations. In contrast to Poulantzas, Therborn emphasizes the "disjuncture" rather than the correspondence resulting from the condensation of class power into state power.

In the historical course of the class struggle, the state apparatuses come to crystallize determinate social relations and thus assume a material existence, efficacy, and inertia which are to a certain extent independent of current state policies and class relations. It follows that, although the variance between state power and the state apparatus is limited by the fact that they express the class relations of the same society, at any given moment significant disjunctures appear between the two. The possibilities of variance are substantially increased by the coexistence within a particular state system of several apparatuses, in which different sets of class relations may have crystallized. (Therborn 1978, 35)

According to Therborn, the national popular state apparatus exists as both the expression of class domination and as the representative of society as a whole executing necessary social tasks. The contradiction between these two functions generates the bounded yet open-ended organizational dynamic specific to the capitalist state. "The new tasks and problems confronting the state basically derive from the changing social totality in which it operates. But the successful organization of class domination in the state apparatus itself generates new problems of

government, administration, judicature and repression—problems which call into question the existing organizational forms of domination" (Therborn 1978, 47). Because it cannot be finally resolved within the context of the dominant mode of production and its antagonistic class relationships, the contradiction between domination and representa-

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tion constitutes the ongoing motive for change within the apparatus of the capitalist state. Therborn also identifies the presence of contradictions between the four distinct functional apparatuses of the capitalist state (the rule-making or governmental, administrative, judicial, and repressive apparatuses). Each of these apparatuses has its own internal rhythms and contradictions, which create contradictions within the political instance as a unified whole: "It cannot be taken for granted that they [the state apparatuses] share a common class character. . . . Even though the state is, in a fundamental sense, always one, the level of integration of its apparatuses varies considerably" (Therborn 1978, 41).

We cannot follow Therborn's discussion of the inputs, processes of transformation, and outputs of state apparatuses within capitalist (let alone feudal and socialist) social formations in its entirety. However, his concept of "organizational technology" and his discussion of "formats of representation" and "processes of mediation" within capitalist forms of the state are particularly relevant to our present analysis. By the term *organizational technology* Therborn refers to "a particular technique of getting things done within productive organizations"—the organizational dynamic that governs the handling of tasks, the patterning of personnel, and the use of incoming material resources. While all tasks, personnel, and material resources are products of class struggle (they are described by Therborn as "crystallizations of class relations"), organizational technology is considered the strategic variable because "it is applied in the process of transformation and affects the regulation of all other inputs and outputs" and because it "directly involves institutionalized social relations of command and compliance, leadership and execution" (Therborn 1978, 40-41). Roughly speaking, organizational technology may be said to constitute the "relations of production" within the state apparatus.

Therborn is particularly interested in the relationship between prevailing class relations on the one hand and two sets of relations, "leadership and execution" and "command and compliance," which constitute organizational technology, on the other. Relations of *leadership and execution* refer to external relations between the state apparatus and the rest of society and denote what Therborn calls a "directive dynamic," that is, "a mode of orientation and a basis of leadership." Relations of *command and compliance* refer to internal organizational hierarchies, the "mode of activation of the members of the organization, whereby their contribution to its orientation is insured" (Ther-

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born 1978, 62). These concepts permit Therborn to develop an interesting contrast between the organizational technologies of feudal and capitalist modes of production and a suggestive account of the emergence and evolution of the latter.

Therborn characterizes the organizational technology of feudal societies as relatively unified and non-contradictory. He sees no fundamental conflict between the directive dynamic of

feudal organization, based on aristocratic privilege and personal loyalty, and its seigniorial relations of command and compliance, based on the economic self-sufficiency of the manor and the need to defend it militarily. Bourgeois revolutions, however, split the relatively unified organizational technology of feudal societies into two distinct technologies, each congruent with the two distinctive characteristics of bourgeois class rule: (1) a "liberal-individualist" technology that combines personal freedom and equality with forms of domination inherent in the relations between capital and labor; and (2) a "rational-bureaucratic" technology that separates mental from manual labor and subordinates the latter to the former.

In its initial period, characterized by competitive capitalism and factory despotism, bourgeois organizational technology takes the bifurcated form of a "formal-legal" directive dynamic, signifying the stratified monopolization of intellectual knowledge, and a "representative" dynamic, which adjudicates and mediates the relationship between the state apparatus and the nation. These new directive dynamics engender new modes of command and compliance that Therborn labels "impersonal bureaucracy" and "parliamentary politics." In contrast to Weber, for whom bureaucracy is an ideal-typical combination of specialization, hierarchy, and knowledge, Therborn stresses the class basis of the "formal rationality" of bureaucracies, which always accept as "given" not only the content of the rules they apply but their enforcement as well. "The market sets the rules of bourgeois society and provides the economic constraint for their enforcement, even if ideological socialization proper, and in the last instance coercive violence, are also necessary. This social dynamic is located in the realm of private enterprise and capital accumulation, and it is the common public needs of these that are insured by the 'calculable rules' of the state" (Therborn 1978, 52).

We have already introduced the mechanisms by which parliamentary politics represents the ruling class while mediating the divisions that exist between it, the state apparatuses, and the dominated classes. Ac-

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ording to Therborn, the predominant *formats of representation* in bourgeois parliamentary politics center on "the links of unity-division manifest both between different fractions of the ruling class and between the class of economic agents and its specialized political personnel," while its *processes of mediation* "concern primarily the strength of the ruled classes" (Therborn 1978, 181). Therborn contends there has been a profound shift in the forms of both representation and mediation within bourgeois organizational technology in the twentieth century, a shift that corresponds to the transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism. During the period of competitive capitalism and parliamentary politics, leadership devolved on politicians who owed their position to personal abilities (although, Therborn hastens to add, to possess any political ability at all, the individuals concerned had to be members of the ruling class, its allies, or its clientele). "The parliamentary politician governed above all by skillful mediation between fellow MP's of his class, each with his idiosyncrasies and immediate economic and social preoccupations: by playing them off against one another, creating heteroclite and shifting coalitions, and by persuading and cajoling with a particular kind of abstract oratory" (Therborn 1978, 53).

Under parliamentary politics, the masses could be either excluded from the legal nation (restricted franchise) or encapsulated by local bosses or notables (patronage system, machine politics, and other systems of "captive populations" controlled by landowners, company towns,

and the like). As the pressure of popular struggles intensified, however, and as capital shifted to its monopoly phase, the classical form of parliamentary politics was no longer an adequate instrument of representation or mediation: it had to be supplemented or replaced by an original form of leadership able to take hold of the increasingly (if only partially) emancipated masses and keep them in a position of subordination. This new kind of bourgeois leadership, which Therborn (following Weber) calls "plebiscitary politics," operates by a combination of increased executive autonomy from the parliamentary process and an intense program of political propaganda designed to substitute emotional manipulation and identification for genuine political participation. "By means of mass appeals, the politician's message, and above all his image and attractive personal qualities, are conveyed to the people through public posters, mass-circulation newspapers, loudspeakers, and the television screen" (Therborn 1978, 53).

The transition from parliamentary to plebiscitary politics is accom-

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panied by a shift in the other mode of command and compliance characteristic of bourgeois societies, the impersonal bureaucracy: the formal-legal directive dynamic of the latter is gradually replaced by a "substantial-technical" dynamic within a new organizational form that Therborn calls "managerial technocracy."

In the twentieth century and particularly the last few decades, a new mode of organizing the bourgeois state has developed alongside the legal bureaucracy. Like the latter, it is characterized by specialization, impersonality and stratified monopolization of intellectual knowledge by professionals. But it does not rely to the same degree upon calculable rules and fixed hierarchies. We may term this form *managerial technocracy*. Its rationality is substantive rather than formal; and, instead of juridical knowledge, it promotes technical and scientific expertise, applied with discretion and consideration of actual effects, rather than with calculable legal precision. The state hierarchy [of impersonal bureaucracy] is broken up by ad hoc committees, working parties, and special enquiries. (Therborn 1978, 54)

The new organizational technologies of plebiscitary politics and managerial technocracy emerge above all in connection with the increasingly social character of the productive forces under monopoly capitalism, the rising challenge of the working classes, and the increasing need for state interventions in the economic sphere. It is at this point that Therborn's discussion of organizational technology, mediation, and representation rejoins Poulantzas's analysis of the interrelation of the state and the economy and the shift in that relation from competitive to monopoly capital.

Poulantzas: The Internationalization of Monopoly Capitalism

In *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* and *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas examines the structural transformation of monopoly capitalism since its emergence in the late nineteenth century. He is concerned, above all, with the emergence of a dominant international capitalist mode of production and the effects of internationalization on the class structures and relatively autonomous states of national social formations. Poulantzas maintains that the most important developments within the international capitalist system have been the dissolution of independent national social formations, however economically powerful these may be, and the emergence of new *internal* relations of domination and dependence that extend across the national boundaries of even the most industrialized countries.

The present stage of monopoly capitalism, Poulantzas insists, is de-

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termined by a social division of labor that is global in nature and that has subordinated national

capital and national class relations to the requirements of international capital and its extended reproduction. By focusing on the relationship between American capital and the European Economic Community in the seventies, Poulantzas is able to grasp the general process by which a truly integral, multinational capitalist mode of production has come into being. For this reason his analysis of the seventies retains its interest, advancing our knowledge of the painful restructuring of the eighties and the relentless global *Gleichschaltung* of the nineties. Poulantzas explains the monopoly stage in terms of the extended reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and its twofold tendency first to expand within social formations, where it takes root and establishes its dominance, and second to expand beyond the limits of this formation. While internal and external expansion are interrelated, Poulantzas argues that external expansion, imperialism, becomes increasingly dominant as monopoly capitalism develops. Gradually the importance of commercial capital and the export of commodities, characteristic of imperialism during the stage of competitive capitalism, is supplanted by the importance of industrial capital and the export of capital during the monopoly stage.

During the monopoly stage, imperialism becomes progressively a more integrated structure. It is an "imperialist chain," Poulantzas insists, made up of national formations linked together by relations of dominance and dependency such that each link "reflects the chain as a whole in the specificity of its own social formation" (Poulantzas 1975, 42). As monopoly capitalism develops from a primarily national to a primarily international mode of production, each social formation making up the imperialist chain internalizes the international structure until, eventually, a point is reached where national structures become little more than "a function of the forms that the dominance of the capitalist mode of production at the international level assumes over the other modes and forms of production that exist within a social formation" (Poulantzas 1975, 42-43). From its very inception, the imperialist chain is forged by relations of domination and dependency. Initially a fundamental cleavage separates the imperialist "metropolises" from a subordinate "periphery" of social formations dominated and dependent on imperialism. During the stage of competitive capitalism, the metropolises remain national, largely autonomous, social formations, while an equal relationship of town (industry) and country (agriculture and raw materials) is established between the core and the

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periphery. With the transition to monopoly capitalism, however, a process of transformation is initiated in the relationship between metropole and periphery and between the imperialist social formations themselves. As monopoly capitalism becomes progressively more internationalist, it generates new relationships of domination and dependency that restructure the imperialist chain as a whole, undermining the national independence of the metropolises and breaking down the distinction between core and periphery.

What drives the development of the imperialist chain is the uneven development of capitalism within the metropolises. In *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, Poulantzas distinguishes the stages of competitive and monopoly capitalism and delineates the different phases of the latter. By the end of the eighteenth century, at least in the economic heart-lands of Europe, competitive capitalism had largely supplanted the articulation of feudal and capitalist modes of production characteristic of the transition to capitalism. Competitive capitalism is defined by Poulantzas as primarily a national mode of production involving the real subsumption of labor to capital and the dominant as well as determinant place of the economic instance within

the social formation. It is characterized by an articulation of petty commodity production and industrial capital, with the latter, in the form of the factory system, dominant.

Production units are relatively simple and decentralized, and the level of the concentration of capital is still quite modest during the competitive stage; as a result, industrial capital exerts certain "conservation" effects on petty production. Extensive exploitation of labor predominates—the major transformation being the restructuring of petty production along the lines of greater regimentation and more efficient division of labor—but the beginnings of exploitation by means of machinery are clearly discernible. Of particular significance, with respect to the distinction Poulantzas wishes to make between competitive and monopoly capitalism, is the "unity" of the plurality of powers of capital during the former stage and their "dissociation," restructuring, and reintegration during the latter stage. Competitive capitalism is characterized by a "coincidence of economic ownership and possession" and by a "unity of the powers deriving from the ownership and possession of the means of production" in the person of the individual capitalist entrepreneur.

By the late nineteenth century the concentration and centralization of industrial capital in the advanced capitalist social formations inau-

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gurates the stage of monopoly capitalism. Poulantzas distinguishes three phases in the development of monopoly capitalism: he "transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism" beginning in the later nineteenth century and ending with World War I; the "consolidation of monopoly capital" as a national mode of production and the international contradictions it creates, contradictions that culminate in the Great Depression and World War II; and finally the "present phase," characterized by the birth and development of a multinational mode of production, a phase of global integration beginning with the "Americanization" of Europe after World War II.⁶³ The timing of Poulantzas's periodization is less important to us here than the general tendency it describes, namely, the transformation of a predominantly national mode of production to a predominantly international, or, perhaps more accurately, a multinational, mode. Let us briefly summarize Poulantzas's discussion.

The transition to monopoly capital involves the appearance and extension of monopoly capital in the context of an unstable articulation of monopoly and competitive capitalism that is still national in character. It is a stage dominated by the concentration and centralization of capital in the form of holding companies or trusts, but it is also characterized by a "massive dissociation" of the plurality of powers of capital previously concentrated in the person of the individual entrepreneur. The predominance of joint stock companies produces a dissociation of economic and legal ownership, while the appearance of holding companies and trusts introduces a dissociation between powers deriving from economic ownership. Economic ownership concentrates, embracing several production units, yet the relatively distinct powers of economic possession attached to these units are subordinated, not eliminated, and considerable powers of possession remain in the hands of subordinate ownerships. A further dissociation is introduced in the form of professional managers, agents who exercise the powers of capital without actually possessing them. Finally, previously existing forms of production units, extending across diverse and distinct branches and industries, are also preserved. Despite the fact that the exploitation of labor becomes progressively more intensive, the labor processes of individual production units are only formally subordinated to monopoly capital; in actuality they retain a degree of

autonomy characteristic of competitive capitalism.

Poulantzas has little to say about the consolidation of monopoly capitalism as the dominant mode of production and the crises of revolu-

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tion, counterrevolution, war, and depression produced by its uneven development. This silence is unfortunate, for it is hardly an exaggeration to describe the global crisis of the interwar years as the birth pangs of multinational capitalism. It is also important to recognize the significance of a new monopoly capitalist regime of accumulation, "Fordism," which emerges first in the United States in the early twentieth century and becomes the ideal-typical model of monopoly capitalism after World War II. The path-breaking analysis of Fordism and the consolidation of monopoly capitalism appeared in *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation* (1976; English translation, 1979), a study of American capitalism from the Civil War to the Carter presidency published two years after *Class in Contemporary Capitalism* by French economist Michel Aglietta, another former student of Althusser.²³ According to Aglietta, the decisive change between competitive and monopoly capitalism occurs in the *mode of accumulation* or method of maximizing surplus value during each stage. Aglietta defines the mode of accumulation under competitive capitalism and during the transition to monopoly capitalism as "extensive": the organization of labor through mechanization is the primary method of maximizing surplus value, while existing patterns of social consumption and "traditional ways of life" are left to persist or dissolve as they will without radical reorganization. With the consolidation of monopoly capitalism, however, there is a shift from extensive to "intensive" accumulation: an entirely new "way of life" is created for the wage-earning class as the totality of time and space, consumption as well as production, is reorganized to maximize surplus value.

The new regime of accumulation, which Aglietta (following Gramsci) calls *Fordism*, is based on the "synchronization of mass production and mass consumption." More specifically, it is the articulation of a labor process, organized around the semi-automated assembly line, and patterns of consumption, organized by stratified "life-styles," each characterized by individual acquisition of commodities mass-produced for private consumption. The linchpin of Fordism, Aglietta maintains, is a reversal of the "iron law of wages," at least for key segments of the labor force, and a new strategy of gearing wages to productivity and getting them back through a rapidly expanding domestic market. The result, the so-called consumer society, is characterized by a more regular and more rapidly increasing rate of surplus value than its predecessor. The internationalization of Fordism inaugurated and sustained the global economic hegemony of the United States throughout the twentieth century.

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The third and contemporary phase of monopoly capitalism is, according to Poulantzas, dominated by the restructuring of global capitalism after World War II under the direction of the United States. The internationalization of Fordism, accelerated by American control over the economic and political destinies of Europe and Japan, has transformed monopoly capitalism into an integrated multinational mode of production that has gradually supplanted predominantly national forms. The spectacular, if temporary, economic boom of the postwar "economic

miracle" obscured, at least until the seventies, the less felicitous outcome of this globalization process: a shift of the burden of exploitation back from the peripheral economies to the metropolises themselves. Only with the global recession of the seventies and the economic restructuring of the eighties is it becoming clear that the classic metropole/periphery distinction is dissolving and that multinational corporations have become globally integrated production units maximizing profits in all geographic regions and in all areas of economic activity.¹⁰ Poulantzas also emphasizes the tendency of multinational monopoly capitalism to reverse the dissociation of the powers of ownership and possession previously introduced by monopoly capital in its national form. Multinational conglomerates replace trusts and holding companies as the dominant organizations and establish single centers of economic ownership of what are, in effect, multinational industrial firms. Concentrated economic ownership entails real economic possession of subsidiaries and the real subsumption of their previously autonomous labor processes. Finally, Poulantzas notes how the new complex production units closely articulate and integrate labor processes divided between various establishments in several countries. Gaps between different levels of economic ownership and different levels of possession are also being closed, and the powers associated with them are concentrating again.

The Internalization of Internationalization

The formation of multinational production units transforms the articulation of multinational monopoly and national competitive capitalism within each of the industrialized social formations. Competitive or non-monopoly capital remains subordinated to monopoly capital as before, but it is now qualitatively transformed and integrated into a multinational mode of production. The closure of the gaps, within monopoly capitalism, between economic ownership and possession and between

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the powers deriving from economic ownership produces an ongoing loss of powers of possession by non-monopoly capital. Indeed, Poulantzas goes so far as to maintain that behind the facade of independent ownership, the very boundaries of non-monopoly capital, that is, the forms of its enterprises and production units, are being dissolved progressively.

Non-monopoly capital loses effective control and direction of its labor process as multinational monopoly capital imposes standardization of basic products and norms of work organization. The dependence of non-monopoly capital on monopoly capital is introduced through patents and licenses controlled by the latter, through the subjection of non-monopoly capital to a social division of labor that confines it to sectors with a low level of productivity and inferior technology, and through limited margins for self-financing of non-monopoly capital. The revival of small-scale businesses, from professional services to skilled craft-work and sweatshop manufacturing, during the restructuring of the eighties confirms Poulantzas's views on this point. As multinational monopoly capital seeks to shift the burden of the crisis onto others and retain maximum flexibility for itself, there has been a marked increase in the subcontracting of skilled as well as unskilled tasks and an increased reliance on a temporary, part-time, or subcontracted labor force. Such businesses are neither atavistic nor autonomous; they are marching to the beat of multinational monopoly capitalism and the rhythms of its expanded reproduction. Far from becoming disorganized, as critics of Poulantzas might suggest, capitalism is becoming more organized precisely as Poulantzas predicted. The "creative destruction" being experienced by

contemporary capitalism is in actuality a *Gleichschaltung* reflecting the newly emerged hegemony of multinational capital.^[2]

The internationalization of monopoly capitalism has restructured class relations and political power within the industrial capitalist metropolises themselves. The concentration of effective economic ownership into the hands of monopoly capital and the dependence of non-monopoly capital has not produced serious antagonism between these two fractions of the capitalist class. This result is not really surprising, Poulantzas argues, because there is no class split between these fractions of the bourgeoisie: relations of domination that might divide the class fractions are structured by global relations of exploitation that unite them. The principal contradiction within the multinational mode of production remains the antagonism of capital as a whole and labor as a whole. Instead of a growing antagonism between monopoly and

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non-monopoly capital, we find non-monopoly capital declining as a social force. Instead of resisting its subordination to the new global division of labor, non-monopoly capital is internalizing it, becoming an integral part of the "induced reproduction" of the political and economic conditions of its own subordination.

As the dominance of the global economy is forcing an economic restructuring of national capital, so class structures and domestic politics are being reorganized by the dissolution effects of the global economy on the national autonomy of advanced capitalist states. International integration has eliminated national imperialist rivalries to the extent that Poulantzas feels it is no longer appropriate to speak of contradictions between imperialisms but only of contradictions within a single imperialist chain. The international division of labor cuts across the various fractions of capital within each national social formation and redefines older class divisions, rendering terms like foreign and indigenous capital irrelevant. The political result, unevenly developed but unmistakable, has been for international capital to increasingly dominate national politics "from within." Poulantzas argues that the "national" bourgeoisies of the metropolises are being transformed from relatively autonomous class fractions into "domestic" bourgeoisies bound by multiple ties of dependence to an international division of labor and an international concentration of capital that they do not control.

Although they possess their own economic foundation and base of capital accumulation and thus cannot be confused with a comprador class fraction, the domestic bourgeoisies of the First World are becoming integrated with and dependent on international capital and have politically internalized their place and function within the global economy. By means of this process, which I call "the internalization of internationalization," the hegemony of multinational capital within the power blocs of the imperialist powers is organized and the interests of multinational capital projected as the common interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole. National party politics, that is, the political scene within each of the industrial capitalist states, is being rapidly restructured to reflect this change in the power bloc. National parties across the entire political spectrum are suddenly no longer amenable to the class compromises of the Fordist-Keynesian welfare state and instead declare themselves fully prepared to endorse a massive shift of resources from the public sector of the economy to the internationally oriented private sector and equally prepared to tolerate, if not actually endorse, a comprehensive attack on the standard of living of the working class as well as political attacks on its real or imagined allies.

The internalization of the internationalization of monopoly capital explains not only the economic and political restructuring of the advanced capitalist metropolises but also the transformation of dependent development in the Third World as well. In contrast to the dependency theory that predominated in the seventies, Poulantzas insists that the extension and consolidation of monopoly capitalism in the metropolises initiates and advances the dissolution of the "town and country" relationship between metropole and periphery. In other words, capitalist development in the periphery, which begins with the forced implantation of capitalism in pre-capitalist social formations and which is articulated with imperialist capital in a relationship of dependency, nevertheless advances steadily and with growing autonomy within the context of the uneven development of the imperialist chain as a whole. Similarly, national independence movements in the Third World emerge with a national bourgeoisie capable of competing with the comprador bourgeois class fraction for hegemony within the power bloc of colonial politics and capable of allying with the popular classes in an anti-imperialist alliance.

However, the national bourgeoisie in the Third World never approaches a degree of autonomy comparable to that of its counterpart in the imperialist metropolises since its economic base develops within limits set by the international division of labor and dependent development. Thus from the moment of national independence, if not before, this class fraction is hardly distinguishable from a domestic bourgeoisie. Still, the emergence of a domestic bourgeoisie in the periphery is a development of major significance, and not only because it is a step up from comprador status. In conjunction with the transformation of the national bourgeoisie into a domestic bourgeoisie in the First World, the transition from a predominantly national to a predominantly international capitalist mode of production has clearly initiated a process of leveling and integration whose final outcome may be the elimination of the core-periphery distinction altogether.

It is precisely this convergence that justifies Poulantzas's claim that the principal contradiction within the imperialist chain is always between the bourgeoisie as a whole and the working class as a whole. The particular contradictions within the dominant classes and fractions always depend on this principal contradiction as do particular relations of exploitation between capital and any given segment of the working class. Accumulation crises are the direct expression of the ongoing struggles of the working class against exploitation, while economic re-

structuring and its political aftershocks are, in the last instance, simply the response by the bourgeoisie to the struggles of the working class. However much it offends delicate postmodern, post-Marxist sensibilities, Poulantzas is only stating the obvious in reminding us that "the extended reproduction of capital is nothing other than the class struggle, the contradictions within the dominant classes and fractions being only the effects, within the power bloc, of the principal contradiction" (Poulantzas 1975, 107).

If Poulantzas is to be faulted, I believe it is for failing to recognize a relative decline in the power of the United States and for continuing to interpret the internationalization and internalization of monopoly capitalism in the context of a single dominant state. Poulantzas,

writing in the seventies, was understandably impressed with the internalization of American hegemony in Western Europe and the global predominance of American capital in the internationalization process. Without attempting to decide the question of American decline here (that is, without attempting to distinguish the current problems of the United States as a national social formation from the massive power of American-based international capital and the enormous significance of the American market for the global capitalist economy), I would suggest that where Poulantzas sees the ongoing predominance of the United States as a *nation*, it might better speak of the predominance of multinational capital increasingly removed from national identifications and constraints. Such a formulation, it seems to me, is more consistent with Poulantzas's own analysis of global integration and the internationalization of social classes.

This said, Poulantzas is by no means incorrect to continue to insist on the crucial significance of the nation-state for contemporary capitalism. The internationalization of monopoly capital and its political internalization do not mean that the nation-state has been superseded, suppressed, or bypassed. The process of internationalization has hitherto been effected under the dominance of capital still associated with a definite national base, and the national state remains, despite the considerable degree of regional restructuring that is occurring, the relevant unit of both international and domestic politics. The national state is not merely a tool or instrument of the dominant classes to be manipulated at will, nor is the relationship between economic internationalization and political internalization such that every step toward a global economy necessitates a parallel step toward political "supranationalization." Indeed, Poulantzas himself explains why this is not the case.

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By including the political and institutional forms of nation-states in systems of interconnections no longer confined to the play of external and mutual pressures among juxtaposed states and capitals, Poulantzas demonstrates how the global economy has dramatically affected these forms. His concepts of a domestic bourgeoisie and induced representation explain how the power bloc and political scene are restructured in such a way that the states themselves take charge of the interests of the now dominant imperialist capital and its development within the national social formation. The process of internalization is not without its own contradictions, however, and it is to these that we now turn.

Monopoly Capitalism and the Interventionist State

The development of monopoly capitalism demands more and more government intervention in the interests of capital. The growing importance of the state is considered so significant by Poulantzas that he describes the shift from a "nightwatchman" to an "interventionist" state as nothing less than a "displacement of dominance" from the economic to the political instance—a profoundly misleading statement since control over the means of production, that is, the function of economic ownership, remains firmly within the economic apparatuses—and as the definitive structural distinction between competitive and monopoly capitalism. Of course, the nightwatchman state of classical liberalism was a capitalist state, and despite the formal separation of the political and economic instances characteristic of competitive capitalism, it performed significant economic functions, among them taxation, factory legislation, customs duties, and the construction of economic infrastructure such as railways. "The capitalist separation of state and economy," Poulantzas maintains, "was never anything other than the

specifically capitalist form of the state's presence in the relations of production" (Poulantzas 1978, 167). Still, the role of the liberal state was restricted largely to reproducing the general conditions of the production of surplus value, enforcing the rights of property and the "freedom" to sell labor power, and providing representative government for and by the propertied classes.

With the emergence of monopoly capitalism, however, the liberal nightwatchman state becomes economically and politically dysfunctional. Mass participation in politics becomes unavoidable for regimes seeking social stability, and popular-democratic institutions provide

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at least a formal veneer of social legitimacy for rapid, state-promoted capitalist industrialization. The emergence of mammoth industrial enterprises employing intensive production techniques, involving the integration of expensive and complex production units and seeking international markets and materials as well as economic protection and stability at home, means increasing intervention of the state in the process of capitalist accumulation. With the development of Fordism, the interventionist state becomes actively involved in the extended reproduction of capitalism as a "way of life" with a concomitant increase in state intervention at all levels of social existence. The Keynesian welfare state, in other words, evolves directly with the needs of monopoly capital for a Fordist regime of accumulation that coordinates mass production and mass consumption under conditions of social and economic stability.

The internationalization of monopoly capital demands ever-increasing government intervention in the interests of capital, thereby threatening to undermine the formal "independence" of the state from the economy. International capital complicates the role of the interventionist state by rendering internal or "national" relations of domination and dependency that extend across the national boundaries of even the advanced industrial countries. State power, by definition national, no longer corresponds to a capitalist mode of production that has become international in scope, yet the interventionist state remains, now more than ever, necessary for capitalism. The interventionist state must organize the domination of monopoly capital over other modes and forms of production not only nationally, as before, but internationally as well. At the same time, it must manage domestic economic and political contradictions to facilitate the expanded reproduction of monopoly capital and increasingly intervene directly in the economy to manage crises and use public funds to maintain the valorization of capital at an acceptable level.¹⁰⁰

The induced reproduction of an international mode of production by means of national political structures introduces an entirely new set of contradictions between the fractions of domestic monopoly capital and imperialist capital, contradictions that must be added to those already existing between domestic monopoly and non-monopoly capital and the various fractions of both. "The national state thus intervenes, in its role as organizer of hegemony, in a domestic field already structured by inter-imperialist contradictions and in which contradictions between the dominant fractions within its social formation are already

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internationalized" (Poulantzas 1975, 74-75). The problem of keeping the contradictions of this new articulation in check, however, devolves on the previously existing apparatus of the nation-

state, which appears increasingly obsolescent and incapable of managing forces that are beyond its control. The configuration of the power bloc is scarcely located at the national level anymore. Foreign capital does not participate directly as a relatively autonomous social force in the power bloc, yet its presence is overwhelmingly felt via restructured financial markets, deindustrialization, migrations of labor and capital, fiscal crises of government at all levels, increasing regional and urban competition for scarce investments, and above all, in the destruction of the Fordist compromise between labor and capital.

The internalization of the new global mode of production has profound consequences for the political place and function of the capitalist nation-state, consequences made dramatically clear by the accumulation crisis of Fordism and the global economic restructuring it has triggered. As Poulantzas predicted, the contemporary capitalist state is increasingly caught up in growing contradictions between international and national developments. On the one hand, as a class state organizing and reproducing the domination of the bourgeoisie, the capitalist state finds itself intervening more often and more directly in the interests of international capital (as reflected through the interests of its own domestic bourgeoisie and their place in the international division of labor). On the other hand, as a popular-democratic state, it must act in the interest of "the people" as a whole, a task it is increasingly unable to perform because of international economic pressures over which it has little or no control. The result is a new "crisis of democracy" whose resolution Poulantzas fears may lead away from democratic participation, perhaps even representation, toward a more authoritarian, pseudo-democratic regime increasingly dominated by managerial technocracy and plebiscitary politics. The shift from the Fordist to the neo-conservative state in the eighties is scarcely reassuring in this regard.

The interventionist state, whether Fordist-Keynesian or neo-conservative, remains a class state. "The task of the state is to maintain the unity and cohesion of a social formation divided into classes, and it focuses and epitomizes the class contradictions of the whole social formation in such a way as to sanction and legitimize the interests of the dominant classes and fractions as against the other classes of the formation, in a context of world class contradictions" (Poulantzas 1975,

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78). However, the function of unity and cohesion is especially difficult (yet all the more necessary) given the crisis of Fordism and the international, national, regional, and urban restructuring it has set in motion. The ideological impact of the restructuring, for example, is truly staggering. Poulantzas insists that the internationalization of capitalism is transforming our very concepts of time and space. "Transformations of the spatio-temporal matrices," he points out, "refer to the materiality of the social division of labor, of the structure of the state, and of the practices and techniques of capitalist economic, political and ideological power; they are the *real substratum* of mythical, religious, philosophical or 'experiential' representations of space-time" (Poulantzas 1978, 26). Through technological developments in communication and transportation, capitalism is not only creating a global mode of production and an international class struggle but is also creating, simultaneously, a globally homogenized commodity culture and a deep nostalgia for a vanishing individuality. Such developments have potentially serious political implications and require unprecedented intervention by the state in the field of ideological practice as well as in the economy.

The national interventionist state persists precisely because it is neither neutral nor

technical. It is the nexus where repressive and ideological power is centered, and it is inconceivable to Poulantzas that its economic and ideological functions could be delegated to a supranational or super-state apparatus without destroying the illusion of representative government which sanctions and legitimizes the entire process. Of course, the persistence of the nation-state and the continuing predominance of politics must not be misconstrued as incompatible with the power of international capital, much less antagonistic to it. The national state has no power of its own; it is assigned a place and function by what is now an international mode of production. The growing power of both the state and multinational capital is perfectly consistent with the extension and reproduction of capitalism. Furthermore, the neo-conservative revolt against "big government" during the eighties, which Poulantzas did not live to see, in no way signifies a reduction in the power of the state. Far from an attack on state power per se, the Reagan-Thatcher effort to "roll back the state" involved a massive application of state power against Fordism, Keynesianism, and the welfare system. Privatization and deregulation are real enough, but they proceed hand in hand with undiminished government intervention directed, as Poulantzas would have expected, by the exigencies of capitalist accumulation and in the interests of international capital. The

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interventionist state is not withering away: it is, like capitalism itself, restructuring.

The interventionist state, whether Fordist or neo-conservative, retains its relative autonomy vis-à-vis monopoly capital. Poulantzas rejects the notion that a "fusion" of the state and monopoly capital is taking place. The state, he argues, takes responsibility for the interests of monopoly capital as a whole, but it does not concretely identify itself with any one of its components. Monopoly capital is the dominant class fraction; but it is the bourgeoisie as a whole that is the dominant class. The state serves the long-term interests of the hegemonic fraction, but only in the context of the reproduction of capital as a whole. "Today as always the state plays the role of political unifier of the power bloc and political organizer of the hegemony of monopoly capital within the power bloc which is made up of several fractions of the bourgeois class and divided by internal contradictions. The relation between the state and the monopolies today is no more one of identification and fusion than was the case in the past with other capitalist fractions. The state rather takes special responsibility for the interest of the hegemonic fraction, monopoly capital, in so far as this fraction holds a leading position in the power bloc, as its interests are erected into the political interest of capital as a whole vis-à-vis the dominated classes" (Poulantzas 1975, 157).

The Crisis of Democracy and Authoritarian Statism

In retrospect, Poulantzas was one of a handful of commentators on the Left to grasp how profoundly the internationalization of capitalism was undermining the stability of the national Fordist-Keynesian state. Although he did not provide an economic counterpart to his masterful explanation of the political aspects of the crisis—for that one has to turn to Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* (1975)—no one understood sooner or better the structural transformations that the global economy has wrought on the class structure and state apparatuses of the advanced capitalist social formations. Although Poulantzas cannot be said to have foreseen the magnitude of the crisis of Fordism, he certainly grasped the crisis of "democracy" that it produced and the

contours of the right-wing reaction by which the crisis was to be "resolved." Although his views were formulated before the triumph of Reaganism and Thatcherism, it remains instructive to compare the drift toward "au-

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thoritarian statism," which Poulantzas feared, with what has in fact come to pass, a regime that has been aptly described as "authoritarian populism."¹³ The expression "crisis of democracy" has a bit of a hollow ring in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism. However, Poulantzas gives the expression a distinct twist and enduring theoretical substance by defining it functionally, by linking the contradictions of democracy as a structured political regime to those of capitalism as an expanding, imperialist mode of production. Furthermore, he gives it enduring political substance by virtue of his rigorous, realistic, some would say pessimistic assessment of the conditions for political class struggle.

Neo-conservatism has indubitably exacerbated the inherent contradiction between domination and execution within the capitalist state. Whatever else the attack on Fordism means, it entails an intensification of the economic activity of the state, which must manage, as best it can, the chaos created by internationalization. The neo-conservative state is still interventionist and still at the very heart of the reproduction of international capital, so much so, in fact, that it is hard to argue with Poulantzas's assessment that "the totality of the operations of the state are currently being reorganized in relation to its economic role" (Poulantzas 1978, 168). Similarly, Poulantzas is not wrong to contend that a political crisis has emerged that strains the structural autonomy of the capitalist state and that "certain major contradictions within the state are now located between its economic role and its role in maintaining order and organizing consent" (Poulantzas 1978, 168). The undiminished thrust toward privatization and deregulation, the reduction of government funding for social services, and the ongoing struggle against organized labor make it increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction of the representative character of the interventionist state. The decreasing separation between the state and the economy revealed by such interventions has resulted in an increasingly politicized attitude toward state activity. "The state has thus been transformed," Poulantzas argues, "from a buffer or safety valve on economic crises into a sounding-box for the reproduction of crises of social relations. . . . The state's subordination to the logic of monopoly capitalist reproduction, which is thus experienced as 'its' inability to respond to the needs of the masses, has never been more flagrant than it is at a time like the present, when the state is intervening in all domains in which these needs present themselves" (Poulantzas 1975, 172).

Poulantzas's contention that the growing contradiction between the state's functions of domination (organizing the hegemony of the power

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bloc) and representation (legitimizing the regime by means of popular-democratic forms responsive to "the people") constitutes a structural crisis, a "crisis of democracy," expresses more or less adequately the political aspects of the crisis of Fordism by the mid-seventies. According to Poulantzas, the state's response to these tensions at the very source of its power follows an authoritarian pattern; state control over socio-economic life intensifies and combines with a

relative decline of the institutions of political democracy. Within the state apparatuses the bureaucracy-executive gains at the expense of the parliamentary party system, and the decline of parliament parallels a "loosening of ties of representation" between the power bloc and political parties and between the legislative and executive apparatuses as well.

New plebiscitary and authoritarian political forms, which Poulantzas calls "dominant mass parties," subtly replace the classical parliamentary system and legal-formal bureaucracy. These organizations are characterized by their subservience to the executive, and within the state apparatus their major function is to "unify or homogenize the state administration; to control and propel (in the direction of general government policy) the cohesiveness of its various branches and sub-apparatuses" (Poulantzas 1978, 233). Simultaneously, new mechanisms, deployable by the executive alone (media manipulation and foreign policy adventures), displace the "interest-aggregatory" functions of older parliamentary parties. The dominant mass parties operate as transmission belts of the state ideology to the popular masses and as a means of manipulating consent from the electorate through plebiscitary tactics. The sum total of all these developments—state intervention in the economy, crisis of democracy, dominant mass parties—represents a shift, within the limits defining its relative autonomy, of the capitalist state from its democratic toward its authoritarian pole.

Such a political regime, which Poulantzas calls "authoritarian statism," attempts to preserve the formal separation of the political and the economic by progressively undermining its content. This aim is accomplished by several devices: "greater exclusion of the masses from the centers of political decision-making; widening of the distance between citizens and the state apparatus, just when the state is invading the life of society as a whole; an unprecedented degree of state centralism; increased attempts to regiment the masses through 'participation' schemes; in essence, therefore, a sharpening of the authoritarian character of political mechanisms" (Poulantzas 1978, 238). However, because the state remains formally separate from the private core of eco-

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conomic power, its policies cannot really touch the causes of the conflicts that it faces. Thus Poulantzas sees the state caught in a trap largely of its own making: "from now on the state can go neither forwards nor backwards. . . . At one and the same time, it is driven to do both too much (crisis-inducing intervention) and too little (being unable to affect the deep causes of crises). The state is constantly oscillating between the two terms of the alternative: withdraw and/or get further involved. It is not an all powerful state . . . but rather a state with its back to the wall and its front poised before a ditch" (Poulantzas 1978, 191).

This, the more gloomy side of Poulantzas's prognosis, corresponds all too closely to the actual course of political restructuring during the eighties. Unfortunately, the more optimistic possibilities he describes have as yet failed to materialize. Poulantzas had hoped that the "crisis of democracy" created by the internationalization of monopoly capitalism might create new, and not necessarily unfavorable, conditions for the political class struggle. Because the class biases of the interventionist state are being more and more exposed, Poulantzas felt that its policies would become politicized and that this increasing political antagonism might weaken rather than strengthen the hegemony of capital. He had hoped that the economic policies of the state might bring into question its popular support, in particular the political alliance between the capitalist bourgeoisie and the "white-collar" middle class. Such a division, Poulantzas realized, would deal

an incalculable blow to the legitimacy of the capitalist state and would also have cardinal significance for the state apparatuses themselves by polarizing the higher and subaltern layers of the bureaucratic administration.

However, Poulantzas, as the author of a brilliant analysis of fascism, was very much aware of the authoritarian potential of middle-class populism in the context of economic and political crisis. His thoroughly justified fear of plebiscitary politics was based on a profound assessment of the ideological gulf that separates the middle class (which Poulantzas defines, rather controversially, as a class fraction of the petty bourgeoisie)^[12] from the working class and a grim recognition of the success with which Fordism deepened the structural roots of bourgeois hegemony. By creating and coordinating mass consumption and by directing the economy by means of Keynesian neo-corporatist policies, the Fordist state integrated and de-politicized labor; by internationalizing the class struggle and globalizing the capitalist mode of production, it rendered a national political struggle against the hegemony of multinational capitalism irrelevant.

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Poulantzas exposed with uncompromising integrity the structural developments that created the crisis of Fordism and determined the course the crisis would take. Had he lived, he would hardly have been surprised by the plebiscitary politics of the New Right, which have belied his hopes and substantiated his fears. Far from becoming discouraged with the blatant class bias of the capitalist state, the middle class has torn the humanitarian veil from the face of the state in order to identify with it more strongly than ever. Faced with a traumatic loss of economic security and objectively declining life chances, the middle class has reacted savagely, not against the internationalization of capitalism, the real source of the problem, or even against the hegemony of monopoly capital, whose interest the neo-conservative state serves just as assiduously as its Fordist predecessor did, but rather against the working-class majority and their real or imagined political and ideological allies. In the eighties the middle and lower middle classes have emulated their European predecessors of the twenties and thirties and conducted a political and ideological pogrom against all classes and class fractions beneath themselves. If the result is not quite fascism, the family resemblance is unmistakable.

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Notes

Introductory Conclusion

1. Among the book-length surveys, I recommend Karsz 1974 (excellent for placing the whole range of Althusser's writings in the context of his later emphasis on class struggle); Callinicos 1976 (excellent on structural causality, weak on and hostile to Althusser's concepts of philosophy, science, and ideology); Benton 1984 (a judicious overview of Structural Marxism with a good discussion of Althusser and his critics); and Elliott 1987 (solid account of Althusser's theory in light of his politics, but occasionally reducing the former to the latter). Among the critiques, Rancière 1974 remains worth reading, as do Hirst 1979 and A. Glucksmann 1978. E. P. Thompson 1978 is as uninformed as it is hostile, but it has achieved something of a cult status and thus a life of its own. See also Vincent et al. 1974. For a full bibliography of Althusser's publications, see Elliott 1987. [\[BACK\]](#)

2. For Derrida's reflections on Marxism, history, and Althusser, see Derrida 1981; for an attempt to integrate Marxism and deconstruction, see Ryan 1982. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis (1977) provide a first-rate synthesis of Althusserian, Lacanian, and semiological perspectives (from Barthes to Kristeva). Juliet Mitchell (1974) brings Althusser and Lacan to bear on the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis; see also Barratt 1980. Callinicos 1982 contains an excellent account of Deleuze and Foucault from a perspective informed by Althusser. Pierre Vilar (1973), a member of *Annales*, has written a lengthy article on Althusser that I discuss in chapter 1, note 1; see also D'Amico 1973. From the camp of the Habermasians, attempts to assess Althusser have been disappointing: Schmidt 1981 is superficial; John Thompson 1984 is much broader and more detailed, but stubbornly obtuse with respect to the explanatory power of the concepts he is attempting to critique. Perry Anderson (1980)

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responds to E. P. Thompson's polemic against Althusser; see also Nield and Seed 1979 and Benton 1984. [\[BACK\]](#)

3. The literature on Western Marxism is overwhelming. As a very selective list for those seeking a comprehensive introduction to the major figures and currents, I recommend the following works: Jay 1984; P. Anderson 1976a; Howard and Klare 1972; Poster 1975 (an invaluable account of French

developments); Stedman Jones et al. 1978; D. Harvey 1982; and Carnoy 1984. For classic Western Marxist interpretations of Marx and Marxism, see Lichtheim 1965; Avineri 1968; and Gouldner 1982. For an excellent Structural Marxist account, see Therborn 1976. [BACK]

4. For Althusser's increasing frustration with the Party bureaucracy throughout the seventies, see Althusser 1978a; see also Althusser 1978 and 1977. Althusser's letters on the events of May 1968 may be found in Maccocchi 1973. Althusser must be seen as seeking a "third way" on the question of party reform, opposing both the existing Stalinist organization, which subordinated mass initiative and participation to the interests of the Party apparatus, and the conversion of the PCF into a reformist, parliamentary party. Rancière 1974 and Elliott 1987 are valuable on Althusser's political evolution.

There was a nuanced opposition within the Althusserian camp between more Leninist and more Gramscian views expressed with respect to the elimination, in 1976, of the slogan "dictatorship of the proletariat" from party canon. Etienne Balibar (1977) argued against elimination on the grounds that, whatever its Stalinist perversions, the term focused political attention on the class nature of existing parliamentary democracy and on the problems of the transition to socialism—problems that, in Balibar's view, were being dangerously ignored by the PCF as it blindly pursued a strategy of alliance with the Socialists. Balibar's arguments are not superficial; they stress important differences between capitalist democracy, in which politics is controlled by the wealthy, and socialist democracy, in which the people would actually have power. Balibar is concerned, rightly enough, that the role of the state as an instrument of class struggle during the transitional period between capitalism and communism not be forgotten. The post-revolutionary state must not only smash the old elitist institutions but actively organize and promote new popular democratic forms. However, Balibar remains caught up in a Leninist view of state power and Lenin's untoward confidence in the capacity of the post-revolutionary state to resolve the problems of pre-revolutionary society. The potential authoritarian dangers of Balibar's faith in the primacy of revolution are foremost in the mind of Nicos Poulantzas (1978). In contrast to Balibar (and many other Althusserians), Poulantzas took a very critical stance toward the PCF. He was a strong defender of Eurocommunism and fully endorsed the rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat. From a Gramscian perspective, Poulantzas was concerned with pre-revolutionary rather than post-revolutionary events and with ensuring the democratic nature of post-revolutionary society—preparing for democratic socialism through ideological and political struggles whose purpose is not merely to promote a revolutionary crisis but to extend and preserve existing political liberties as well.

The political differences between the Leninist and Gramscian orientations

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within the Structural Marxist camp with regard to Eurocommunism and reform within the PCF are outlined cogently in Benton 1984. A useful triangulation on Eurocommunism is obtained from Mandel 1978 (a Trotskyist critique); Claudin 1978 (a Left-Eurocommunist perspective); and Boggs 1982 (a post-Marxist account). For the French context and the PCF, see Ross 1982 and Jenson and Ross 1984. Debates within the PCF are surveyed in Kelly 1982 and Molina and Vargas 1978. For events of the eighties, see Ambler 1985; Cerney and Schain 1985; Ross and Jenson 1988; and Singer 1988. [BACK]

5. For critical discussions of the neo-liberals, see Callinicos 1988; Tucker 1980; and Levine 1988. For Rawls, see Buchanan 1982; for a persuasive critique of Habermas, see Roderick 1986. I discuss Foucault and Deleuze in chapter 4; see also Callinicos 1982; and Resch 1989. Stojanovich 1976 remains a perceptive critical introduction to the *Annales* school. The disparate approaches of anthropologists Victor Turner, who is interested in the disruptive gaps between functionally ordered symbolic systems, and Clifford Geertz, a Parsonian disciple defending the primacy and unity of the cultural-symbolic, are straightforwardly presented in their own collected essays (Geertz 1973; Turner 1974). Baudrillard may be sampled in his selected writings (Baudrillard 1988); see also Douglas Kellner's thoughtful study of Baudrillard (Kellner 1989). [BACK]

6. My thinking on postmodernism has been inspired by the seminal essays of Fredric Jameson (1984; 1984a; 1987) and by David Harvey's brilliant and comprehensive study (Harvey 1989). Both Jameson and Harvey focus on the political economy of postmodernity, and Harvey, in particular, does a thorough job of relating the cultural logic of postmodernism to the dissolution of national Fordist modes of production and the globalization of capitalism. For the inability of dissident postmodernism to comprehend its own existence, see Soja 1989 (and my review essay, Resch 1992). For cultural-aesthetic discussions of postmodernism, see Eagleton 1986; Foster 1983; Huyssen 1986; Krauss 1985; McHale 1987; Owens 1980; and Ulmer 1985. [BACK]

7. The class position of the professional middle class-new petty bourgeoisie is best developed, in my opinion, in Erik Olin Wright's reformulation of the concept of social class (Wright 1985; see also Wright et al. 1989). Wright's work has been influenced by Poulantzas and by the "labor theory of exploitation" developed by John Roemer (1986; 1988). Unlike his fellow "analytical" Marxist, Jon Elster, Roemer has contributed positively to the development of Marxist social theory through the use of game theory and mathematical model building. However, his contribution remains limited by its ahistorical and individualist assumptions regarding rationality. Ultimately Roemer is unwilling or unable to build the historical-intransitive dimension into his models—neither the ideological complexity of social subjectivity and habitus nor the matrix effect of the structured whole on the effectivity of individual structures. The analytical Marxists oscillate between an interesting critique of Marxist concepts of history and a neo-positivist attempt to subordinate the science of history to philosophy, specifically to certain premises of empiricist philosophy of science, namely, nominalism and methodological individualism. This move may permit a certain radicalism; Roemer, for example, takes neo-positivist methods

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and attempts to turn them against conservatives. More representatively, Jon Elster (1985) uses methodological individualism and nominalist empiricism to attack Marxism and to defend a philosophical position virtually indistinguishable from neo-liberalism. For a critical discussion of analytical Marxism see Ware and Nielson 1989; Callinicos 1989; and Levine, Sober, and Wright 1987.

Poulantzas 1975 explains why the "new petty bourgeoisie" of professionals and managers should be viewed as an ally of capital, not the working class (see chapter 6, note 12). The alternative, post-Marxist concept of the "professional middle class" is indebted to the opposite notion, fundamentally wrongheaded in my view, that because professionals are not owners of the corporations they manage they are somehow opposed to capitalism and somehow undermining the power of the capitalist class that does own or effectively own these corporations. Ultimately, the autonomy of the professional middle class is posited in order to refute the Marxist view of economic determination and to justify the "end of ideology" ideology of post-industrial or post-capitalist society. This technocratic view of a "managerial revolution" has a long history, but it is perhaps most succinctly stated in Gouldner 1979 and thoroughly discussed in Walker 1979, a collection of essays on the concept of the professional middle class. The illusion of professional middle-class independence and anti-capitalism are finally succumbing to reality, however; see Barbara Ehrenreich's stimulating account of the inner life of the American middle class during the eighties (Ehrenreich 1990). Despite her many profound insights, Ehrenreich still cannot (or will not) see capitalism as determining the struggle between liberals and conservatives within the professional middle classes, a struggle she stubbornly persists in viewing as autonomous. [BACK]

8. My views of the structural dynamics of *perestroika* have been informed by Post and Wright 1989; Lane 1990; Mandel 1989; Kerblay 1989; Lewin 1988; and Alec Nove 1983. Nove's pragmatic attempt to define a "feasible" market socialism that might avoid the mistakes of Bolshevik-type economies without abandoning the goal of socialism or leaping beyond the objective possibilities of the present conjuncture should be read in conjunction with Carens 1981 and Miller 1989. Nove's ideas have been criticized in Mandel 1986 and 1988. Nove replies to Mandel's first article in Nove 1987; see also Elson 198. [BACK]

9. The totalitarian school of Soviet studies has concerned itself almost exclusively with moral condemnation, body counts, and a concept of party power and oppression detached from any social cause or explanation. It was never much interested in the class forces at work in the Russian Revolution or in the popular class struggles and political difficulties that transformed Bolshevism from a dictatorship of the proletariat to a dictatorship over the proletariat. Even Trotsky's interpretation of the "revolution betrayed" tends to ignore class analysis in favor of an explanation based on the "evil genius" of Stalin and a totalitarian conception of party power. Structural Marxists offer a more complex explanation emphasizing first the Stalin deviation, which substituted the development of the productive forces for the development of popular democracy, and second the class struggles within the Soviet Union, which ended in the triumph of a new technocratic ruling class, the state bourgeoisie (see Althusser 1976, 78-93; and Bettelheim 1983; 1982; 1978; 1976). These efforts paral-

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leled those of revisionist Anglo-American scholars seeking finally to break free from the dogmas of totalitarianism. For some recent fruits of this revisionism, see Fitzpatrick 1982; Getty 1985; Viola 1987; and Kurumiya 1988. These works build, of course, on the monumental achievement of the original and long-isolated revisionist E. H. Carr, who has lucidly condensed the results of his ten-volume *History of Soviet Russia* in Carr 1979. [BACK]

10. My emphasis on the conjunction of realism and formalism in modernist culture is indebted to John Berger (1985), who argues brilliantly the thesis that cubism represents the truly original component of modernism and a new "syntax" for the modern experience. My distinction between realist modernism of the Left and the irrationalist and elitist movements of the Right may seem untenable at first, but I call the reader's attention to Peter Bürger's provocative attempt to define the avant-garde in terms of the social status and function of art (Bürger 1984) and John Willett's fine survey of the politics of modernism from 1917 to 1933 (Willett 1978) in support of my position. The politics of art cannot, in any case, be read off from formal criteria alone, a fact that postmodernists carefully avoid in their ahistorical condemnation of the failures of "high modernism" and their tendency to obscure profound differences in the social and political context of European art during the interwar years and the Cold War. For the aesthetic Right, see Jameson 1979; Kaplan 1986; and Herf 1984. And for the capitalist assimilation and domestication of modernism after World War II, see Guilbaut 1983 and Allen 1983. For a more inclusive conception of modernism than the one defended here, see Calinescu 1987; and for the sweeping changes in technology and

culture that created new modes of understanding and experiencing time and space between 1880 and World War I, see Kern 1983. [\[BACK\]](#)

11. For the social and political context of the scientific revolution and its philosophical and religious consequences, the works of James R. Jacob and Margaret C. Jacob are innovative as well as enlightening; for a general survey of the historical process by which scientific knowledge became an integral part of Western culture and a convenient synthesis of their approach, see Margaret Jacob (1988). [\[BACK\]](#)

12. For useful accounts of Structuralism, see Hawkes 1977; Jameson 1972; Culler 1975; Coward and Ellis 1977; and Merquior 1986. For poststructuralism and the broader philosophical and literary context, see Anderson 1984; Dews 1987; Descombes 1980; Eagleton 1983; Lentricchia 1980; and Gasché 1986 (the best study of Derrida and his philosophical project). [\[BACK\]](#)

13. This is the fatal flaw of post-Marxists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's concept of "democratic revolution" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Laclau and Mouffe define political and ideological discourses as free-floating, autonomous systems unrelated to economic determination and class positions and defend a neo-Crocean view of history as the "story of liberty" driven by a desire for democracy inherent in human nature and independent of social determinations. The concept of "democratic revolution" is, for Laclau and Mouffe, a Sorelian myth that can and should be constructed "autonomously" by ideological and political means without reference to the economy or social classes. Such an irrationalist view of discourse is not only unable to explain why it is

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we have no democracy (in the only meaningful sense of the word: popular control over the means of production and its distribution) but is also unable to move beyond the level of postmodern populist sloganizing or even to begin to articulate the material conditions for an alternative vision. Populism, Laclau argues in an earlier book (Laclau 1977), is a "popular-democratic" discourse that pits the interests of "the people" against those of the "power bloc" without reference to concepts of class. However, because Laclau stubbornly rejects the notion that political practice is assigned its "relatively autonomous" place and function by the matrix effect of the mode of production (a position Laclau dismisses as "reductionism"), he cannot accept the fact that the categories of populist discourse are determined, in the last instance, by economic structures and relations. Populism is always irrationalist insofar as class struggle is never explicitly present in populist discourse but rather masked behind collective political categories such as "the people." But populist irrationalism may be grasped rationally insofar as populist discourse is an indirect effect of economic class determinations refracted through ideological and political structures.

Populisms, democratic or otherwise, are politically unstable (and dangerous) precisely because they lack the very grasp of economic determination and class power that Laclau and Mouffe seek to replace with vulgar pluralism, relativism, and individualism. As Ellen Meiksins Wood points out (Wood 1986), Laclau and Mouffe cannot tell us who, in particular, might want or need democracy, whether some kinds of people might want or need more—or different aspects—than others do, how a social force capable of bringing it about might come into being, or indeed why there should be any difficulty or conflict about it. That we need a new, hopeful vision of democratic socialism is undeniable; that we will achieve it by a post-Marxist, postmodern lobotomy performed on the critical faculty of social theory is ludicrous.

Laclau and Mouffe, along with Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst, and others, make up a post-Althusserian variant of post-Marxist postmodernism that has rejected Structural Marxist concepts of structural causality, relative autonomy, and social class in order to embrace political voluntarism and philosophical irrationalism (see my discussion of Hindess and Hirst in chapter 1). The most thorough-going critic of the post-Althusserians and their concept of democracy is Ellen Meiksins Wood (1986). For a brief, lucid, and devastating critique of representative democracy under capitalism, see Macpherson 1977 and 1973; see also the powerful arguments for socialism put forward by Levine (1988; and 1987); Miller 1990; and for equality put forward by Baker (1987). [\[BACK\]](#)

Chapter 1 Structural Causality, Contradiction, and Social Formations

1. The reception of Althusser's ideas within the historical profession has frequently been negative and ill informed. See E. P. Thompson's self-indulgent polemic (Thompson 1978) for an unfortunately representative example. Thompson's diatribe should be read along with Perry Anderson's patient rejoinder (Anderson 1980). It is ironic, to say the least, that Thompson's own formidable historical research can be effectively marshaled against his theoretical humanist philosophy of history—and in support of the very Althusserian con-

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cepts that Thompson so rabidly condemns (see Anderson's examples, 31-49, 69-71). For a comparison of the Thompsonian and Althusserian schools, see Nield and Seed 1979. Hirst 1979a is a thorough critique of Thompson from within the post-Althusserian camp; a defense of Thompson's conception of class consciousness is offered in Wood 1982. For a critique of the rejection of class struggle by post-Marxist historians, see Resch 1989a.

Also of interest is the important article by Pierre Vilar (1973), one of the few Marxist historians currently working within the *Annales* school. Vilar's article is disappointing, however, because it engages in the dubious tactic of arguing against Althusser from a position that is nebulous and largely unspecified, a "black box" that Vilar passes off as somehow self-evidently *real* history. One gets the feeling that included among Vilar's unspoken premises are many that he would rather not put forward openly, perhaps because Althusser so devastatingly criticized them. In addition, Vilar's interpretations of Althusser's ideas are often dubious. I will confine myself to the central section of Vilar's essay, where he defends Ernest Labrousse and Fernand Braudel and their usage of historical time from Althusser's criticism. Althusser's "criticism" is largely a positive acknowledgment of the fact that these historians were beginning to observe differential temporalities in history. He is critical, however, of the fact "that they do not pose them explicitly as a function of the structure of the whole" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 96). This is in fact the case. The three economic cycles put forward by Labrousse in his famous study of the French Revolution are undoubtedly important structural factors. There is nothing in them that Althusser would have any quarrel with, although this is implied by Vilar's misreading of Althusser's concept of differential time. The problem, for Althusser, is not so much what Labrousse has demonstrated but simply that he doesn't go far enough, that he fails to situate his three differential times in relation to the overall structure in dominance within which they occur. It is not that such an extension is impossible or even that Labrousse's work is not an important initial step in achieving such a task. It is the fact that he doesn't do it that constitutes the problem, which is all Althusser ever said. Braudel's monumental work on the Mediterranean region has often been faulted even by traditional historians on similar grounds: its three strata never achieve any significant synthesis into a structure. For further discussion of these matters, see Stoianovich 1976; and for a comparison of the Althusserians and the *Annales*, see D'Amico 1973. [\[BACK\]](#)

2. Perry Anderson points out that the term *social formation* marks a space between the term *society*, the standard concept of classical sociology, and the Marxist concept of *mode of production*. The former term is unsatisfactory because it suggests a coherence and unity that reduces social contradictions to "dysfunctions" from functional norms, while the latter term has been too often used to justify the reduction of social contradictions to reflections of economic phenomena, a tendency that ignores the relative autonomy not only of other social practices but also of the economy as well; see P. Anderson 1980, 67. For a masterful comparative account of the development of classical sociology and historical materialism from a Structural Marxist perspective, see Therborn 1976. [\[BACK\]](#)

3. See P. Anderson 1976a, 64-66; Patton 1978; and Elliott 1987. These

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misunderstandings persist despite Althusser's own comments on his relation to Spinoza (Althusser 1976, 132-41, 187-93) and, in the case of Elliott's more recent book, Macherey 1979. My own understanding of Spinoza is indebted to Hampshire 1987 and Curley 1988, as well as Macherey's interesting, if controversial, interpretation. [\[BACK\]](#)

4. This view originates with A. Glucksmann 1978; see esp. 286-90. [\[BACK\]](#)

5. Lenin (1975, 648-51) introduces the phrase "unity of opposites" but fails to distinguish sufficiently between the Hegelian term *identity* and the Marxist concept of *unity*. Althusser defines the "identity of differences" in terms of uneven development, an anti-Hegelian conception shared by Godelier (1972, 86-92) who also rejects the internality of contradictions in favor of their externality—contradictions between rather than within structures. [\[BACK\]](#)

6. The term *overdetermination* is, of course, borrowed from psychoanalysis. Freud uses it to express the fact that unconscious formations can be attributed to a plurality of determining factors. For Freud, the term has two senses: first, it indicates that the formation in question is a result of several causes, since one alone is not sufficient to account for it; second, it expresses the fact that the multiplicity of unconscious elements that make up a formation may be organized in different meaningful sequences, each having its own specific coherence at a particular level of interpretation. Althusser was "not particularly taken by this term overdetermination" but used it "in the absence of anything better" (Althusser 1969, 101). Presumably, Althusser was attracted by Freud's effort to avoid extremes of reductionism and pluralism in his analysis of the unconscious and the drives. For a brief comparison of Althusserian concepts and those of Freud, see Miriam Glucksmann 1974, 99-103. Unfortunately, Glucksmann fails to consider the work of Jacques Lacan and its important influence on certain of Althusser's ideas, most notably the latter's theory of ideological interpellation but also the concepts of displacement and condensation. My account of Freud's use of the term relies on that given in Laplanche and Pontalis 1980, 292-93. [\[BACK\]](#)

7 For these debates and their context, see L. Rosen 1971; Kurzweil 1980; Descombes 1980; Hirsch 1981; and above all, Poster 1975, which, despite its idiosyncratic attempt to marry Althusser and Sartre and its dubious assessment of the impact of the events of May 1968, remains the best survey of

French intellectual developments between 1945 and 1968. For Althusser and the debates over humanism within the communist party, see Kelly 1982. Althusser's position is thoughtfully defended in Mephram 1985. [BACK]

8. For critical discussion of Althusser's framework, see Buci-Glucksmann 1976; Renaut 1983; and Gerratana 1977. Grahame Lock's introduction to Althusser's *Essays in Self-Criticism* elaborates and extends Althusser's conception. Bettelheim (1975; 1976; 1978; 1982; 1983) provides a historical and theoretical analysis of Soviet society influenced by Althusser. See also the interesting discussion of the "technological voluntarism" of "proletarian biology" in Le-court 1976. It should be mentioned that the Althusserian School did not originate the "state capitalist" critique of the USSR. Credit for this critique, I believe, goes to British ex-Trotskyist Tony Cliff (1974; first published in 1948) and to the various American writings of C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, also former Trotskyists, dating from the late forties and early fifties. [BACK]

Chapter 2 Modes of Production and Historical Development

1. For important debates on the concept of a mode of production, see Hindess and Hirst 1975; Wolpe 1980; Foster-Carter 1978; and J. Taylor 1979. For discussions of slave-tributary mode of production (not discussed here), see P. Anderson 1974a; Saint-Croix 1981; Wood 1988; Garlan 1988. For the Asiatic mode of production, see Krader 1975; Bailey and Llobera 1981; Godelier 1978; and P. Anderson 1974. [BACK]

2. For the primacy of "technological determinism" see Cohen 1978; for the primacy of "class struggle" see Robert Brenner's articles in Aston and Philpin 1985. Both arguments reduce the forces and relations to technological development and class struggle in order to separate them and privilege one over the other. Once it is made clear that it is the *unity* of the forces and relations that constitutes the class struggle at a given level of economic development, then it also becomes clear that Cohen's defense of technological determinism establishes not the primacy of the forces over the relations of production but rather the dominance of a more advanced mode of production over a less advanced mode. Similarly, it becomes clear that Brenner's defense of the primacy of class struggle implies the dominance of relations of production and the class exercising economic ownership within a given mode of production and not the primacy of the political over the economic function nor the freedom of ruling or exploited classes to leap ahead of the existing forces and relations that as a unity constitute their powers and define their interests. [BACK]

3. Conceptualizing the labor process in this way opens up its political and ideological dimensions, what Michael Burawoy has aptly called "the politics of production," for investigation; see Burawoy 1979; 1983. [BACK]

4. See Dupré and Rey 1980 for a penetrating critique of "formalist" and "substantivist" perspectives within economic anthropology. Formalists envision primitive societies in terms of neo-classical economic concepts derived from capitalist societies (marginal utility, maximization of scarce resources, and so forth). Substantivists, such as Karl Polanyi and his followers, insist on the anachronism of formalist methodology and restrict the term *economics* to capitalist market societies. For the substantivists, kinship, religion, and politics must be employed to explain the "economies" of pre-capitalist societies. Structural Marxists, such as Dupré and Rey, contend that both the formalists and the substantivists deal only with surface phenomena ("the market," kinship, religion, and so forth) and fail to explain pre-capitalist societies in terms of underlying functions and structures, most fundamentally, the relations of ownership and labor process that define their modes of production. For Dupré and Rey, exchange can be understood only relative to the mode(s) of production involved in the exchange. [BACK]

5. Althusser has been frequently, and rather uncritically, lumped together with Structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss. While Althusser acknowledges a "flirtation with Structuralist terminology" in his early works (1976, 126), the comparison can easily obscure more than it reveals, as is often the case with Miriam Glucksmann's comparative study of Althusser and Lévi-Strauss (Glucksmann

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1974). For other useful accounts, see Jameson 1972; Coward and Ellis 1977; and Merquior 1986. For a Structural Marxist critique of Lévi-Strauss, see Godelier 1972, vii-xlii; 1977, 15-98. See also Sebag 1964 and the uncompromising, if perhaps excessively naturalist, critique of Structuralist anthropology in Harris 1979, 165-215. [BACK]

6. Balibar's self-criticism goes so far as to throw out the baby with the bath-water, rejecting along with rationalism the utility of any cross-cultural concepts, including the concept of a mode of production:

In such a perspective [the concept of a mode of production], the very designation of "instance" in the social formation can only lead to the designation of further *elements*, invariant essences of historical analysis . . . pre-existing the process of their historical transformation. . . . This means . . . that the term "economic" will have the *same meaning* in the feudal or capitalist mode of production, and in fact in any mode of production whatsoever. In short, it is the risk of a return to the ideological presuppositions of political economy and bourgeois historiography. (E. Balibar 1974, 230-31)

Such a dramatic retreat into nominalism and historicism ignores the fact that concepts pitched at different levels of generality are equally valid—"abstract" concepts of general functions (economic, political, and ideological) produce knowledge in exactly the same way as do "concrete" concepts of particular social formations (French capitalism during the Second Empire). The general concept of the economic function and the particular concept of the economy of the Second Empire are both concepts; neither is more "true" or more "real" than the other. We must, of course, avoid treating "the economic" as an idealist essence existing apart from concrete social formations and imparting to them its reality in an approximate and imperfect form. However, rejecting idealism does not oblige us to abandon general concepts of social functions actually existing in every human society albeit in qualitatively distinct structures and institutions.

Balibar's born-again enthusiasm for the particular is inseparable from the voluntarist espousal of "class struggle" embraced by him and Pierre Macherey during the early seventies. Inspired by a distorted understanding of Maoism, such voluntarism bears within it the seeds of a further move, toward either neo-liberalism (e.g., Glucksmann, Hirst) or postmodern dissidence (Rancière, Laclau). The question of general concepts raised by the "new historicism" of Balibar and Macherey is discussed in chapter 5. [BACK]

7. On the "theoreticism" of Hindess and Hirst, see John Taylor's two-part review of *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (Taylor 1975, 1976). For a brief discussion of the post-Althusserian view of the autonomy of discourse and its relation to democracy, a view most fully developed in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), see "Introductory Conclusion," note 13. [BACK]

8. We cannot trace the evolution of Marxist anthropology in France or even the various divisions within the ranks of the Structural Marxists themselves. Although one must avoid attributing too much homogeneity to the latter, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that most of the (often nasty) disagreements between them are motivated by concerns other than those of science. Meillassoux and Godelier initially shared a view of "primitive" societies as economic sys-

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tems to which ahistorical, neo-classical economic concepts were inapplicable, and both have been reluctant to associate their work with that of Althusser despite the obvious influence of the latter on their work. Meillassoux remained suspicious of the "theoreticism" of Althusser even as he came to take a position progressively less distinguishable from Althusser's own. Godelier initially shared the basic Althusserian framework of structural causality, mode of production, and so on, but he retained a positive view of Lévi-Strauss as well. In his later work, Godelier moves away from the concept of the social formation as an articulation of distinct structural functions and toward a more essentialist view of the structured whole within which functional distinctions have no meaning and thus no hierarchy. Godelier also places greater value on mental structures than do other Structural Marxists, although he continues to insist that such mental structures adapt to changing modes of production. Godelier's earlier views are presented in Godelier 1977, and his more recent development is evidenced in Godelier 1986. For an excellent overview of Marxism and anthropological theory, see Bloch 1985. For French developments in particular, see Kahn and Llobera 1981, 263-329; and Jean Copans and David Seddon, "Marxism and Anthropology: A Preliminary Survey," in Seddon 1978. Valuable collections of essays, in addition to those edited by Kahn and Llobera and Seddon, include Bloch 1975 and Friedman and Rowlands 1977. See also *Dialectiques* 21 (1977), a special volume devoted to Structural Marxist anthropology. [BACK]

9. Meillassoux 1978; 1964; see also 1980. [BACK]

10. I concentrate on *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies* in order to contrast Terray's initial defense of the primacy of the forces of production, a view that has had considerable impact independent of Terray's later retractions, with the rival views of Rey (emphasizing the relations of production) and Meillassoux (emphasizing reproduction as well as production). The subsequent development of Terray's views on dominance and subordination of articulated modes of production, in the context of the relationship between trade and the constitution of political authority in West Africa, can be followed in Terray 1974; 1975; 1977; 1985. [BACK]

11. For further discussions of Rey, see Foster-Carter 1978; Bradby 1980; and Brewer 1980. The literature on Rey suffers from the fact that critics tend to concentrate on one aspect of his work—the lineage mode of production, imperialism, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and so on—without demonstrating an awareness of the existence of the others or of the overall position that integrates all of them into a single problematic. [BACK]

12. I do not wish to exaggerate the opposition between modes of production analysis and the global system approach of dependency theory. The problematic I am defending here has a place for both levels of analysis; indeed, despite important and obvious differences between national, regional, and global structures, this approach insists on the necessity of analysis of each of them for exactly the same reasons it insists on different structural

levels of analysis within individual social formations. The literature on dependency and the global capitalist system is, of course, enormous. It is perhaps most helpful to refer the reader to Brewer 1980, who cogently compares the positions of André

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Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, Ernesto Laclau, Giovanni Arrighi, Arghiri Emmanuel, Robert Brenner, and Samir Amin and provides a useful bibliography as well. Stern 1988, a critique of Wallerstein, surveys an enormous amount of recent work from a mode of production perspective. [BACK]

13. The following discussion draws on debates over the nature of the feudal mode of production and the transition from feudalism to capitalism inaugurated by Maurice Dobb's pioneering mode of production analysis (Dobb 1963). For major collections of articles pertaining to these debates, see Hilton 1976; Aston and Philpin 1985; Aston 1965. For their special relevance to the application of the concept of mode of production to feudalism and the transition to capitalism, see Kula 1976; Kriedte, Medick, and Schlumbohm 1981; de Vries 1976; Wallerstein 1974; Wallerstein 1980; Wallerstein 1983; Wallerstein 1989; Porchnev 1972; Ladurie 1969; and Lublinskaya 1968. [BACK]

14. For a critical discussion of Rey's analysis of the transition, see Cutler and Taylor 1972. Robin 1970 and Postel-Vinay 1974 attempt to apply Rey's framework to eighteenth-century France. Comninel 1987 criticizes Rey, Robin, and Postel-Vinay in a work flawed by the author's misunderstanding of the Structural Marxist concepts. Comninel's revisionist criticism—namely, that traditional Marxist interpretations of the French Revolution apply the term *capitalism* too loosely to forces and relations that are still feudal in character—has some validity against Rey (an Africanist after all) but misfires when applied to Robin and Postel-Vinay, who are, in fact, quite careful about such matters. In any case, this is an empirical, not a theoretical, question, and its resolution has no impact on the validity (or invalidity) of the Structural Marxist conception of articulation and historical transformation, about which Comninel hasn't a clue. Finally, Comninel's assertion that the "ancien régime . . . shows no sign of either developed capitalism or its emergence" (1987, 192) is an indefensible overstatement. Not only does Comninel fail to shake Postel-Vinay's persuasive interpretation of the capitalist nature of the relations of production introduced by the *fermiers*, but he also ignores the breakthrough of capitalist relations initiated by nobles in Toulouse and other regions. Comninel likewise ignores the undeniable proto-industrialization of the countryside of northern France and, even more seriously, fails to take into account the work of Bois, Kriedte, and others regarding the logic of feudal accumulation and the emergence of capitalism. My own account of these positions, whatever its shortcomings, is sufficient to refute the theoretical criticisms that Comninel directs at Structural Marxism. Furthermore, I would argue that it is precisely from the Structural Marxist position of Rey, Robin, and Postel-Vinay that a new framework for "rethinking" the French Revolution in light of the revisionist challenge is in the process of emerging. [BACK]

15. Robert Brenner has engaged Bois in yet another chicken-egg controversy over "politicism" and "economism" in articles published as part of the so-called Brenner Debate (and collected in Aston and Philpin 1985). In his response to Brenner's critique of the neo-Malthusian interpretation of the crisis of feudalism from a "class struggle" perspective, Bois accuses Brenner of "politicism" and of ignoring the structural dynamics of a feudal mode of production. Brenner responds by consigning Bois to eternal damnation for the sin of

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"economism." Brenner's arguments against Bois are considerably weaker than those he marshals against his other critics, not least because of the straw-man tactics he employs. Brenner consistently refuses to acknowledge Bois's recognition of the "political" nature of the feudal levy and the inherent class struggle over it, as well as Bois's arguments regarding the possibility, indeed, the inevitability, of aristocratic political centralization as an outcome of this class struggle. Brenner's own emphasis on seigneurial political power and organization, although much more nuanced in his final essay (largely because he takes over much of Bois's own position, as well as that of Perry Anderson, who is not even cited by Brenner) continues to reify political power. Brenner, following a path already taken by Rey (who is also not cited), treats class power as if it were somehow independent of the forces and relations of production. How can *class* be distinct from *production* when it is the forces and relations of production that constitute classes? Brenner makes an interesting and persuasive contrast between France and England as if he were thereby refuting Bois's general concept of feudalism. All Brenner has really accomplished, however, is an identification of the degree of variation of the English and French cases, that is, their uneven and combined development within the logic of feudalism, something Bois himself explicitly recognizes. Brenner's central argument—that because different outcomes can be demonstrated from similar feudal conditions, the independent variable must be class power, not the mode of production—is simply specious. If English lords had significantly more class power than did their French counterparts, they had it simply because the forces and relations of production in England were significantly different from those of France. [BACK]

16. The debate has many dimensions; the central division, however, is between the Weber-Pirenne-Polanyi-Wallerstein position (which asserts first the inherently capitalist nature of cities, merchants, and markets and second the primacy of cities and trade in the evolution of capitalism) and the Marx-Dobb-Bois-Brenner position (which argues, if not for the primacy, at least for the importance of agrarian transformation and which denies the ahistorical view that all economic exchange is capitalist in nature). These debates, of course, echo those between formalists and substantivists, Marxists and Weberians, mode of production analysis versus dependency theorists, and so on. Kriedte follows Dobb in emphasizing the transformation of urban feudal classes (merchants and artisans) into capitalist classes (owners and workers) in articulation with agrarian transformations from seigneurs and peasants to landowners, tenants, and wage laborers. [BACK]

Chapter 3 Science, Ideology, and Philosophy

1. The argument of the present chapter is deeply influenced by Bhaskar 1978; Bhaskar 1979; Ruben 1979; and Newton-Smith 1981. Each of these works provides a searching critique of contemporary philosophy of science, and all, by different yet convergent paths, attempt to defend scientific realism and the rationality of science without recourse to epistemological absolutism. Although none deals explicitly with Althusser (Bhaskar being a closet Althusserian), I am encouraged to find considerable similarities between the argu-

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ments advanced in these works and the positions elaborated earlier by Althusser. Although I dissent from the stronger claims made by Bhaskar for his "transcendental realism" (I find the arguments made by Newton-Smith and Ruben more persuasive), I know of no better philosophical elaboration of the strengths of Althusser's philosophical position than the one implicit in Bhaskar's *Possibility of Naturalism* (1979). Since he expresses Althusser's position better than Althusser himself does, I have applied Bhaskar's terms *ontological realism* and *epistemological relativism* to Althusser's materialist theses (which are obviously the source of Bhaskar's original inspiration anyway). For Althusser's philosophy of science, I am also indebted to two excellent articles, O'Hagan 1981 and Gordy 1983; and, of course, to Lecourt 1975, a brilliant Structural Marxist survey of Bachelard and Canguilhem, which is equally informed with regard to Althusser's philosophical position. Finally, I am indebted to Kolakowski's lucid history of positivism (1968) and Novack's trenchant critique of Dewey's pragmatism (1975). [BACK]

2. Even the best discussions of Althusser fail to explore satisfactorily the connections between his early and later works. Benton 1984 glosses over the implications of Althusser's new view of philosophy for the concept of science; Callinicos 1982 simply dismisses the problem by asserting that Althusser's final position (which Callinicos sees correctly enough as subordinating epistemology to historical materialism) is incoherent because it continues to employ a science/ideology distinction. Callinicos does not seem to see that Althusser's final assertion of a science/ideology distinction has dropped all pretence of epistemological absolutism, nor does he grasp the import of Althusser's distinction between the substantive concepts of science and the logical categories of philosophy. Oddly enough, Callinicos proceeds to develop his own solution (based on Lakatos), which defends historical materialism on the grounds of its productivity, precisely the move already made by Althusser, but he lacks Althusser's awareness of the need to take a materialist and realist position that explains and defends such knowledge effects in the *Kampfplatz* of philosophy. [BACK]

3. Balibar provides an excellent discussion of this, marred however by his contention that historical materialism can have no "general concept" of an epistemological break (E. Balibar 1978, 231). We will deal with Balibar's critique of general concepts (an excessive reaction to Althusser's rejection of theoreticism) in chapter 5. [BACK]

4. Most controversial of these accusations is the charge of Stalinism. E. P. Thompson accuses Althusser of "an attempt to reconstruct Stalinism at the level of theory" (Thompson 1978, 323), while Alvin Gouldner sees him "providing a theoretical storm-cellar for Stalinism" (Gouldner 1977, 450). Jacques Rancière, one of the coauthors of *Lire le Capital*, maintains that Althusser's initial project, to undermine the Party bureaucracy and its stranglehold on theory, dissipated itself with the debates over "humanism" wherein Althusser's defense of the autonomy of theory, in a backhanded fashion, ended up serving the interests of the Party leadership; see Rancière 1974. A more restrained critique of the political implications of Althusser's theory may be found in Gerratana 1977 and 1977a; see also the wide-ranging discussion in the special Althusser issue of the French journal *Dialectiques*, 15-16 (Autumn 1976). For

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a defense of Althusser against the charges of Stalinism, see P. Anderson 1980, chap. 4; and Benton 1984, 14-23. [BACK]

5. This position is most intelligently presented in Callinicos 1976. For Callinicos, the solution is to abandon once and for all the notion of ideology as the other of science and to retain only the concept of ideology as the outcome of material practices. This is ultimately an irrationalist position, denying the concept of science and the specificity of scientific discourse (or any other discourse for that matter). Such a move also ignores the fact that philosophical

debates over science and Marxism do take place and that without a concept of science as distinct from ideology/error a realist and philosophical position cannot be formulated. Callinicos argues that we should pursue Althusser's insights into the materiality of ideology and eliminate the "epistemological relics" of his early works. But where does this leave Marxist philosophy? Ideology is what social agents "think in" or "represent themselves in," but it is the economic and the political that they think *about*. Because Marxism defines the economic and the political in a *different* way, the distinction between science and ideology cannot be dispensed with theoretically; Marxism not only explains ideology as socially produced ideas and beliefs but also combats those ideas and beliefs as erroneous (ideology/error). Thus it is not, as Callinicos seems to think, a matter of simply "leaving behind" the relationship of ideology and science and the functional distinctions between them, for Marxism cannot conceptualize science without ideology and without ideology/error, nor can Marxism philosophically defend its own knowledge effects without taking a position defending the category of the scientific. [BACK]

6. Descombes, in a popular survey of the French intellectual scene, argues that in his later works Althusser "did away with Althusserianism and restored the priority of the political over the theoretical instance" (Descombes 1980, 134). Descombes cites the discussion of Althusser's "Preface to Capital" (Althusser 1971, 71-101), in which Althusser attempts to explain why intellectuals have difficulty understanding *Capital* while workers do not. Althusser writes: "The former [intellectuals] are blinded by bourgeois ideology which does everything it can to cover up class exploitation. The latter [workers], on the contrary, despite the terrible weight of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology they carry cannot fail to see this exploitation since it constitutes their daily life" (Althusser 1971, 100). Descombes concludes from this statement that "in returning in this way to experience and the 'lived through' Althusser abandons the attempt to endow Marxism with an epistemological foundation and reverts to the phenomenological foundation which had previously been thought good enough" (Descombes 1980, 135).

Descombes is guilty of two errors of interpretation here. First, he seems to imply that in rejecting theoreticism in his later work Althusser is abandoning the relative autonomy of theory, a view that is demonstrably wrong. Second, the implication that Althusser is returning to phenomenological Marxism cannot be sustained even within the text Descombes has chosen to prove his point. Descombes fails to mention that, in the passage cited, Althusser is referring to the class instinct of the proletariat and not their class position, an important distinction since, for Althusser, the former is ideological (referring to lived ex-

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perience) while the latter is theoretical (referring to a concept). While class instinct is certainly an important factor in the receptivity of working-class subjects to Marxist theory (and an obstacle for bourgeois subjects), it is not a guarantee either that the theory will be received (or rejected) or that it will even be created: "Class instinct is subjective and spontaneous. Class position is objective and rational. To arrive at proletarian class positions the class instinct of proletarians only needs to be educated; the class instinct of the petty bourgeoisie, and hence of intellectuals, have, on the contrary, to be revolutionized" (Althusser 1971, 13). Descombes has simply missed the fact that the terms *class position* and *class instinct* are perfectly consistent with Althusser's (unchanged) position regarding the different modalities of ideology and science. The working class *experiences* exploitation but can attribute it to many different causes: the will of God, bad luck, natural scarcity, as well as capitalism; what they *know* about it, however, is something completely different. [BACK]

7. The usual tactic is to dismiss Althusser's thought as no more than the reflection of a political line. We have already referred to this tactic in reference to the charge of Stalinism leveled against Althusser, but it is also evident in Elliott 1987, who mechanically plots the course of Althusser's intellectual development in terms of political phases—Leninism, Maoism, Eurocommunism, and finally the demoralizing break with the PCF. While there is no denying the general accuracy (and usefulness) of Elliott's political chronology, nor even the fervor of Althusser's faith in communist internationalism and the intensity of his disillusionment with the PCF leadership, there is no justification for reducing theory to politics as Elliott occasionally does. Althusser's political commitment to the PCF and to global communism always existed in an uneasy relationship to his theoretical enterprise. His political faith in the popular masses and his desire for a revolutionary party organization capable of imaginative leadership and developing a "mass line" was never easily reconciled with a scientific application of his own problematic to existing capitalist and communist social formations and the global economy. Perhaps, as Elliott maintains, Althusser blamed first the ossified Stalinist bureaucracy of the PCF and second his own theoretical enterprise for the party's failure to activate the "popular masses," whose existence he posited as an article of faith rather than a scientific hypothesis. Perhaps also the widening gulf between political faith and objective reality contributed to Althusser's personal tragedy. Even if such speculations were to be true, however, they would have no relevance to a theoretical assessment of Althusser's work or to theoretical debates over historical materialism. [BACK]

8. Althusser's periodization of Marx's intellectual development is elaborated in Althusser 1969, and summarized in the introduction to that work. Althusser returned to the problem in light of his reformulation of the concept of philosophy in a 1970 essay, "Marx's Relation to Hegel" (in Althusser 1972, 163-86). For excellent accounts of Marx's work sympathetic to Althusser's point of view see Therborn 1976, 317-413, and Callinicos 1983, 26-60; my summary of Althusser's interpretation of Marx's development is much indebted to them. For another interesting assessment of Althusser's intentions in relation to Hegel and to the scientificity of Marxism, see Levine 1981. [BACK]

9. Lecourt 1975, written from an Althusserian perspective, contains one of

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the best evaluations of Foucault's pre-Nietzschean works (which depend positively on Canguilhem and negatively on Althusser). For Bachelard in relation to Anglo-American philosophy of science, see Bhaskar 1975. For the relationship between Althusser and Bachelard, see Brewster 1971 and Balibar's more self-serving account, Balibar 1978. For an interesting application of the Althusserian problematic to the history of mathematics, see Raymond 1978; 1977; 1973. For another interesting application, this time focusing on the relation between Stalinism and science, see Lecourt 1977. [BACK]

10. Thus the oft-repeated claim that Althusser's project was to create an "epistemological Marxism" is mistaken. In fact, Althusser attempted to rid Marxism of the onus of grounding its knowledge in a philosophical discourse outside itself. André Glucksmann 1978 (an article that originally appeared in *Les temps modernes* in May 1967) anticipated Althusser's self-criticism of theoreticism without acknowledging the realist dimensions of Althusser's initial position. Given the trajectory of Glucksmann's intellectual career, which culminates in neo-conservatism, such a one-sided critique is not surprising. It is rather more surprising to find the "epistemological Marxism" designation in Smith 1984. Smith's discussion, unfortunately, deals only with *For Marx and Reading Capital*, and then only with Althusser himself. I must also dissent from the interpretations of Althusser's epistemology presented in Elliott 1987 and Patton 1978. [BACK]

Chapter 4 Ideology and Social Subjectivity

1. On this point Althusser owes a great deal to Spinoza's concept of *experientia vaga*. Althusser credits Spinoza with the "first theory of ideology ever thought out in terms of (1) its imaginary 'reality'; (2) its internal inversion; (3) its 'center', the illusion of the subject" (Althusser 1976, 135). [BACK]

2. Hirst 1979 criticizes Althusser for positing an impossible essence (the human individual) prior to the interpellated subject and for equating the concept of a social subject with a single human individual. With regard to the first point, Althusser's distinction between individuals and interpellated subjects is simply a heuristic device expressing the process by which human beings are constituted as social beings. Althusser has always insisted that the individual is always already a subject. What Hirst really objects to, and this is the thrust of his second point, is Althusser's claim that it is only human beings that are the locus of interpellations. Hirst rejects this "theoretical humanism" on Althusser's part and insists that economic enterprises are also socially constituted subjects, each having its own individual existence, rights, and powers. I would not wish to understate the reality or the power of corporations. However, I would argue that their social "subjectivity" is of secondary, not primary, significance: only human agents act. [BACK]

3. The literature on Lacan is immense. Useful introductions to Lacan are Lemaire 1977; Bevenuto and Kennedy 1986; and Macey 1988. One should also consult two major collections of articles by or about Lacan published in *Yale French Studies*, volumes 48 and 55-56 (1972, 1977). Of particular importance in the context of the present work are Jameson 1977; Coward and Ellis

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1977; and Badiou 1982. Althusser's own support for Lacan's project is recorded in "Freud and Lacan" (in Althusser 1971, 189-219). Althusser became progressively estranged from Lacan's posturing, however, and finally denounced him as a "magnificent, pathetic Harlequin" (see Clément 1983, 20, 206-7 n. 14). My summary of Lacan follows that of Lowe 1982. [BACK]

4. In *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1980) attack Althusser for this monolithic view of ideology. However, they completely miss Althusser's emphasis on the non-normative aspect of ideology, which opens the way to the subjection/qualification contradiction developed by Therborn. As for the dominant thesis of *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*—that ideology is not important, that it has never assimilated the exploited classes of any social formation, and that under capitalist modes of production it is not even essential to the reproduction of the social relations of production (since capitalism encourages diversity and relies on economic compulsion to keep it within "safe" limits)—it is at least arguable that the valorization of the "free individual" by the book's authors (who see it as symptomatic of the decline of capitalism) is in actuality a manifestation of a dominant ideology rather than a refutation of its existence. For an extended critique of Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, see Therborn 1984. For a careful elaboration of the dominant ideology of individualism and its contradictions within the present American context, see O'Conner 1984. [BACK]

5. Althusser himself concedes this point in a personal communication to Therborn in which he states that he is "no longer prepared to defend the theoretical necessity of the notion ideological State apparatus," maintaining only that "the crucial point is to grasp the intrinsic link between the ideological apparatuses and the State" (Althusser, cited in Therborn 1980, 85). [\[BACK\]](#)

6. For the New Philosophy, see A. Glucksmann 1980 and Levi 1982. See also the special issue of *Chicago Review* (volume 32, number 3 [1981]) devoted to the New Philosophy. For critiques to which I am especially indebted, see Dews 1985; Lecourt 1978; and Poulantzas 1978. It is important, I believe, to distinguish the *gauchisme* of Rancière from the neo-conservatism of the New Philosophers. While Rancière 1985 makes some cogent criticisms of Althusser's science/ideology distinction (as developed in the context of Althusser's essay "A propos de l'article de Michel Verret sur 'mai étudiant'" [1969a]), for the most part they are vitiated by Rancière's extreme voluntarism and irrationalism. Rancière rejects any attempt to defend the relative autonomy of scientific practice and instead collapses scientific practice wholly into ideology. Whereas Althusser attempts to distinguish between the technical and social divisions of labor within the university apparatuses—defending the value of the former while condemning the deformations of the latter—Rancière maintains that the university must be viewed as an oppressive unity, the object of class struggle, not as a contradictory apparatus internally divided by class struggle. While Althusser may or may not be guilty of understating the class bias of the university apparatus, there is no reason to follow Rancière and reduce science to ideology (to be replaced by what? proletarian science?). Rancière continues to privilege ideological struggle and working-class voluntarism in *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Rancière 1989), a work interesting for its iconoclastic attack on predominant interpretations of

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working-class consciousness (its supposed desire to remake the world according to a working-class image rather than to change their lives in order to escape from a working-class existence); however, this effort—fully consistent with an Althusserian concept of ideology, by the way—is flawed by Rancière's unrepentant contempt for structural determination and scientific realism. [\[BACK\]](#)

7. The French Nietzscheans Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard are critically discussed in Descombes 1980 and Callinicos 1982 (my account of Deleuze is based on that of Callinicos). For Foucault's appreciation of Deleuze, see Foucault 1980a, 165-96. For Deleuze's appreciation of Foucault, see Deleuze 1972. Donzelot 1979, one of the best works inspired by Foucault, amply demonstrates the affinity of Foucault and Deleuze.

There is a vast literature on Foucault. The "authorized" commentary is Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983; another sympathetic and thorough account is that of Foucault's translator Alan Sheridan (1980). More critical is Merquior 1985, which, unlike Dreyfus and Rabinow, gives full attention to the neo-anarchist Nietzschean element of Foucault's work. Merquior also provides a useful survey of the controversies that have emerged over Foucault's scholarship. For the relationship between Foucault and the New Philosophers, see Dews 1979 and 1984; Lecourt 1978; and Poulantzas 1978. For my part, I am building on the arguments of Dews and Poulantzas regarding the ontologizing and demonization of Power in Foucault's works of the seventies; see also Merquior 1985. On Foucault's early period, see White 1978 (my summary of Foucault's *The Order of Things* follows White's) and Dominique Lecourt's chapter on Foucault in Lecourt 1975. For Foucault's later work, see White 1979 and Megill 1979. For the influence of Deleuze on Foucault, see Callinicos 1982. Megill 1985 situates Foucault in the tradition of Nietzsche and Heidegger but is insensitive to the uniqueness of the French neo-Nietzschean Left represented by Deleuze. Both Deleuze and Althusser are, characteristically, absent from the pages of Rabinow and Dreyfus. Indeed, Foucault's negative dependence on Althusserian concepts (see Lecourt 1975) is a well-kept secret among Foucault enthusiasts in the United States. Sheridan acknowledges the possibility of Althusser's influence but angrily (if feebly) rejects it by repeating Foucault's own disclaimers (see Sheridan 1980, 214). On the postmodern Left, the uncritical acceptance of Foucault advances furthest in Poster 1984, where Foucault is depicted as the discoverer of a "mode of information" that has allegedly replaced the mode of production as the relevant critical concept for contemporary social theory. Without denying the importance of the technological revolution in information processing and control, I fail to see why it vitiates the concept of a mode of production any more than did the steamship revolution or the telegraph revolution. For another post-Marxist, postmodern interpretation of Foucault, see Smart 1983. Finally, for Foucault's relation to the tradition from Sade to Bataille, see Stoekl 1985 and Lash 1985. [\[BACK\]](#)

Chapter 5 Literature and Ideology

1. My interpretation is directly opposed to that of Bennett 1979 and more or less compatible with Sprinker 1987; see also Kavanagh 1982. Macherey (1982) has come to acknowledge grudgingly the necessity for some concept of

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literary practice, while Eagleton waffles back and forth on his commitment to "Althusserianism"; see the preface to Eagleton 1986 and the interview (Eagleton 1982). [\[BACK\]](#)

2. For an expanded critique of contemporary linguistics, see Pêcheux 1969; Pêcheux and Gadet 1981; Ducrot 1972; Henry 1977; and Faye 1972. All of these works share and develop a Structural Marxist approach to discourse and language that I am introducing through Pêcheux alone. For additional discussions of Pêcheux, see Macdonell 1986; Macabe 1979; and John Thompson 1984, a work flawed by its author's failure to acknowledge the common ground shared by Pêcheux, Faye, Bourdieu, and Althusser (Thompson self-servingly identifies Althusser solely with the work of Hindess and Hirst). Thompson deprecates, where he does not ignore entirely, the comprehensiveness and explanatory power of the problematic within which the particular works he discusses are situated in order to inflate the significance, in the minds of uninformed readers, of authors who reflect his own eclectic hodgepodge of phenomenology and critical theory. [\[BACK\]](#)

3. On Gadamer and Reception Aesthetics, see Hoy 1978; Holub 1984; and Hohendahl 1977 and 1983. [\[BACK\]](#)

4. It is more plausible that the historical variation of the "categories of literary reception"—the fact that certain texts are born literary while others become or cease to be so—indicates the presence of a certain type of objective, determinate cognitive activity, something like ideological production, around which aesthetic ideologies of reception and consumption constantly draw and redraw ideological lines of demarcation. Structural Marxism is able to conceptualize both the specific literary effectivity of the text (its autonomy relative to other signifying practices) as well as its determinate conditions of production and reception (its dependence on a variety of historically specific ideological practices). While such knowledge cannot produce an absolute or definitive interpretation of the meaning of the text in the objective idealist manner of Ingarden, Poulet, and Iser, it also cannot be mystified in the subjective idealist manner of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Jaus. Structural Marxism successfully avoids the aporia introduced by positing an "incommensurability" between production and reception in the manner of the so-called New Historicism of Greenblatt, Montrose, and company (see Veeger 1989). Against the New Historicism, we must protest that it is not enough to "juxtapose" text and context, literary and non-literary phenomena (a process that Dominick LaCapra aptly characterizes as weak montage), nor is it legitimate to hide inadequate explanations behind theoretical fig leaves such as the "irreducible complexity" of history, nor, finally, is it justifiable to parade an ideological desire to dissolve the distinction between knowledge and art—why? in order to sustain the notion of the critic as genius? to evade the political consequences of taking a firm position?—under the banner of textualizing history. The New Historicism may indeed answer such burning questions as how a professional middle-class academic from Berkeley might feel if he suddenly found himself in the body of Thomas More, but beyond legitimizing such thought experiments it is difficult to find any theoretical value in the New Historicist enterprise. (For an alternative, "Cultural Materialist" view of the English Renaissance, a view informed

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by Structural Marxist concepts, see Dollimore 1984; Halpern 1991; and Dollimore and Sinfield 1985.) Nor, finally, is there much to recommend a Marxist version of reception aesthetics, which simply replaces the crude materialist objectivism of reflection theory with an equally crude materialist subjectivism of a historicist reception theory.

It is interesting how a general concept of literary production keeps popping up, even in the works of its avowed enemies. Raymond Williams (1977), for example, begins by attacking the validity of a concept of literature by virtue of its historicity but ends up extolling the practice of literature as the "human essence of creativity." [\[BACK\]](#)

5. My résumé of Renée Balibar's books is much indebted to Bouché 1981. [\[BACK\]](#)

6. Fredric Jameson (1981) has convincingly shown that semantic elements (which he calls "ideologemes") perform an essential function in the realization of the literary styles of Balzac, Gissing, and Conrad. I have not included an analysis of Jameson's important book here despite the strong influence of Althusserian concepts on it—not primarily because of space limitations, although these are prohibitive, but because of the many other influences on Jameson's work. For perceptive evaluations of Jameson, see Eagleton 1986 and Dowling 1984. [\[BACK\]](#)

Chapter 6 Class Struggle, Political Power, and the Capitalist State

1. Poulantzas found in Althusser's concept of structural causality the key to the problems of political power and hegemony raised by Lenin, Gramsci, and Weber. Take away Althusser's problematic and Poulantzas's entire work becomes incomprehensible. The tendency of certain commentators (Carnoy 1984; Jessop 1985) to depict Gramsci and Foucault as the "true" references for Poulantzas—thereby reducing his Althusserian "phase" to a temporary aberration of no real significance—is a preposterous misrepresentation and insupportable from Poulantzas's own remarks (see Poulantzas 1980; 1976a; 1979). The names of Gramsci and Foucault have become traces of the erasure of Althusser's impact on social theory—and Poulantzas, unfortunately, has

been used frequently as an instrument of this process. As I have already argued, Foucault is something of a bastard child of Structural Marxism; Poulantzas accepted in Foucault only what they both took over from Althusser. We have also seen how Poulantzas wholeheartedly rejected the neo-Nietzschean, post-modern, post-Marxist tendencies of Foucault. I am not attempting to minimize the importance of Gramsci for Poulantzas (or for Structural Marxism generally, for that matter). For the important interaction between them, see Buci-Glucksmann 1980; Macciocchi 1974; Mouffe and Sassoon 1977; Anderson 1976. For Poulantzas on Gramsci, see Poulantzas 1965; and on Althusser in relation to Gramsci, see Poulantzas 1966. The importance of Weber for Poulantzas has been overlooked in the secondary literature. There is a need for a systematic comparison of Althusser and Poulantzas in relation to Weber. [\[BACK\]](#)

2. The subtlety of Poulantzas's concept of the matrix effect of a mode of production—the fact that it denotes the intransitive moment of structural causality in opposition to the transitive moment of a particular practice—eludes most of the commentators, who throw up their hands in despair over the "circularity" of Poulantzas's thought (see, for example, Milliband 1973; Connell 1979). Ernesto Laclau's writings on Poulantzas (Laclau 1977) are superior to the rest of the literature in this respect, but even Laclau sees Poulantzas's framework as "unilateral," thus grossly misrepresenting the subtle indirect determination of the matrix effect as "class reductionism" and willfully dismissing the distinction between intransitive and transitive moments as merely "abstract formalism." While Laclau has a point—Poulantzas, like Althusser, assumes the determinant place of the economic function in all social formations and the dominant role of the instance which exercises the ownership function within the mode of production—to call this reductionism or formalism makes sense only if one is seeking to defend pluralist indeterminacy, irrationalist relativism, and political voluntarism. Laclau's hidden agenda, revealed by his subsequent intellectual development, is a post-Marxist, postmodernist attack on scientific realism and economic determination. Laclau's views on Poulantzas are taken over and developed by Jessop 1985. [\[BACK\]](#)

3. See, for example, Bridges 1974 and Milliband 1973. This criticism misses the central point, namely, the fact that the limitation of the political by the economic is both historical and structural (the matrix effect of a mode of production and the concepts of social class and political practice) as well as conjunctural. The well-known exchange between Milliband and Poulantzas regarding the class nature of the capitalist state is rather sterile since Milliband's subject-oriented view of class power and Poulantzas's structure-oriented approach lack any common ground, neither party being able (or willing) to bring up the concepts of ideological interpellation, pertinent effects, or social class, which might bridge the distance between their respective positions. For the exchange, see, in addition to Milliband 1973, Poulantzas 1969; Poulantzas 1976; and Milliband 1970. [\[BACK\]](#)

4. Briefly, Poulantzas argues that the accumulation of contradictions in Germany and Italy accounts for the emergence of fascism. Within the power bloc of Germany the primary source of contradictions was the rapid expansion and concentration of capital in a country where political hegemony still resided with the landed aristocracy—the Prussian Junkers—who carried out the Prussian "bourgeois" revolution of the nineteenth century. German monopoly capital required mass state intervention in its favor in order to compensate for the disproportionate political weight of the Junkers, yet the structure of the power bloc and the relative strength of the various non-monopoly groups within it were obstacles to such intervention. In Italy the situation was even more accentuated. The power bloc consisted of the industrialists of the north and the landowners of the Mezzogiorno, with the former establishing their hegemonic position by maintaining the feudal character of southern agriculture.

The rise of fascism also involves a political confrontation between the forces of the working class and the bourgeoisie, of course, but it is the petty bourgeoisie that plays the essential role in the coming to power of fascism. Political and economic crises dissociate the petty bourgeoisie from liberal capitalism, and "status quo anti-capitalism" becomes a dominant oppositional ideological

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theme. This ideological sub-ensemble "replaces" the dominant bourgeois ideology and "cements" the social formation back together (this is the decisive element of a fascist takeover, as opposed to Bonapartism or military dictatorship). The function of fascism, according to Poulantzas, is to bring into existence a form of the state capable of establishing and organizing the hegemony of monopoly capital in this particular set of historical circumstances and political-economic crises. Under these particular crisis conditions, the petty bourgeoisie is able to climb to the highest levels of political life, yet the crisis is finally resolved only by the neutralization of the petty bourgeoisie and the establishment of the hegemony of monopoly capital—the latter being the essential component of the nationalist military power desired by the petty bourgeoisie themselves.

According to Poulantzas, the formal separation of the state and the economy is characteristic of all capitalist social formations, not simply parliamentary democracies. Poulantzas has written two books about "exceptional" or non-parliamentary forms of the capitalist state, including military dictatorship in *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* and fascism in *Fascism and Dictatorship* (Poulantzas 1976a; 1974). He examines a third form, "Bonapartism," in Poulantzas 1973. For the best discussions of Poulantzas's views of fascism, see Laclau 1977; Jessop 1985; and Faye 1973; see also Caplan 1989. Abraham 1986 is a suggestive and stimulating attempt to extend Poulantzas's line of investigation into the political dynamics of the rise of German fascism. The revised edition corrects certain controversial errors of quotation and includes a retrospective defense of the original argument and a response to critics. See also the important collection Dobkowski and Wallimann 1989. From an immense literature, I will mention only two brilliant works of synthesis that independently corroborate and complement Poulantzas's analysis, Wehler 1985 and Broszat 1981. [\[BACK\]](#)

5. Poulantzas's work only suggests the fruitful potential of an application of Althusserian concepts of ideology, ideological interpellation, and habitus to the study of nationalism. They assimilate and transcend the cultural functionalism of Geertz 1973 and Gellner 1983. See, in particular, B. Anderson 1983; Nairn 1981; Howell 1986. For overviews of traditional Marxist views of nationalism, see H. Davis 1980, 1967. [\[BACK\]](#)

6. For the creation of the post-war "American Century"—the European recovery, the Cold War, the Fordist state, and so on—in relation to the development of global capitalism, see Kolko and Kolko 1972; Block 1977; Piji 1984; Mandel 1986; Mandel 1970; and Schurmann 1974. [\[BACK\]](#)

7. Aglietta, Christian Palloix, Alain Lipietz, and others are all French economists and members of the so-called *école de régulation* concerned with capitalist regimes of accumulation and the global economy. Students of Althusser who have been significantly influenced by the Structural Marxist concept of a mode of production, the authors of the Regulation School are gaining increasing recognition as an alternative to the banalities of postmodernism and the shortcomings of dependency theory. In addition to Aglietta 1979, see Palloix 1972; Palloix 1976; Lipietz 1977; Lipietz 1983; Lipietz 1987; and Aglietta 1982. For a critical evaluation, see Brenner and Glick 1991. [\[BACK\]](#)

8. For global restructuring and its effect on the uneven development of me-

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tropole and periphery, see Mandel 1975; Lipietz 1987; Warren 1980; Amin 1980; and J. Kolko 1988. [\[BACK\]](#)

9. For a lucid and systematic analysis of the present condition, see J. Kolko 1988. Lash and Urry 1987 is illuminating in its historical survey of the "organized" capitalist states, but its Habermasian thesis that capitalism is becoming "disorganized" is unconvincing; more persuasive is D. Harvey 1989, which analyzes postmodern culture in relation to global economic restructuring and the transition from a Fordist to a "flexible" regime of accumulation. Mention may perhaps be made here of the influential work of Structural Marxist urban geographers such as David Harvey and Manuel Castells, who have done much to clarify the importance of urbanization for capitalist accumulation and the significance of social space for capitalist domination; see, in particular, D. Harvey 1989a; and Castells 1977. [\[BACK\]](#)

10. Of course Poulantzas's work hardly exhausts the field of Marxist and neo-Marxist analysis of the state in contemporary capitalism. At the very least, mention must be made of Wolfe 1977; O'Conner 1984; Offe 1984; Offe 1985; and Gross 1982. For the important work of Joachim Hirsch and the German "state derivation" (*Staatsableitung*) debates of the seventies, see Holloway and Picciotto 1979. Useful surveys of new theoretical developments include Carnoy 1984 and Jessop 1982. [\[BACK\]](#)

11. The phrase is Stuart Hall's. Hall 1988 and Leys 1989 are superb analytical accounts of the ideological and social-structural basis of Thatcherism. For Reaganism, see the equally perceptive analysis of Mike Davis 1986. [\[BACK\]](#)

12. Poulantzas justifies this designation by arguing that the "middle class" of white-collar workers, technicians, supervisors, and civil servants is a recently emerged fraction of the petty bourgeoisie. His argument is based on the concept of social class—the fact that today's class relations bear the mark, via the matrix effect, of yesterday's ensemble of political, ideological, and economic relations. He argues that "certain groupings which at first sight seem to occupy different places in economic relations can be considered as belonging to the same class [the petty bourgeoisie] . . . because these places, although they are different, nevertheless have the same effects at the political and ideological level" (Poulantzas 1975, 205). In effect, Poulantzas maintains that despite having different positions in the forces and relations of production, the new traditional petty bourgeoisies have similar political and ideological positions, and these similarities justify defining them as fractions of the same social class.

At first sight, Poulantzas appears to have reversed the causal relationship between social classes and their pertinent effects in order to assert the predominance of political and ideological effects over economic relations. While similar ideological and political positions today will participate in the constitution of the matrix effect of tomorrow, Poulantzas has apparently lost sight of the fact that these political and ideological positions will not constitute the matrix effect by themselves, but only in their articulation with economic relations whose modes of determination are dominant within the capitalist mode of production. The apparent confusion of pertinent and matrix effects is corrected in a later article in which Poulantzas forcefully reasserts the primacy of economic relations: "What are social classes in Marxist theory? They are groups of social

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agents . . . defined *principally* but not exclusively by their place in the *production process*, i.e., by their place in the economic sphere. The economic place of the social agents has a *principal* role in determining social classes. But from that we cannot conclude that this economic place is sufficient to determine social classes . . . the political and the ideological also have an important role" (Poulantzas 1973a, 27).

Poulantzas's attempt to incorporate political and ideological relations into the matrix effect constituting social class should never have been construed as a denial of the primacy of economic relations for the simple reason that such a reading renders the entire body of his work incomprehensible. Unfortunately, however, it is precisely such a reading that opened the door for a post-Althusserian, post-Marxist misappropriation of the concept of social class such as that of Laclau 1977, who criticizes Poulantzas's "economic reductionism" while developing a concept of social class based on the autonomy of ideology and the primacy of politics with respect to economic relations. This approach reaches its logical conclusion in Laclau and Mouffe 1985, who treat history as a "story of liberty" with the discourse of "democracy" as its historical motor. Laclau and Mouffe advocate a new ideological offensive "cutting across" class lines and deploying "democracy" as a neo-Sorelian, populist myth of "liberty as well as equality." Laclau and Mouffe assert an irrationalist individualism combining the most specious aspect of Saussurean linguistics (there is no social reality, only the differential reality of discourse) with a perverted form of Lacanian psychology. Lacan's concepts of the Real (desires, needs, and feelings of the individual), the Imaginary (the psychological process of identification), and the Symbolic (the discursive codes and practices of society) refer to an objectively existing tension between the psyche of a determinate individual and a determinate social reality. Laclau and Mouffe transmogrify Lacan's problematic in order to assert a free-floating relationship between the Symbolic and the Imaginary from which the Real of the individual psyche and the reality of social structures are equally absent. From here it is a simple matter for them to reduce political theory to an arbitrary dispersion of equally inadequate ideological positions and political power to a random pattern of "nodal points" condensing willy-nilly in social space. Thus the "socialist strategy" of Laclau and Mouffe is little better than a defense of Madison Avenue huckstering, and their view of democracy reduces it to yet another commodity to be mass-marketed without regard to its substance.

Poulantzas compounds his problems by attempting to distinguish the "new petty bourgeoisie" from the working class by means of the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Productive labor is defined as "labor which produces surplus value while *directly reproducing the material elements that serve as the substratum of the relation of exploitation: labor that is directly involved in material production by producing use-values that increase material wealth*" (Poulantzas 1975, 216). Insofar as I understand the distinction in Marxist theory between productive and unproductive labor (see Gough 1972), it seems to be increasingly unhelpful when large proportions of "unproductive" workers sell their labor power to capitalist firms and when the production and realization of surplus value increasingly depend on the integration of produc-

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tion and distribution, on scientific and technological services, and on a vast array of governmental activities. In any case, Poulantzas never successfully reconciles his ad hoc use of economic criteria as a principle of distinction in one case and political and ideological criteria in another.

These errors, I hasten to add, do not vitiate the general thrust of Poulantzas's argument. A common ideological "sub-ensemble" (reformism, individualism, power fetishism) does exist between the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie and for precisely the reasons Poulantzas specifies: both fractions are caught in a contradictory class position between the hegemonic class interests of the capitalist class and its antithesis, the class interests of the working class. Given the primacy of the capitalist-working class contradiction, the position of the new petty bourgeoisie is necessarily contradictory and oscillates with varying degrees of instability between capitalism and socialism. One can hardly argue with Poulantzas's contention that historically the new petty bourgeoisie has, with rare exceptions, gravitated toward the capitalist pole of the ideological spectrum. Even less can one refute his contention that the mere fact that the new petty bourgeoisie and the working class are both employed by capital has produced little ground for a viable anti-capitalist political alliance.

I believe that the confusion engendered by Poulantzas's attempt to deploy the concept of social class for purposes of clarifying the class position of the new petty bourgeoisie can be salvaged by the rather obvious device of considering the distinction between mental and manual labor from an economic rather than an ideological perspective. Poulantzas, of course, recognizes the vital significance of the mental-manual labor distinction, but he assigns it to the realm of ideology and not to the forces and relations of production. I would argue the reverse: credentials, degrees, organizational positions, and skills are personally owned economic assets, and as such they correspond, roughly, to the personal property of the traditional petty bourgeoisie. The new petty bourgeoisie can never be hegemonic in any capitalist social formation—functionally, their assets, like the personal property of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, are subsumed by the requirements of monopoly capital—but they can and do wage a fierce struggle to preserve their symbolic capital from devaluation by capitalists (deskilling, mechanization) and by the working class (equal opportunity, equality).

Thus similar economic relations (personal ownership of economic assets) account for similar pertinent effects (a common ideological sub-ensemble) shared by the traditional and new petty bourgeoisie. While recognizing the effectivity of political and ideological positions within the ensemble of social relations that constitute the matrix effect and social class, we must also acknowledge the primacy of economic relations within the ensemble. Such an approach demonstrates the essential validity of Poulantzas's contention that the "middle class" is a class fraction of the petty bourgeoisie. But even here the significance is not so much in the name as in the careful elaboration of the phenomenon.

Finally, the Structural Marxist view that the political spectrum is defined, in the last instance, by its capitalist and working-class poles and not the contradictory class position of the petty bourgeoisie is certainly more persuasive than

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the universe of "free-floating" signifiers devoid of class determinations and class values posited by postmodern, post-Marxist social theorists. This later position is at the very least guilty of peddling wish fulfillment to the middle classes; at most it may be justly condemned for facilitating the ideological legitimization of global capitalism and relegating the Left to the degrading and hopeless position of "loyal opposition" and chief whipping boy of the New Right.

My own views on the problem of the new petty bourgeoisie are heavily indebted to Wright 1985 and Larson 1977. For alternative perspectives from within a Structural Marxist perspective, see Baudelot, Establat, and Malemort 1981 and Carchedi 1977. For a brilliant sociological analysis of ideological distinctions between the various class fractions of the bourgeoisie and the working class using the concepts of habitus and symbolic capital, see Bourdieu 1984. For discussions of Poulantzas's conception of the new petty bourgeoisie, see Wood 1986; Connell 1979; Ross 1979; and Jessop 1985. [\[BACK\]](#)

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1. Among the book-length surveys, I recommend Karsz 1974 (excellent for placing the whole range of Althusser's writings in the context of his later emphasis on class struggle); Callinicos 1976 (excellent on structural causality, weak on and hostile to Althusser's concepts of philosophy, science, and ideology); Benton 1984 (a judicious overview of Structural Marxism with a good discussion of Althusser and his critics); and Elliott 1987 (solid account of Althusser's theory in light of his politics, but occasionally reducing the former to the latter). Among the critiques, Rancière 1974 remains worth reading, as do Hirst 1979 and A. Glucksmann 1978. E. P. Thompson 1978 is as uninformed as it is hostile, but it has achieved something of a cult status and thus a life of its own. See also Vincent et al. 1974. For a full bibliography of Althusser's publications, see Elliott 1987.

2. For Derrida's reflections on Marxism, history, and Althusser, see Derrida 1981; for an attempt to integrate Marxism and deconstruction, see Ryan 1982. Rosalind Coward and John

Ellis (1977) provide a first-rate synthesis of Althusserian, Lacanian, and semiological perspectives (from Barthes to Kristeva). Juliet Mitchell (1974) brings Althusser and Lacan to bear on the relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis; see also Barratt 1980. Callinicos 1982 contains an excellent account of Deleuze and Foucault from a perspective informed by Althusser. Pierre Vilar (1973), a member of *Annales*, has written a lengthy article on Althusser that I discuss in chapter 1, note 1; see also D'Amico 1973. From the camp of the Habermasians, attempts to assess Althusser have been disappointing: Schmidt 1981 is superficial; John Thompson 1984 is much broader and more detailed, but stubbornly obtuse with respect to the explanatory power of the concepts he is attempting to critique. Perry Anderson (1980)

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responds to E. P. Thompson's polemic against Althusser; see also Nield and Seed 1979 and Benton 1984.

3. The literature on Western Marxism is overwhelming. As a very selective list for those seeking a comprehensive introduction to the major figures and currents, I recommend the following works: Jay 1984; P. Anderson 1976a; Howard and Klare 1972; Poster 1975 (an invaluable account of French developments); Stedman Jones et al. 1978; D. Harvey 1982; and Carnoy 1984. For classic Western Marxist interpretations of Marx and Marxism, see Lichtheim 1965; Avineri 1968; and Gouldner 1982. For an excellent Structural Marxist account, see Therborn 1976.

4. For Althusser's increasing frustration with the Party bureaucracy throughout the seventies, see Althusser 1978a; see also Althusser 1978 and 1977. Althusser's letters on the events of May 1968 may be found in Macciocchi 1973. Althusser must be seen as seeking a "third way" on the question of party reform, opposing both the existing Stalinist organization, which subordinated mass initiative and participation to the interests of the Party apparatus, and the conversion of the PCF into a reformist, parliamentary party. Rancière 1974 and Elliott 1987 are valuable on Althusser's political evolution.

There was a nuanced opposition within the Althusserian camp between more Leninist and more Gramscian views expressed with respect to the elimination, in 1976, of the slogan "dictatorship of the proletariat" from party canon. Etienne Balibar (1977) argued against elimination on the grounds that, whatever its Stalinist perversions, the term focused political attention on the class nature of existing parliamentary democracy and on the problems of the transition to socialism—problems that, in Balibar's view, were being dangerously ignored by the PCF as it blindly pursued a strategy of alliance with the Socialists. Balibar's arguments are not superficial; they stress important differences between capitalist democracy, in which politics is controlled by the wealthy, and socialist democracy, in which the people would actually have power. Balibar is concerned, rightly enough, that the role of the state as an instrument of class struggle during the transitional period between capitalism and communism not be forgotten. The post-revolutionary state must not only smash the old elitist institutions but actively organize and promote new popular democratic forms. However, Balibar remains caught up in a Leninist view

of state power and Lenin's untoward confidence in the capacity of the post-revolutionary state to resolve the problems of pre-revolutionary society. The potential authoritarian dangers of Balibar's faith in the primacy of revolution are foremost in the mind of Nicos Poulantzas (1978). In contrast to Balibar (and many other Althusserians), Poulantzas took a very critical stance toward the PCF. He was a strong defender of Eurocommunism and fully endorsed the rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat. From a Gramscian perspective, Poulantzas was concerned with pre-revolutionary rather than post-revolutionary events and with ensuring the democratic nature of post-revolutionary society—preparing for democratic socialism through ideological and political struggles whose purpose is not merely to promote a revolutionary crisis but to extend and preserve existing political liberties as well.

The political differences between the Leninist and Gramscian orientations

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within the Structural Marxist camp with regard to Eurocommunism and reform within the PCF are outlined cogently in Benton 1984. A useful triangulation on Eurocommunism is obtained from Mandel 1978 (a Trotskyist critique); Claudin 1978 (a Left-Eurocommunist perspective); and Boggs 1982 (a post-Marxist account). For the French context and the PCF, see Ross 1982 and Jenson and Ross 1984. Debates within the PCF are surveyed in Kelly 1982 and Molina and Vargas 1978. For events of the eighties, see Ambler 1985; Cerney and Schain 1985; Ross and Jenson 1988; and Singer 1988.

5. For critical discussions of the neo-liberals, see Callinicos 1988; Tucker 1980; and Levine 1988. For Rawls, see Buchanan 1982; for a persuasive critique of Habermas, see Roderick 1986. I discuss Foucault and Deleuze in chapter 4; see also Callinicos 1982; and Resch 1989. Stoianovich 1976 remains a perceptive critical introduction to the *Annales* school. The disparate approaches of anthropologists Victor Turner, who is interested in the disruptive gaps between functionally ordered symbolic systems, and Clifford Geertz, a Parsonian disciple defending the primacy and unity of the cultural-symbolic, are straightforwardly presented in their own collected essays (Geertz 1973; Turner 1974). Baudrillard may be sampled in his selected writings (Baudrillard 1988); see also Douglas Kellner's thoughtful study of Baudrillard (Kellner 1989).

6. My thinking on postmodernism has been inspired by the seminal essays of Fredric Jameson (1984; 1984a; 1987) and by David Harvey's brilliant and comprehensive study (Harvey 1989). Both Jameson and Harvey focus on the political economy of postmodernity, and Harvey, in particular, does a thorough job of relating the cultural logic of postmodernism to the dissolution of national Fordist modes of production and the globalization of capitalism. For the inability of dissident postmodernism to comprehend its own existence, see Soja 1989 (and my review essay, Resch 1992). For cultural-aesthetic discussions of postmodern, see Eagleton 1986; Foster 1983; Huyssen 1986; Krauss 1985; McHale 1987; Owens 1980; and Ulmer 1985.

7. The class position of the professional middle class-new petty bourgeoisie is best developed, in my opinion, in Erik Olin Wright's reformulation of the concept of social class

(Wright 1985; see also Wright et al. 1989). Wright's work has been influenced by Poulantzas and by the "labor theory of exploitation" developed by John Roemer (1986; 1988). Unlike his fellow "analytical" Marxist, Jon Elster, Roemer has contributed positively to the development of Marxist social theory through the use of game theory and mathematical model building. However, his contribution remains limited by its ahistorical and individualist assumptions regarding rationality. Ultimately Roemer is unwilling or unable to build the historical-intransitive dimension into his models—neither the ideological complexity of social subjectivity and habitus nor the matrix effect of the structured whole on the effectivity of individual structures. The analytical Marxists oscillate between an interesting critique of Marxist concepts of history and a neo-positivist attempt to subordinate the science of history to philosophy, specifically to certain premises of empiricist philosophy of science, namely, nominalism and methodological individualism. This move may permit a certain radicalism; Roemer, for example, takes neo-positivist methods

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and attempts to turn them against conservatives. More representatively, Jon Elster (1985) uses methodological individualism and nominalist empiricism to attack Marxism and to defend a philosophical position virtually indistinguishable from neo-liberalism. For a critical discussion of analytical Marxism see Ware and Nielson 1989; Callinicos 1989; and Levine, Sober, and Wright 1987.

Poulantzas 1975 explains why the "new petty bourgeoisie" of professionals and managers should be viewed as an ally of capital, not the working class (see chapter 6, note 12). The alternative, post-Marxist concept of the "professional middle class" is indebted to the opposite notion, fundamentally wrongheaded in my view, that because professionals are not owners of the corporations they manage they are somehow opposed to capitalism and somehow undermining the power of the capitalist class that does own or effectively own these corporations. Ultimately, the autonomy of the professional middle class is posited in order to refute the Marxist view of economic determination and to justify the "end of ideology" ideology of post-industrial or post-capitalist society. This technocratic view of a "managerial revolution" has a long history, but it is perhaps most succinctly stated in Gouldner 1979 and thoroughly discussed in Walker 1979, a collection of essays on the concept of the professional middle class. The illusion of professional middle-class independence and anti-capitalism are finally succumbing to reality, however; see Barbara Ehrenreich's stimulating account of the inner life of the American middle class during the eighties (Ehrenreich 1990). Despite her many profound insights, Ehrenreich still cannot (or will not) see capitalism as determining the struggle between liberals and conservatives within the professional middle classes, a struggle she stubbornly persists in viewing as autonomous.

8. My views of the structural dynamics of *perestroika* have been informed by Post and Wright 1989; Lane 1990; Mandel 1989; Kerblay 1989; Lewin 1988; and Alec Nove 1983. Nove's pragmatic attempt to define a "feasible" market socialism that might avoid the mistakes of Bolshevik-type economies without abandoning the goal of socialism or leaping beyond the objective possibilities of the present conjuncture should be read in conjunction with Carens 1981

and Miller 1989. Nove's ideas have been criticized in Mandel 1986 and 1988. Nove replies to Mandel's first article in Nove 1987; see also Elson 198.

9. The totalitarian school of Soviet studies has concerned itself almost exclusively with moral condemnation, body counts, and a concept of party power and oppression detached from any social cause or explanation. It was never much interested in the class forces at work in the Russian Revolution or in the popular class struggles and political difficulties that transformed Bolshevism from a dictatorship of the proletariat to a dictatorship over the proletariat. Even Trotsky's interpretation of the "revolution betrayed" tends to ignore class analysis in favor of an explanation based on the "evil genius" of Stalin and a totalitarian conception of party power. Structural Marxists offer a more complex explanation emphasizing first the Stalin deviation, which substituted the development of the productive forces for the development of popular democracy, and second the class struggles within the Soviet Union, which ended in the triumph of a new technocratic ruling class, the state bourgeoisie (see Althusser 1976, 78-93; and Bettelheim 1983; 1982; 1978; 1976). These efforts paral-

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leled those of revisionist Anglo-American scholars seeking finally to break free from the dogmas of totalitarianism. For some recent fruits of this revisionism, see Fitzpatrick 1982; Getty 1985; Viola 1987; and Kuromiya 1988. These works build, of course, on the monumental achievement of the original and long-isolated revisionist E. H. Carr, who has lucidly condensed the results of his ten-volume *History of Soviet Russia* in Carr 1979.

10. My emphasis on the conjunction of realism and formalism in modernist culture is indebted to John Berger (1985), who argues brilliantly the thesis that cubism represents the truly original component of modernism and a new "syntax" for the modern experience. My distinction between realist modernism of the Left and the irrationalist and elitist movements of the Right may seem untenable at first, but I call the reader's attention to Peter Bürger's provocative attempt to define the avant-garde in terms of the social status and function of art (Bürger 1984) and John Willett's fine survey of the politics of modernism from 1917 to 1933 (Willett 1978) in support of my position. The politics of art cannot, in any case, be read off from formal criteria alone, a fact that postmodernists carefully avoid in their ahistorical condemnation of the failures of "high modernism" and their tendency to obscure profound differences in the social and political context of European art during the interwar years and the Cold War. For the aesthetic Right, see Jameson 1979; Kaplan 1986; and Herf 1984. And for the capitalist assimilation and domestication of modernism after World War II, see Guilbaut 1983 and Allen 1983. For a more inclusive conception of modernism than the one defended here, see Calinescu 1987; and for the sweeping changes in technology and culture that created new modes of understanding and experiencing time and space between 1880 and World War I, see Kern 1983.

11. For the social and political context of the scientific revolution and its philosophical and religious consequences, the works of James R. Jacob and Margaret C. Jacob are innovative as well as enlightening; for a general survey of the historical process by which scientific knowledge

became an integral part of Western culture and a convenient synthesis of their approach, see Margaret Jacob (1988).

12. For useful accounts of Structuralism, see Hawkes 1977; Jameson 1972; Culler 1975; Coward and Ellis 1977; and Merquior 1986. For poststructuralism and the broader philosophical and literary context, see Anderson 1984; Dews 1987; Descombes 1980; Eagleton 1983; Lentricchia 1980; and Gasché 1986 (the best study of Derrida and his philosophical project).

13. This is the fatal flaw of post-Marxists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's concept of "democratic revolution" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Laclau and Mouffe define political and ideological discourses as free-floating, autonomous systems unrelated to economic determination and class positions and defend a neo-Crocean view of history as the "story of liberty" driven by a desire for democracy inherent in human nature and independent of social determinations. The concept of "democratic revolution" is, for Laclau and Mouffe, a Sorelian myth that can and should be constructed "autonomously" by ideological and political means without reference to the economy or social classes. Such an irrationalist view of discourse is not only unable to explain why it is

we have no democracy (in the only meaningful sense of the word: popular control over the means of production and its distribution) but is also unable to move beyond the level of postmodern populist sloganizing or even to begin to articulate the material conditions for an alternative vision. Populism, Laclau argues in an earlier book (Laclau 1977), is a "popular-democratic" discourse that pits the interests of "the people" against those of the "power bloc" without reference to concepts of class. However, because Laclau stubbornly rejects the notion that political practice is assigned its "relatively autonomous" place and function by the matrix effect of the mode of production (a position Laclau dismisses as "reductionism"), he cannot accept the fact that the categories of populist discourse are determined, in the last instance, by economic structures and relations. Populism is always irrationalist insofar as class struggle is never explicitly present in populist discourse but rather masked behind collective political categories such as "the people." But populist irrationalism may be grasped rationally insofar as populist discourse is an indirect effect of economic class determinations refracted through ideological and political structures.

Populisms, democratic or otherwise, are politically unstable (and dangerous) precisely because they lack the very grasp of economic determination and class power that Laclau and Mouffe seek to replace with vulgar pluralism, relativism, and individualism. As Ellen Meiksins Wood points out (Wood 1986), Laclau and Mouffe cannot tell us who, in particular, might want or need democracy, whether some kinds of people might want or need more—or different aspects—than others do, how a social force capable of bringing it about might come into being, or indeed why there should be any difficulty or conflict about it. That we need a new, hopeful vision of democratic socialism is undeniable; that we will achieve it by a post-Marxist,

postmodern lobotomy performed on the critical faculty of social theory is ludicrous.

Laclau and Mouffe, along with Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst, and others, make up a post-Althusserian variant of post-Marxist postmodernism that has rejected Structural Marxist concepts of structural causality, relative autonomy, and social class in order to embrace political voluntarism and philosophical irrationalism (see my discussion of Hindess and Hirst in chapter 1). The most thorough-going critic of the post-Althusserians and their concept of democracy is Ellen Meiksins Wood (1986). For a brief, lucid, and devastating critique of representative democracy under capitalism, see Macpherson 1977 and 1973; see also the powerful arguments for socialism put forward by Levine (1988; and 1987); Miller 1990; and for equality put forward by Baker (1987).

1. The reception of Althusser's ideas within the historical profession has frequently been negative and ill informed. See E. P. Thompson's self-indulgent polemic (Thompson 1978) for an unfortunately representative example. Thompson's diatribe should be read along with Perry Anderson's patient rejoinder (Anderson 1980). It is ironic, to say the least, that Thompson's own formidable historical research can be effectively marshaled against his theoretical humanist philosophy of history—and in support of the very Althusserian con-

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cepts that Thompson so rabidly condemns (see Anderson's examples, 31-49, 69-71). For a comparison of the Thompsonian and Althusserian schools, see Nield and Seed 1979. Hirst 1979a is a thorough critique of Thompson from within the post-Althusserian camp; a defense of Thompson's conception of class consciousness is offered in Wood 1982. For a critique of the rejection of class struggle by post-Marxist historians, see Resch 1989a.

Also of interest is the important article by Pierre Vilar (1973), one of the few Marxist historians currently working within the *Annales* school. Vilar's article is disappointing, however, because it engages in the dubious tactic of arguing against Althusser from a position that is nebulous and largely unspecified, a "black box" that Vilar passes off as somehow self-evidently *real* history. One gets the feeling that included among Vilar's unspoken premises are many that he would rather not put forward openly, perhaps because Althusser so devastatingly criticized them. In addition, Vilar's interpretations of Althusser's ideas are often dubious. I will confine myself to the central section of Vilar's essay, where he defends Ernest Labrousse and Fernand Braudel and their usage of historical time from Althusser's criticism. Althusser's "criticism" is largely a positive acknowledgment of the fact that these historians were beginning to observe differential temporalities in history. He is critical, however, of the fact "that they do not pose them explicitly as a function of the structure of the whole" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 96). This is in fact the case. The three economic cycles put forward by Labrousse in his famous study of the French Revolution are undoubtedly important structural factors. There is nothing in them that Althusser would have any quarrel with, although this is implied by Vilar's misreading of Althusser's concept of differential time. The problem, for Althusser, is not so much what Labrousse has demonstrated but simply that he doesn't go far enough, that he fails to situate his

three differential times in relation to the overall structure in dominance within which they occur. It is not that such an extension is impossible or even that Labrousse's work is not an important initial step in achieving such a task. It is the fact that he doesn't do it that constitutes the problem, which is all Althusser ever said. Braudel's monumental work on the Mediterranean region has often been faulted even by traditional historians on similar grounds: its three strata never achieve any significant synthesis into a structure. For further discussion of these matters, see Stoianovich 1976; and for a comparison of the Althusserians and the *Annalistes*, see D'Amico 1973.

2. Perry Anderson points out that the term *social formation* marks a space between the term *society*, the standard concept of classical sociology, and the Marxist concept of *mode of production*. The former term is unsatisfactory because it suggests a coherence and unity that reduces social contradictions to "dysfunctions" from functional norms, while the latter term has been too often used to justify the reduction of social contradictions to reflections of economic phenomena, a tendency that ignores the relative autonomy not only of other social practices but also of the economy as well; see P. Anderson 1980, 67. For a masterful comparative account of the development of classical sociology and historical materialism from a Structural Marxist perspective, see Therborn 1976.

3. See P. Anderson 1976a, 64-66; Patton 1978; and Elliott 1987. These

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misunderstandings persist despite Althusser's own comments on his relation to Spinoza (Althusser 1976, 132-41, 187-93) and, in the case of Elliott's more recent book, Macherey 1979. My own understanding of Spinoza is indebted to Hampshire 1987 and Curley 1988, as well as Macherey's interesting, if controversial, interpretation.

4. This view originates with A. Glucksmann 1978; see esp. 286-90.

5. Lenin (1975, 648-51) introduces the phrase "unity of opposites" but fails to distinguish sufficiently between the Hegelian term *identity* and the Marxist concept of *unity*. Althusser defines the "identity of differences" in terms of uneven development, an anti-Hegelian conception shared by Godelier (1972, 86-92) who also rejects the internality of contradictions in favor of their externality—contradictions between rather than within structures.

6. The term *overdetermination* is, of course, borrowed from psychoanalysis. Freud uses it to express the fact that unconscious formations can be attributed to a plurality of determining factors. For Freud, the term has two senses: first, it indicates that the formation in question is a result of several causes, since one alone is not sufficient to account for it; second, it expresses the fact that the multiplicity of unconscious elements that make up a formation may be organized in different meaningful sequences, each having its own specific coherence at a particular level of interpretation. Althusser was "not particularly taken by this term overdetermination" but used it "in the absence of anything better" (Althusser 1969, 101). Presumably, Althusser was attracted by Freud's effort to avoid extremes of reductionism and pluralism in his analysis of the

unconscious and the drives. For a brief comparison of Althusserian concepts and those of Freud, see Miriam Glucksmann 1974, 99-103. Unfortunately, Glucksmann fails to consider the work of Jacques Lacan and its important influence on certain of Althusser's ideas, most notably the latter's theory of ideological interpellation but also the concepts of displacement and condensation. My account of Freud's use of the term relies on that given in Laplanche and Pontalis 1980, 292-93.

7 For these debates and their context, see L. Rosen 1971; Kurzweil 1980; Descombes 1980; Hirsch 1981; and above all, Poster 1975, which, despite its idiosyncratic attempt to marry Althusser and Sartre and its dubious assessment of the impact of the events of May 1968, remains the best survey of French intellectual developments between 1945 and 1968. For Althusser and the debates over humanism within the communist party, see Kelly 1982. Althusser's position is thoughtfully defended in Mephram 1985.

8. For critical discussion of Althusser's framework, see Buci-Glucksmann 1976; Renaut 1983; and Gerratana 1977. Grahame Lock's introduction to Althusser's *Essays in Self-Criticism* elaborates and extends Althusser's conception. Bettelheim (1975; 1976; 1978; 1982; 1983) provides a historical and theoretical analysis of Soviet society influenced by Althusser. See also the interesting discussion of the "technological voluntarism" of "proletarian biology" in Le-court 1976. It should be mentioned that the Althusserian School did not originate the "state capitalist" critique of the USSR. Credit for this critique, I believe, goes to British ex-Trotskyist Tony Cliff (1974; first published in 1948) and to the various American writings of C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, also former Trotskyists, dating from the late forties and early fifties.

1. For important debates on the concept of a mode of production, see Hindess and Hirst 1975; Wolpe 1980; Foster-Carter 1978; and J. Taylor 1979. For discussions of slave-tributary mode of production (not discussed here), see P. Anderson 1974a; Saint-Croix 1981; Wood 1988; Garlan 1988. For the Asiatic mode of production, see Krader 1975; Bailey and Llobera 1981; Godelier 1978; and P. Anderson 1974.

2. For the primacy of "technological determinism" see Cohen 1978; for the primacy of "class struggle" see Robert Brenner's articles in Aston and Philpin 1985. Both arguments reduce the forces and relations to technological development and class struggle in order to separate them and privilege one over the other. Once it is made clear that it is the *unity* of the forces and relations that constitutes the class struggle at a given level of economic development, then it also becomes clear that Cohen's defense of technological determinism establishes not the primacy of the forces over the relations of production but rather the dominance of a more advanced mode of production over a less advanced mode. Similarly, it becomes clear that Brenner's defense of the primacy of class struggle implies the dominance of relations of production and the class exercising economic ownership within a given mode of production and not the primacy of the political over the economic function nor the freedom of ruling or exploited classes to leap ahead of the existing forces and relations that as a unity constitute their powers and define their interests.

3. Conceptualizing the labor process in this way opens up its political and ideological

dimensions, what Michael Burawoy has aptly called "the politics of production," for investigation; see Burawoy 1979; 1983.

4. See Dupré and Rey 1980 for a penetrating critique of "formalist" and "substantivist" perspectives within economic anthropology. Formalists envision primitive societies in terms of neo-classical economic concepts derived from capitalist societies (marginal utility, maximization of scarce resources, and so forth). Substantivists, such as Karl Polanyi and his followers, insist on the anachronism of formalist methodology and restrict the term *economics* to capitalist market societies. For the substantivists, kinship, religion, and politics must be employed to explain the "economies" of pre-capitalist societies. Structural Marxists, such as Dupré and Rey, contend that both the formalists and the substantivists deal only with surface phenomena ("the market," kinship, religion, and so forth) and fail to explain pre-capitalist societies in terms of underlying functions and structures, most fundamentally, the relations of ownership and labor process that define their modes of production. For Dupré and Rey, exchange can be understood only relative to the mode(s) of production involved in the exchange.

5. Althusser has been frequently, and rather uncritically, lumped together with Structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss. While Althusser acknowledges a "flirtation with Structuralist terminology" in his early works (1976, 126), the comparison can easily obscure more than it reveals, as is often the case with Miriam Glucksmann's comparative study of Althusser and Lévi-Strauss (Glucksmann

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1974). For other useful accounts, see Jameson 1972; Coward and Ellis 1977; and Merquior 1986. For a Structural Marxist critique of Lévi-Strauss, see Godelier 1972, vii-xlii; 1977, 15-98. See also Sebag 1964 and the uncompromising, if perhaps excessively naturalist, critique of Structuralist anthropology in Harris 1979, 165-215.

6. Balibar's self-criticism goes so far as to throw out the baby with the bath-water, rejecting along with rationalism the utility of any cross-cultural concepts, including the concept of a mode of production:

In such a perspective [the concept of a mode of production], the very designation of "instance" in the social formation can only lead to the designation of further *elements*, invariant essences of historical analysis . . . pre-existing the process of their historical transformation. . . . This means . . . that the term "economic" will have the *same meaning* in the feudal or capitalist mode of production, and in fact in any mode of production whatsoever. In short, it is the risk of a return to the ideological presuppositions of political economy and bourgeois historiography. (E. Balibar 1974, 230-31)

Such a dramatic retreat into nominalism and historicism ignores the fact that concepts pitched at different levels of generality are equally valid—"abstract" concepts of general functions (economic, political, and ideological) produce knowledge in exactly the same way as

do "concrete" concepts of particular social formations (French capitalism during the Second Empire). The general concept of the economic function and the particular concept of the economy of the Second Empire are both concepts; neither is more "true" or more "real" than the other. We must, of course, avoid treating "the economic" as an idealist essence existing apart from concrete social formations and imparting to them its reality in an approximate and imperfect form. However, rejecting idealism does not oblige us to abandon general concepts of social functions actually existing in every human society albeit in qualitatively distinct structures and institutions.

Balibar's born-again enthusiasm for the particular is inseparable from the voluntarist espousal of "class struggle" embraced by him and Pierre Macherey during the early seventies. Inspired by a distorted understanding of Maoism, such voluntarism bears within it the seeds of a further move, toward either neo-liberalism (e.g., Glucksmann, Hirst) or postmodern dissidence (Rancière, Laclau). The question of general concepts raised by the "new historicism" of Balibar and Macherey is discussed in chapter 5.

7. On the "theoreticism" of Hindess and Hirst, see John Taylor's two-part review of *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (Taylor 1975, 1976). For a brief discussion of the post-Althusserian view of the autonomy of discourse and its relation to democracy, a view most fully developed in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), see "Introductory Conclusion," note 13.

8. We cannot trace the evolution of Marxist anthropology in France or even the various divisions within the ranks of the Structural Marxists themselves. Although one must avoid attributing too much homogeneity to the latter, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that most of the (often nasty) disagreements between them are motivated by concerns other than those of science. Meillassoux and Godelier initially shared a view of "primitive" societies as economic sys-

tems to which ahistorical, neo-classical economic concepts were inapplicable, and both have been reluctant to associate their work with that of Althusser despite the obvious influence of the latter on their work. Meillassoux remained suspicious of the "theoreticism" of Althusser even as he came to take a position progressively less distinguishable from Althusser's own. Godelier initially shared the basic Althusserian framework of structural causality, mode of production, and so on, but he retained a positive view of Lévi-Strauss as well. In his later work, Godelier moves away from the concept of the social formation as an articulation of distinct structural functions and toward a more essentialist view of the structured whole within which functional distinctions have no meaning and thus no hierarchy. Godelier also places greater value on mental structures than do other Structural Marxists, although he continues to insist that such mental structures adapt to changing modes of production. Godelier's earlier views are presented in Godelier 1977, and his more recent development is evidenced in Godelier 1986. For an excellent overview of Marxism and anthropological theory, see Bloch 1985. For French developments in particular, see Kahn and Llobera 1981, 263-329; and Jean Copans and David

Seddon, "Marxism and Anthropology: A Preliminary Survey," in Seddon 1978. Valuable collections of essays, in addition to those edited by Kahn and Llobera and Seddon, include Bloch 1975 and Friedman and Rowlands 1977. See also *Dialectiques* 21 (1977), a special volume devoted to Structural Marxist anthropology.

9. Meillassoux 1978; 1964; see also 1980.

10. I concentrate on *Marxism and "Primitive" Societies* in order to contrast Terray's initial defense of the primacy of the forces of production, a view that has had considerable impact independent of Terray's later retractions, with the rival views of Rey (emphasizing the relations of production) and Meillassoux (emphasizing reproduction as well as production). The subsequent development of Terray's views on dominance and subordination of articulated modes of production, in the context of the relationship between trade and the constitution of political authority in West Africa, can be followed in Terray 1974; 1975; 1977; 1985.

11. For further discussions of Rey, see Foster-Carter 1978; Bradby 1980; and Brewer 1980. The literature on Rey suffers from the fact that critics tend to concentrate on one aspect of his work—the lineage mode of production, imperialism, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and so on—without demonstrating an awareness of the existence of the others or of the overall position that integrates all of them into a single problematic.

12. I do not wish to exaggerate the opposition between modes of production analysis and the global system approach of dependency theory. The problematic I am defending here has a place for both levels of analysis; indeed, despite important and obvious differences between national, regional, and global structures, this approach insists on the necessity of analysis of each of them for exactly the same reasons it insists on different structural levels of analysis within individual social formations. The literature on dependency and the global capitalist system is, of course, enormous. It is perhaps most helpful to refer the reader to Brewer 1980, who cogently compares the positions of André

Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, Ernesto Laclau, Giovanni Arrighi, Arghiri Emmanuel, Robert Brenner, and Samir Amin and provides a useful bibliography as well. Stern 1988, a critique of Wallerstein, surveys an enormous amount of recent work from a mode of production perspective.

13. The following discussion draws on debates over the nature of the feudal mode of production and the transition from feudalism to capitalism inaugurated by Maurice Dobb's pioneering mode of production analysis (Dobb 1963). For major collections of articles pertaining to these debates, see Hilton 1976; Aston and Philpin 1985; Aston 1965. For their special relevance to the application of the concept of mode of production to feudalism and the transition to capitalism, see Kula 1976; Kriedte, Medick, and Schlumbohm 1981; de Vries 1976; Wallerstein 1974; Wallerstein 1980; Wallerstein 1983; Wallerstein 1989; Porchnev 1972;

Ladurie 1969; and Lublinskaya 1968.

14. For a critical discussion of Rey's analysis of the transition, see Cutler and Taylor 1972. Robin 1970 and Postel-Vinay 1974 attempt to apply Rey's framework to eighteenth-century France. Comninel 1987 criticizes Rey, Robin, and Postel-Vinay in a work flawed by the author's misunderstanding of the Structural Marxist concepts. Comninel's revisionist criticism—namely, that traditional Marxist interpretations of the French Revolution apply the term *capitalism* too loosely to forces and relations that are still feudal in character—has some validity against Rey (an Africanist after all) but misfires when applied to Robin and Postel-Vinay, who are, in fact, quite careful about such matters. In any case, this is an empirical, not a theoretical, question, and its resolution has no impact on the validity (or invalidity) of the Structural Marxist conception of articulation and historical transformation, about which Comninel hasn't a clue. Finally, Comninel's assertion that the "ancien régime . . . shows no sign of either developed capitalism or its emergence" (1987, 192) is an indefensible overstatement. Not only does Comninel fail to shake Postel-Vinay's persuasive interpretation of the capitalist nature of the relations of production introduced by the *fermiers*, but he also ignores the breakthrough of capitalist relations initiated by nobles in Toulouse and other regions. Comninel likewise ignores the undeniable proto-industrialization of the countryside of northern France and, even more seriously, fails to take into account the work of Bois, Kriedte, and others regarding the logic of feudal accumulation and the emergence of capitalism. My own account of these positions, whatever its shortcomings, is sufficient to refute the theoretical criticisms that Comninel directs at Structural Marxism. Furthermore, I would argue that it is precisely from the Structural Marxist position of Rey, Robin, and Postel-Vinay that a new framework for "rethinking" the French Revolution in light of the revisionist challenge is in the process of emerging.

15. Robert Brenner has engaged Bois in yet another chicken-egg controversy over "politicism" and "economism" in articles published as part of the so-called Brenner Debate (and collected in Aston and Philpin 1985). In his response to Brenner's critique of the neo-Malthusian interpretation of the crisis of feudalism from a "class struggle" perspective, Bois accuses Brenner of "politicism" and of ignoring the structural dynamics of a feudal mode of production. Brenner responds by consigning Bois to eternal damnation for the sin of

"economism." Brenner's arguments against Bois are considerably weaker than those he marshals against his other critics, not least because of the straw-man tactics he employs. Brenner consistently refuses to acknowledge Bois's recognition of the "political" nature of the feudal levy and the inherent class struggle over it, as well as Bois's arguments regarding the possibility, indeed, the inevitability, of aristocratic political centralization as an outcome of this class struggle. Brenner's own emphasis on seigneurial political power and organization, although much more nuanced in his final essay (largely because he takes over much of Bois's own position, as well as that of Perry Anderson, who is not even cited by Brenner) continues to reify political power. Brenner, following a path already taken by Rey (who is also not cited), treats class power as if it were somehow independent of the forces and relations of production. How

can *class* be distinct from *production* when it is the forces and relations of production that constitute classes? Brenner makes an interesting and persuasive contrast between France and England as if he were thereby refuting Bois's general concept of feudalism. All Brenner has really accomplished, however, is an identification of the degree of variation of the English and French cases, that is, their uneven and combined development within the logic of feudalism, something Bois himself explicitly recognizes. Brenner's central argument—that because different outcomes can be demonstrated from similar feudal conditions, the independent variable must be class power, not the mode of production—is simply specious. If English lords had significantly more class power than did their French counterparts, they had it simply because the forces and relations of production in England were significantly different from those of France.

16. The debate has many dimensions; the central division, however, is between the Weber-Pirenne-Polanyi-Wallerstein position (which asserts first the inherently capitalist nature of cities, merchants, and markets and second the primacy of cities and trade in the evolution of capitalism) and the Marx-Dobb-Bois-Brenner position (which argues, if not for the primacy, at least for the importance of agrarian transformation and which denies the ahistorical view that all economic exchange is capitalist in nature). These debates, of course, echo those between formalists and substantivists, Marxists and Weberians, mode of production analysis versus dependency theorists, and so on. Kriedte follows Dobb in emphasizing the transformation of urban feudal classes (merchants and artisans) into capitalist classes (owners and workers) in articulation with agrarian transformations from seigneurs and peasants to landowners, tenants, and wage laborers.

1. The argument of the present chapter is deeply influenced by Bhaskar 1978; Bhaskar 1979; Ruben 1979; and Newton-Smith 1981. Each of these works provides a searching critique of contemporary philosophy of science, and all, by different yet convergent paths, attempt to defend scientific realism and the rationality of science without recourse to epistemological absolutism. Although none deals explicitly with Althusser (Bhaskar being a closet Althusserian), I am encouraged to find considerable similarities between the argu-

ments advanced in these works and the positions elaborated earlier by Althusser. Although I dissent from the stronger claims made by Bhaskar for his "transcendental realism" (I find the arguments made by Newton-Smith and Ruben more persuasive), I know of no better philosophical elaboration of the strengths of Althusser's philosophical position than the one implicit in Bhaskar's *Possibility of Naturalism* (1979). Since he expresses Althusser's position better than Althusser himself does, I have applied Bhaskar's terms *ontological realism* and *epistemological relativism* to Althusser's materialist theses (which are obviously the source of Bhaskar's original inspiration anyway). For Althusser's philosophy of science, I am also indebted to two excellent articles, O'Hagan 1981 and Gordy 1983; and, of course, to Lecourt 1975, a brilliant Structural Marxist survey of Bachelard and Canguilhem, which is equally informed with regard to Althusser's philosophical position. Finally, I am indebted to Kolakowski's lucid history of positivism (1968) and Novack's trenchant critique of Dewey's

pragmatism (1975).

2. Even the best discussions of Althusser fail to explore satisfactorily the connections between his early and later works. Benton 1984 glosses over the implications of Althusser's new view of philosophy for the concept of science; Callinicos 1982 simply dismisses the problem by asserting that Althusser's final position (which Callinicos sees correctly enough as subordinating epistemology to historical materialism) is incoherent because it continues to employ a science/ideology distinction. Callinicos does not seem to see that Althusser's final assertion of a science/ideology distinction has dropped all pretence of epistemological absolutism, nor does he grasp the import of Althusser's distinction between the substantive concepts of science and the logical categories of philosophy. Oddly enough, Callinicos proceeds to develop his own solution (based on Lakatos), which defends historical materialism on the grounds of its productivity, precisely the move already made by Althusser, but he lacks Althusser's awareness of the need to take a materialist and realist position that explains and defends such knowledge effects in the *Kampfplatz* of philosophy.

3. Balibar provides an excellent discussion of this, marred however by his contention that historical materialism can have no "general concept" of an epistemological break (E. Balibar 1978, 231). We will deal with Balibar's critique of general concepts (an excessive reaction to Althusser's rejection of theoreticism) in chapter 5.

4. Most controversial of these accusations is the charge of Stalinism. E. P. Thompson accuses Althusser of "an attempt to reconstruct Stalinism at the level of theory" (Thompson 1978, 323), while Alvin Gouldner sees him "providing a theoretical storm-cellar for Stalinism" (Gouldner 1977, 450). Jacques Rancière, one of the coauthors of *Lire le Capital*, maintains that Althusser's initial project, to undermine the Party bureaucracy and its stranglehold on theory, dissipated itself with the debates over "humanism" wherein Althusser's defense of the autonomy of theory, in a backhanded fashion, ended up serving the interests of the Party leadership; see Rancière 1974. A more restrained critique of the political implications of Althusser's theory may be found in Gerratana 1977 and 1977a; see also the wide-ranging discussion in the special Althusser issue of the French journal *Dialectiques*, 15-16 (Autumn 1976). For

a defense of Althusser against the charges of Stalinism, see P. Anderson 1980, chap. 4; and Benton 1984, 14-23.

5. This position is most intelligently presented in Callinicos 1976. For Callinicos, the solution is to abandon once and for all the notion of ideology as the other of science and to retain only the concept of ideology as the outcome of material practices. This is ultimately an irrationalist position, denying the concept of science and the specificity of scientific discourse (or any other discourse for that matter). Such a move also ignores the fact that philosophical debates over science and Marxism do take place and that without a concept of science as distinct from ideology/error a realist and philosophical position cannot be formulated. Callinicos argues that

we should pursue Althusser's insights into the materiality of ideology and eliminate the "epistemological relics" of his early works. But where does this leave Marxist philosophy? Ideology is what social agents "think in" or "represent themselves in," but it is the economic and the political that they think *about*. Because Marxism defines the economic and the political in a *different* way, the distinction between science and ideology cannot be dispensed with theoretically; Marxism not only explains ideology as socially produced ideas and beliefs but also combats those ideas and beliefs as erroneous (ideology/error). Thus it is not, as Callinicos seems to think, a matter of simply "leaving behind" the relationship of ideology and science and the functional distinctions between them, for Marxism cannot conceptualize science without ideology and without ideology/error, nor can Marxism philosophically defend its own knowledge effects without taking a position defending the category of the scientific.

6. Descombes, in a popular survey of the French intellectual scene, argues that in his later works Althusser "did away with Althusserianism and restored the priority of the political over the theoretical instance" (Descombes 1980, 134). Descombes cites the discussion of Althusser's "Preface to *Capital*" (Althusser 1971, 71-101), in which Althusser attempts to explain why intellectuals have difficulty understanding *Capital* while workers do not. Althusser writes: "The former [intellectuals] are blinded by bourgeois ideology which does everything it can to cover up class exploitation. The latter [workers], on the contrary, despite the terrible weight of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology they carry cannot fail to see this exploitation since it constitutes their daily life" (Althusser 1971, 100). Descombes concludes from this statement that "in returning in this way to experience and the 'lived through' Althusser abandons the attempt to endow Marxism with an epistemological foundation and reverts to the phenomenological foundation which had previously been thought good enough" (Descombes 1980, 135).

Descombes is guilty of two errors of interpretation here. First, he seems to imply that in rejecting theoreticism in his later work Althusser is abandoning the relative autonomy of theory, a view that is demonstrably wrong. Second, the implication that Althusser is returning to phenomenological Marxism cannot be sustained even within the text Descombes has chosen to prove his point. Descombes fails to mention that, in the passage cited, Althusser is referring to the class instinct of the proletariat and not their class position, an important distinction since, for Althusser, the former is ideological (referring to lived ex-

perience) while the latter is theoretical (referring to a concept). While class instinct is certainly an important factor in the receptivity of working-class subjects to Marxist theory (and an obstacle for bourgeois subjects), it is not a guarantee either that the theory will be received (or rejected) or that it will even be created: "Class instinct is subjective and spontaneous. Class position is objective and rational. To arrive at proletarian class positions the class instinct of proletarians only needs to be educated; the class instinct of the petty bourgeoisie, and hence of intellectuals, have, on the contrary, to be revolutionized" (Althusser 1971, 13). Descombes has simply missed the fact that the terms *class position* and *class instinct* are perfectly consistent with Althusser's (unchanged) position regarding the different modalities of ideology and science.

The working class *experiences* exploitation but can attribute it to many different causes: the will of God, bad luck, natural scarcity, as well as capitalism; what they *know* about it, however, is something completely different.

7. The usual tactic is to dismiss Althusser's thought as no more than the reflection of a political line. We have already referred to this tactic in reference to the charge of Stalinism leveled against Althusser, but it is also evident in Elliott 1987, who mechanically plots the course of Althusser's intellectual development in terms of political phases—Leninism, Maoism, Eurocommunism, and finally the demoralizing break with the PCF. While there is no denying the general accuracy (and usefulness) of Elliott's political chronology, nor even the fervor of Althusser's faith in communist internationalism and the intensity of his disillusionment with the PCF leadership, there is no justification for reducing theory to politics as Elliott occasionally does. Althusser's political commitment to the PCF and to global communism always existed in an uneasy relationship to his theoretical enterprise. His political faith in the popular masses and his desire for a revolutionary party organization capable of imaginative leadership and developing a "mass line" was never easily reconciled with a scientific application of his own problematic to existing capitalist and communist social formations and the global economy. Perhaps, as Elliott maintains, Althusser blamed first the ossified Stalinist bureaucracy of the PCF and second his own theoretical enterprise for the party's failure to activate the "popular masses," whose existence he posited as an article of faith rather than a scientific hypothesis. Perhaps also the widening gulf between political faith and objective reality contributed to Althusser's personal tragedy. Even if such speculations were to be true, however, they would have no relevance to a theoretical assessment of Althusser's work or to theoretical debates over historical materialism.

8. Althusser's periodization of Marx's intellectual development is elaborated in Althusser 1969, and summarized in the introduction to that work. Althusser returned to the problem in light of his reformulation of the concept of philosophy in a 1970 essay, "Marx's Relation to Hegel" (in Althusser 1972, 163-86). For excellent accounts of Marx's work sympathetic to Althusser's point of view see Therborn 1976, 317-413, and Callinicos 1983, 26-60; my summary of Althusser's interpretation of Marx's development is much indebted to them. For another interesting assessment of Althusser's intentions in relation to Hegel and to the scientificity of Marxism, see Levine 1981.

9. Lecourt 1975, written from an Althusserian perspective, contains one of

the best evaluations of Foucault's pre-Nietzschean works (which depend positively on Canguilhem and negatively on Althusser). For Bachelard in relation to Anglo-American philosophy of science, see Bhaskar 1975. For the relationship between Althusser and Bachelard, see Brewster 1971 and Balibar's more self-serving account, Balibar 1978. For an interesting application of the Althusserian problematic to the history of mathematics, see Raymond 1978; 1977; 1973. For another interesting application, this time focusing on the relation between

Stalinism and science, see Lecourt 1977.

10. Thus the oft-repeated claim that Althusser's project was to create an "epistemological Marxism" is mistaken. In fact, Althusser attempted to rid Marxism of the onus of grounding its knowledge in a philosophical discourse outside itself. André Glucksmann 1978 (an article that originally appeared in *Les temps modernes* in May 1967) anticipated Althusser's self-criticism of theoreticism without acknowledging the realist dimensions of Althusser's initial position. Given the trajectory of Glucksmann's intellectual career, which culminates in neo-conservatism, such a one-sided critique is not surprising. It is rather more surprising to find the "epistemological Marxism" designation in Smith 1984. Smith's discussion, unfortunately, deals only with *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, and then only with Althusser himself. I must also dissent from the interpretations of Althusser's epistemology presented in Elliott 1987 and Patton 1978.

1. On this point Althusser owes a great deal to Spinoza's concept of *experientia vaga*. Althusser credits Spinoza with the "first theory of ideology ever thought out in terms of (1) its imaginary 'reality'; (2) its internal inversion; (3) its 'center', the illusion of the subject" (Althusser 1976, 135).

2. Hirst 1979 criticizes Althusser for positing an impossible essence (the human individual) prior to the interpellated subject and for equating the concept of a social subject with a single human individual. With regard to the first point, Althusser's distinction between individuals and interpellated subjects is simply a heuristic device expressing the process by which human beings are constituted as social beings. Althusser has always insisted that the individual is always already a subject. What Hirst really objects to, and this is the thrust of his second point, is Althusser's claim that it is only human beings that are the locus of interpellations. Hirst rejects this "theoretical humanism" on Althusser's part and insists that economic enterprises are also socially constituted subjects, each having its own individual existence, rights, and powers. I would not wish to understate the reality or the power of corporations. However, I would argue that their social "subjectivity" is of secondary, not primary, significance: only human agents act.

3. The literature on Lacan is immense. Useful introductions to Lacan are Lemaire 1977; Bevenuto and Kennedy 1986; and Macey 1988. One should also consult two major collections of articles by or about Lacan published in *Yale French Studies*, volumes 48 and 55-56 (1972, 1977). Of particular importance in the context of the present work are Jameson 1977; Coward and Ellis

1977; and Badiou 1982. Althusser's own support for Lacan's project is recorded in "Freud and Lacan" (in Althusser 1971, 189-219). Althusser became progressively estranged from Lacan's posturing, however, and finally denounced him as a "magnificent, pathetic Harlequin" (see Clément 1983, 20, 206-7 n. 14). My summary of Lacan follows that of Lowe 1982.

4. In *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1980) attack

Althusser for this monolithic view of ideology. However, they completely miss Althusser's emphasis on the non-normative aspect of ideology, which opens the way to the subjection/qualification contradiction developed by Therborn. As for the dominant thesis of *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*—that ideology is not important, that it has never assimilated the exploited classes of any social formation, and that under capitalist modes of production it is not even essential to the reproduction of the social relations of production (since capitalism encourages diversity and relies on economic compulsion to keep it within "safe" limits)—it is at least arguable that the valorization of the "free individual" by the book's authors (who see it as symptomatic of the decline of capitalism) is in actuality a manifestation of a dominant ideology rather than a refutation of its existence. For an extended critique of Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, see Therborn 1984. For a careful elaboration of the dominant ideology of individualism and its contradictions within the present American context, see O'Conner 1984.

5. Althusser himself concedes this point in a personal communication to Therborn in which he states that he is "no longer prepared to defend the theoretical necessity of the notion ideological State apparatus," maintaining only that "the crucial point is to grasp the intrinsic link between the ideological apparatuses and the State" (Althusser, cited in Therborn 1980, 85).

6. For the New Philosophy, see A. Glucksmann 1980 and Levi 1982. See also the special issue of *Chicago Review* (volume 32, number 3 [1981]) devoted to the New Philosophy. For critiques to which I am especially indebted, see Dews 1985; Lecourt 1978; and Poulantzas 1978. It is important, I believe, to distinguish the *gauchisme* of Rancière from the neo-conservatism of the New Philosophers. While Rancière 1985 makes some cogent criticisms of Althusser's science/ideology distinction (as developed in the context of Althusser's essay "A propos de l'article de Michel Verret sur 'mai étudiant'" [1969a]), for the most part they are vitiated by Rancière's extreme voluntarism and irrationalism. Rancière rejects any attempt to defend the relative autonomy of scientific practice and instead collapses scientific practice wholly into ideology. Whereas Althusser attempts to distinguish between the technical and social divisions of labor within the university apparatuses—defending the value of the former while condemning the deformations of the latter—Rancière maintains that the university must be viewed as an oppressive unity, the object of class struggle, not as a contradictory apparatus internally divided by class struggle. While Althusser may or may not be guilty of understating the class bias of the university apparatus, there is no reason to follow Rancière and reduce science to ideology (to be replaced by what? proletarian science?). Rancière continues to privilege ideological struggle and working-class voluntarism in *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Rancière 1989), a work interesting for its iconoclastic attack on predominant interpretations of

working-class consciousness (its supposed desire to remake the world according to a working-class image rather than to change their lives in order to escape from a working-class existence); however, this effort—fully consistent with an Althusserian concept of ideology, by the way—is flawed by Rancière's unrepentant contempt for structural determination and

scientific realism.

7. The French Nietzscheans Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard are critically discussed in Descombes 1980 and Callinicos 1982 (my account of Deleuze is based on that of Callinicos). For Foucault's appreciation of Deleuze, see Foucault 1980a, 165-96. For Deleuze's appreciation of Foucault, see Deleuze 1972. Donzelot 1979, one of the best works inspired by Foucault, amply demonstrates the affinity of Foucault and Deleuze.

There is a vast literature on Foucault. The "authorized" commentary is Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983; another sympathetic and thorough account is that of Foucault's translator Alan Sheridan (1980). More critical is Merquior 1985, which, unlike Dreyfus and Rabinow, gives full attention to the neo-anarchist Nietzschean element of Foucault's work. Merquior also provides a useful survey of the controversies that have emerged over Foucault's scholarship. For the relationship between Foucault and the New Philosophers, see Dews 1979 and 1984; Lecourt 1978; and Poulantzas 1978. For my part, I am building on the arguments of Dews and Poulantzas regarding the ontologizing and demonization of Power in Foucault's works of the seventies; see also Merquior 1985. On Foucault's early period, see White 1978 (my summary of Foucault's *The Order of Things* follows White's) and Dominique Lecourt's chapter on Foucault in Lecourt 1975. For Foucault's later work, see White 1979 and Megill 1979. For the influence of Deleuze on Foucault, see Callinicos 1982. Megill 1985 situates Foucault in the tradition of Nietzsche and Heidegger but is insensitive to the uniqueness of the French neo-Nietzschean Left represented by Deleuze. Both Deleuze and Althusser are, characteristically, absent from the pages of Rabinow and Dreyfus. Indeed, Foucault's negative dependence on Althusserian concepts (see Lecourt 1975) is a well-kept secret among Foucault enthusiasts in the United States. Sheridan acknowledges the possibility of Althusser's influence but angrily (if feebly) rejects it by repeating Foucault's own disclaimers (see Sheridan 1980, 214). On the postmodern Left, the uncritical acceptance of Foucault advances furthest in Poster 1984, where Foucault is depicted as the discoverer of a "mode of information" that has allegedly replaced the mode of production as the relevant critical concept for contemporary social theory. Without denying the importance of the technological revolution in information processing and control, I fail to see why it vitiates the concept of a mode of production any more than did the steamship revolution or the telegraph revolution. For another post-Marxist, postmodern interpretation of Foucault, see Smart 1983. Finally, for Foucault's relation to the tradition from Sade to Bataille, see Stoekl 1985 and Lash 1985.

1. My interpretation is directly opposed to that of Bennett 1979 and more or less compatible with Sprinker 1987; see also Kavanagh 1982. Macherey (1982) has come to acknowledge grudgingly the necessity for some concept of

literary practice, while Eagleton waffles back and forth on his commitment to "Althusserianism"; see the preface to Eagleton 1986 and the interview (Eagleton 1982).

2. For an expanded critique of contemporary linguistics, see Pêcheux 1969; Pêcheux and Gadet 1981; Ducrot 1972; Henry 1977; and Faye 1972. All of these works share and develop a Structural Marxist approach to discourse and language that I am introducing through Pêcheux alone. For additional discussions of Pêcheux, see Macdonell 1986; Macabe 1979; and John Thompson 1984, a work flawed by its author's failure to acknowledge the common ground shared by Pêcheux, Faye, Bourdieu, and Althusser (Thompson self-servingly identifies Althusser solely with the work of Hindess and Hirst). Thompson deprecates, where he does not ignore entirely, the comprehensiveness and explanatory power of the problematic within which the particular works he discusses are situated in order to inflate the significance, in the minds of uninformed readers, of authors who reflect his own eclectic hodgepodge of phenomenology and critical theory.

3. On Gadamer and Reception Aesthetics, see Hoy 1978; Holub 1984; and Hohendahl 1977 and 1983.

4. It is more plausible that the historical variation of the "categories of literary reception"—the fact that certain texts are born literary while others become or cease to be so—indicates the presence of a certain type of objective, determinate cognitive activity, something like ideological production, around which aesthetic ideologies of reception and consumption constantly draw and redraw ideological lines of demarcation. Structural Marxism is able to conceptualize both the specific literary effectivity of the text (its autonomy relative to other signifying practices) as well as its determinate conditions of production and reception (its dependence on a variety of historically specific ideological practices). While such knowledge cannot produce an absolute or definitive interpretation of the meaning of the text in the objective idealist manner of Ingarden, Poulet, and Iser, it also cannot be mystified in the subjective idealist manner of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Jauss. Structural Marxism successfully avoids the aporia introduced by positing an "incommensurability" between production and reception in the manner of the so-called New Historicism of Greenblatt, Montrose, and company (see Veenser 1989). Against the New Historicism, we must protest that it is not enough to "juxtapose" text and context, literary and non-literary phenomena (a process that Dominick LaCapra aptly characterizes as weak montage), nor is it legitimate to hide inadequate explanations behind theoretical fig leaves such as the "irreducible complexity" of history, nor, finally, is it justifiable to parade an ideological desire to dissolve the distinction between knowledge and art—why? in order to sustain the notion of the critic as genius? to evade the political consequences of taking a firm position?—under the banner of textualizing history. The New Historicism may indeed answer such burning questions as how a professional middle-class academic from Berkeley might feel if he suddenly found himself in the body of Thomas More, but beyond legitimizing such thought experiments it is difficult to find any theoretical value in the New Historicist enterprise. (For an alternative, "Cultural Materialist" view of the English Renaissance, a view informed

by Structural Marxist concepts, see Dollimore 1984; Halpern 1991; and Dollimore and Sinfield 1985.) Nor, finally, is there much to recommend a Marxist version of reception

aesthetics, which simply replaces the crude materialist objectivism of reflection theory with an equally crude materialist subjectivism of a historicist reception theory.

It is interesting how a general concept of literary production keeps popping up, even in the works of its avowed enemies. Raymond Williams (1977), for example, begins by attacking the validity of a concept of literature by virtue of its historicity but ends up extolling the practice of literature as the "human essence of creativity."

5. My résumé of Renée Balibar's books is much indebted to Bouché 1981.

6. Fredric Jameson (1981) has convincingly shown that semantic elements (which he calls "ideologemes") perform an essential function in the realization of the literary styles of Balzac, Gissing, and Conrad. I have not included an analysis of Jameson's important book here despite the strong influence of Althusserian concepts on it—not primarily because of space limitations, although these are prohibitive, but because of the many other influences on Jameson's work. For perceptive evaluations of Jameson, see Eagleton 1986 and Dowling 1984.

1. Poulantzas found in Althusser's concept of structural causality the key to the problems of political power and hegemony raised by Lenin, Gramsci, and Weber. Take away Althusser's problematic and Poulantzas's entire work becomes incomprehensible. The tendency of certain commentators (Carnoy 1984; Jessop 1985) to depict Gramsci and Foucault as the "true" references for Poulantzas—thereby reducing his Althusserian "phase" to a temporary aberration of no real significance—is a preposterous misrepresentation and insupportable from Poulantzas's own remarks (see Poulantzas 1980; 1976a; 1979). The names of Gramsci and Foucault have become traces of the erasure of Althusser's impact on social theory—and Poulantzas, unfortunately, has been used frequently as an instrument of this process. As I have already argued, Foucault is something of a bastard child of Structural Marxism; Poulantzas accepted in Foucault only what they both took over from Althusser. We have also seen how Poulantzas wholeheartedly rejected the neo-Nietzschean, post-modern, post-Marxist tendencies of Foucault. I am not attempting to minimize the importance of Gramsci for Poulantzas (or for Structural Marxism generally, for that matter). For the important interaction between them, see Buciglucksmann 1980; Macciocchi 1974; Mouffe and Sassoon 1977; Anderson 1976. For Poulantzas on Gramsci, see Poulantzas 1965; and on Althusser in relation to Gramsci, see Poulantzas 1966. The importance of Weber for Poulantzas has been overlooked in the secondary literature. There is a need for a systematic comparison of Althusser and Poulantzas in relation to Weber.

2. The subtlety of Poulantzas's concept of the matrix effect of a mode of production—the fact that it denotes the intransitive moment of structural cau-

ality in opposition to the transitive moment of a particular practice—eludes most of the commentators, who throw up their hands in despair over the "circularity" of Poulantzas's thought (see, for example, Milliband 1973; Connell 1979). Ernesto Laclau's writings on Poulantzas

(Laclau 1977) are superior to the rest of the literature in this respect, but even Laclau sees Poulantzas's framework as "unilateral," thus grossly misrepresenting the subtle indirect determination of the matrix effect as "class reductionism" and willfully dismissing the distinction between intransitive and transitive moments as merely "abstract formalism." While Laclau has a point—Poulantzas, like Althusser, assumes the determinant place of the economic function in all social formations and the dominant role of the instance which exercises the ownership function within the mode of production—to call this reductionism or formalism makes sense only if one is seeking to defend pluralist indeterminacy, irrationalist relativism, and political voluntarism. Laclau's hidden agenda, revealed by his subsequent intellectual development, is a post-Marxist, postmodernist attack on scientific realism and economic determination. Laclau's views on Poulantzas are taken over and developed by Jessop 1985.

3. See, for example, Bridges 1974 and Milliband 1973. This criticism misses the central point, namely, the fact that the limitation of the political by the economic is both historical and structural (the matrix effect of a mode of production and the concepts of social class and political practice) as well as conjunctural. The well-known exchange between Milliband and Poulantzas regarding the class nature of the capitalist state is rather sterile since Milliband's subject-oriented view of class power and Poulantzas's structure-oriented approach lack any common ground, neither party being able (or willing) to bring up the concepts of ideological interpellation, pertinent effects, or social class, which might bridge the distance between their respective positions. For the exchange, see, in addition to Milliband 1973, Poulantzas 1969; Poulantzas 1976; and Milliband 1970.

4. Briefly, Poulantzas argues that the accumulation of contradictions in Germany and Italy accounts for the emergence of fascism. Within the power bloc of Germany the primary source of contradictions was the rapid expansion and concentration of capital in a country where political hegemony still resided with the landed aristocracy—the Prussian Junkers—who carried out the Prussian "bourgeois" revolution of the nineteenth century. German monopoly capital required mass state intervention in its favor in order to compensate for the disproportionate political weight of the Junkers, yet the structure of the power bloc and the relative strength of the various non-monopoly groups within it were obstacles to such intervention. In Italy the situation was even more accentuated. The power bloc consisted of the industrialists of the north and the landowners of the Mezzogiorno, with the former establishing their hegemonic position by maintaining the feudal character of southern agriculture.

The rise of fascism also involves a political confrontation between the forces of the working class and the bourgeoisie, of course, but it is the petty bourgeoisie that plays the essential role in the coming to power of fascism. Political and economic crises dissociate the petty bourgeoisie from liberal capitalism, and "status quo anti-capitalism" becomes a dominant oppositional ideological

theme. This ideological sub-ensemble "replaces" the dominant bourgeois ideology and

"cements" the social formation back together (this is the decisive element of a fascist takeover, as opposed to Bonapartism or military dictatorship). The function of fascism, according to Poulantzas, is to bring into existence a form of the state capable of establishing and organizing the hegemony of monopoly capital in this particular set of historical circumstances and political-economic crises. Under these particular crisis conditions, the petty bourgeoisie is able to climb to the highest levels of political life, yet the crisis is finally resolved only by the neutralization of the petty bourgeoisie and the establishment of the hegemony of monopoly capital—the latter being the essential component of the nationalist military power desired by the petty bourgeoisie themselves.

According to Poulantzas, the formal separation of the state and the economy is characteristic of all capitalist social formations, not simply parliamentary democracies. Poulantzas has written two books about "exceptional" or non-parliamentary forms of the capitalist state, including military dictatorship in *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* and fascism in *Fascism and Dictatorship* (Poulantzas 1976a; 1974). He examines a third form, "Bonapartism," in Poulantzas 1973. For the best discussions of Poulantzas's views of fascism, see Laclau 1977; Jessop 1985; and Faye 1973; see also Caplan 1989. Abraham 1986 is a suggestive and stimulating attempt to extend Poulantzas's line of investigation into the political dynamics of the rise of German fascism. The revised edition corrects certain controversial errors of quotation and includes a retrospective defense of the original argument and a response to critics. See also the important collection Dobkowski and Wallimann 1989. From an immense literature, I will mention only two brilliant works of synthesis that independently corroborate and complement Poulantzas's analysis, Wehler 1985 and Broszat 1981.

5. Poulantzas's work only suggests the fruitful potential of an application of Althusserian concepts of ideology, ideological interpellation, and habitus to the study of nationalism. They assimilate and transcend the cultural functionalism of Geertz 1973 and Gellner 1983. See, in particular, B. Anderson 1983; Nairn 1981; Howell 1986. For overviews of traditional Marxist views of nationalism, see H. Davis 1980, 1967.

6. For the creation of the post-war "American Century"—the European recovery, the Cold War, the Fordist state, and so on—in relation to the development of global capitalism, see Kolko and Kolko 1972; Block 1977; Pijl 1984; Mandel 1986; Mandel 1970; and Schurmann 1974.

7. Aglietta, Christian Palloix, Alain Lipietz, and others are all French economists and members of the so-called *école de régulation* concerned with capitalist regimes of accumulation and the global economy. Students of Althusser who have been significantly influenced by the Structural Marxist concept of a mode of production, the authors of the Regulation School are gaining increasing recognition as an alternative to the banalities of postmodernism and the shortcomings of dependency theory. In addition to Aglietta 1979, see Palloix 1972; Palloix 1976; Lipietz 1977; Lipietz 1983; Lipietz 1987; and Aglietta 1982. For a critical evaluation, see Brenner and Glick 1991.

8. For global restructuring and its effect on the uneven development of me-

tropole and periphery, see Mandel 1975; Lipietz 1987; Warren 1980; Amin 1980; and J. Kolko 1988.

9. For a lucid and systematic analysis of the present condition, see J. Kolko 1988. Lash and Urry 1987 is illuminating in its historical survey of the "organized" capitalist states, but its Habermasian thesis that capitalism is becoming "disorganized" is unconvincing; more persuasive is D. Harvey 1989, which analyzes postmodern culture in relation to global economic restructuring and the transition from a Fordist to a "flexible" regime of accumulation. Mention may perhaps be made here of the influential work of Structural Marxist urban geographers such as David Harvey and Manuel Castells, who have done much to clarify the importance of urbanization for capitalist accumulation and the significance of social space for capitalist domination; see, in particular, D. Harvey 1989a; and Castells 1977.

10. Of course Poulantzas's work hardly exhausts the field of Marxist and neo-Marxist analysis of the state in contemporary capitalism. At the very least, mention must be made of Wolfe 1977; O'Conner 1984; Offe 1984; Offe 1985; and Gross 1982. For the important work of Joachim Hirsch and the German "state derivation" (*Staatsableitung*) debates of the seventies, see Holloway and Picciotto 1979. Useful surveys of new theoretical developments include Carnoy 1984 and Jessop 1982.

11. The phrase is Stuart Hall's. Hall 1988 and Leys 1989 are superb analytical accounts of the ideological and social-structural basis of Thatcherism. For Reaganism, see the equally perceptive analysis of Mike Davis 1986.

12. Poulantzas justifies this designation by arguing that the "middle class" of white-collar workers, technicians, supervisors, and civil servants is a recently emerged fraction of the petty bourgeoisie. His argument is based on the concept of social class—the fact that today's class relations bear the mark, via the matrix effect, of yesterday's ensemble of political, ideological, and economic relations. He argues that "certain groupings which at first sight seem to occupy different places in economic relations can be considered as belonging to the same class [the petty bourgeoisie] . . . because these places, although they are different, nevertheless have the same effects at the political and ideological level" (Poulantzas 1975, 205). In effect, Poulantzas maintains that despite having different positions in the forces and relations of production, the new traditional petty bourgeoisies have similar political and ideological positions, and these similarities justify defining them as fractions of the same social class.

At first sight, Poulantzas appears to have reversed the causal relationship between social classes and their pertinent effects in order to assert the predominance of political and ideological effects over economic relations. While similar ideological and political positions today will participate in the constitution of the matrix effect of tomorrow, Poulantzas has apparently lost sight of the fact that these political and ideological positions will not constitute the matrix effect by themselves, but only in their articulation with economic relations whose modes of determination are dominant within the capitalist mode of production. The apparent confusion of pertinent and matrix effects is corrected in a later article in which Poulantzas forcefully reasserts

the primacy of economic relations: "What are social classes in Marxist theory? They are groups of social

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agents . . . defined *principally* but not exclusively by their place in the *production process* , i.e., by their place in the economic sphere. The economic place of the social agents has a *principal* role in determining social classes. But from that we cannot conclude that this economic place is sufficient to determine social classes . . . the political and the ideological also have an important role" (Poulantzas 1973a, 27).

Poulantzas's attempt to incorporate political and ideological relations into the matrix effect constituting social class should never have been construed as a denial of the primacy of economic relations for the simple reason that such a reading renders the entire body of his work incomprehensible. Unfortunately, however, it is precisely such a reading that opened the door for a post-Althusserian, post-Marxist misappropriation of the concept of social class such as that of Laclau 1977, who criticizes Poulantzas's "economic reductionism" while developing a concept of social class based on the autonomy of ideology and the primacy of politics with respect to economic relations. This approach reaches its logical conclusion in Laclau and Mouffe 1985, who treat history as a "story of liberty" with the discourse of "democracy" as its historical motor. Laclau and Mouffe advocate a new ideological offensive "cutting across" class lines and deploying "democracy" as a neo-Sorelian, populist myth of "liberty as well as equality." Laclau and Mouffe assert an irrationalist individualism combining the most specious aspect of Saussurean linguistics (there is no social reality, only the differential reality of discourse) with a perverted form of Lacanian psychology. Lacan's concepts of the Real (desires, needs, and feelings of the individual), the Imaginary (the psychological process of identification), and the Symbolic (the discursive codes and practices of society) refer to an objectively existing tension between the psyche of a determinate individual and a determinate social reality. Laclau and Mouffe transmogrify Lacan's problematic in order to assert a free-floating relationship between the Symbolic and the Imaginary from which the Real of the individual psyche and the reality of social structures are equally absent. From here it is a simple matter for them to reduce political theory to an arbitrary dispersion of equally inadequate ideological positions and political power to a random pattern of "nodal points" condensing willy-nilly in social space. Thus the "socialist strategy" of Laclau and Mouffe is little better than a defense of Madison Avenue huckstering, and their view of democracy reduces it to yet another commodity to be mass-marketed without regard to its substance.

Poulantzas compounds his problems by attempting to distinguish the "new petty bourgeoisie" from the working class by means of the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Productive labor is defined as "labor which produces surplus value while *directly reproducing the material elements that serve as the substratum of the relation of exploitation: labor that is directly involved in material production by producing use-values that increase material wealth* " (Poulantzas 1975, 216). Insofar as I understand the distinction in Marxist theory between productive and unproductive labor (see Gough 1972), it seems to be

increasingly unhelpful when large proportions of "unproductive" workers sell their labor power to capitalist firms and when the production and realization of surplus value increasingly depend on the integration of produc-

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tion and distribution, on scientific and technological services, and on a vast array of governmental activities. In any case, Poulantzas never successfully reconciles his ad hoc use of economic criteria as a principle of distinction in one case and political and ideological criteria in another.

These errors, I hasten to add, do not vitiate the general thrust of Poulantzas's argument. A common ideological "sub-ensemble" (reformism, individualism, power fetishism) does exist between the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie and for precisely the reasons Poulantzas specifies: both fractions are caught in a contradictory class position between the hegemonic class interests of the capitalist class and its antithesis, the class interests of the working class. Given the primacy of the capitalist-working class contradiction, the position of the new petty bourgeoisie is necessarily contradictory and oscillates with varying degrees of instability between capitalism and socialism. One can hardly argue with Poulantzas's contention that historically the new petty bourgeoisie has, with rare exceptions, gravitated toward the capitalist pole of the ideological spectrum. Even less can one refute his contention that the mere fact that the new petty bourgeoisie and the working class are both employed by capital has produced little ground for a viable anti-capitalist political alliance.

I believe that the confusion engendered by Poulantzas's attempt to deploy the concept of social class for purposes of clarifying the class position of the new petty bourgeoisie can be salvaged by the rather obvious device of considering the distinction between mental and manual labor from an economic rather than an ideological perspective. Poulantzas, of course, recognizes the vital significance of the mental-manual labor distinction, but he assigns it to the realm of ideology and not to the forces and relations of production. I would argue the reverse: credentials, degrees, organizational positions, and skills are personally owned economic assets, and as such they correspond, roughly, to the personal property of the traditional petty bourgeoisie. The new petty bourgeoisie can never be hegemonic in any capitalist social formation—functionally, their assets, like the personal property of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, are subsumed by the requirements of monopoly capital—but they can and do wage a fierce struggle to preserve their symbolic capital from devaluation by capitalists (deskilling, mechanization) and by the working class (equal opportunity, equality).

Thus similar economic relations (personal ownership of economic assets) account for similar pertinent effects (a common ideological sub-ensemble) shared by the traditional and new petty bourgeoisie. While recognizing the effectivity of political and ideological positions within the ensemble of social relations that constitute the matrix effect and social class, we must also acknowledge the primacy of economic relations within the ensemble. Such an approach demonstrates the essential validity of Poulantzas's contention that the "middle class" is a class

fraction of the petty bourgeoisie. But even here the significance is not so much in the name as in the careful elaboration of the phenomenon.

Finally, the Structural Marxist view that the political spectrum is defined, in the last instance, by its capitalist and working-class poles and not the contradictory class position of the petty bourgeoisie is certainly more persuasive than

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the universe of "free-floating" signifiers devoid of class determinations and class values posited by postmodern, post-Marxist social theorists. This later position is at the very least guilty of peddling wish fulfillment to the middle classes; at most it may be justly condemned for facilitating the ideological legitimation of global capitalism and relegating the Left to the degrading and hopeless position of "loyal opposition" and chief whipping boy of the New Right.

My own views on the problem of the new petty bourgeoisie are heavily indebted to Wright 1985 and Larson 1977. For alternative perspectives from within a Structural Marxist perspective, see Baudelot, Establet, and Malemort 1981 and Carchedi 1977. For a brilliant sociological analysis of ideological distinctions between the various class fractions of the bourgeoisie and the working class using the concepts of habitus and symbolic capital, see Bourdieu 1984. For discussions of Poulantzas's conception of the new petty bourgeoisie, see Wood 1986; Connell 1979; Ross 1979; and Jessop 1985.

