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THE "STRUCTURALIST" INTERROGATION  
OF MARX

The "Structuralist" Interrogation  
of Marx

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to outline and assess the "structuralist" reading of Marx with respect to the principles of Marx's method of class analysis. The work of Louis Althusser was my major point of reference although the works of Etienne Balibar, Maurice Godelier and Nicos Poulantzas were also consulted.

It is argued that Marx's method can be broken down into four major principles: (1) a principle of materialism; (2) a principle of complexity; (3) a principle of structural causality; (4) and finally a principle of objectivity. Althusser's marxism is employed as a theoretical framework for outlining these principles. At the same time I attempt to assess Althusser's reading of Marx.

My overall judgement of Althusser is positive although a number of critical points of weakness are discussed. It is argued that Althusser's marxism creates for the possibility of a truly "open" marxism - a marxism committed to knowing something and not unthinkingly applying Marx's utterances in a non-critical manner.

### Acknowledgements

This study was conceived as an attempt to critically assess the work of a marxist theorist whom I consider to be one of the most important in the entire tradition of Western Marxism. Althusser's marxism can be considered as a move towards a more "open" marxism. In my view the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (The Critique of Dialectical Reason), Lucio Colletti (Marxism and Hegel) and Sebastiano Timpanaro (On Materialism) are also invaluable contributions to this project. All of these writers allow for the possibility of a non-dogmatic marxism.

Needless to say, Althusser's studies have radically transformed my own thinking about Marx and marxism. A word of caution however - this is not to say that I think Althusser has said the last word on Marx. Many intelligent men and women have thought and written about Marx and no doubt each interpretation has a certain validity. There is no real Marx directly available for cognition. Any reading of Marx is tendentious in that we always read Marx from a particular point of view. Althusser is correct here - there is no innocent reading.

The work of Henry Veltmeyer (The Idealist Problematic of Marx's Early Works) has also greatly effected my understanding of Marx. Also, personal advice from him helped me to organize my thoughts more clearly.

I would like to thank my committee, Cusillo Legendre, Maurice Roche, and Louis Greenspan for their assistance. Finally I am grateful for being able to work in a department with such supportive fellow students.

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'My analytical method does not start from man but  
from the economically given social period.'

Karl Marx, Notes on Wagner, 1879-80.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Althusser's Intervention

The object of this study is to systematize and assess the "structuralist" interrogation of Marx with respect to Marx's method of class analysis. The theoretical point of reference is the work of Louis Althusser although reference is made, in the course of this study, to the writings of Etienne Balibar, Maurice Godelier and Nicos Poulantzas, all of which have either collaborated with Althusser or are inspired by his work. In my view, Althusser's philosophical studies on Marx have crucial consequences for the manner in which Marx's method of class analysis is conceptualized. I hope to provide a demonstration of these consequences.

I feel that Althusser has made an important contribution to the science of historical materialism in rigorously reading and raising questions concerning the nature of Marx's thought. His work marks a decisive and controversial break with other interpretations of Marx and thus deserves to be thoroughly read and assessed by those working within marxism as a framework of analysis and/or by those who employ marxism as a point of reference for political practice. It also deserves serious consideration by those working within the sociological enterprise - however conceived - as a possible contribution to certain forms of sociological discourse.

This writer conceives of this study as part of a larger theoretical task - the task of demonstrating the methodological consequence of either appropriating Marx's early works (especially the 1844 Manuscripts) as works of historical materialism, or rejecting them (as Althusser does) on the grounds that they are pre-marxist texts. This theoretical task is not simply an academic question but is rather of theoretical and ultimately political consequence. Let us begin by situating Althusser's marxism within its political-ideological field and within the contemporary contours of the tradition of western marxism,<sup>2</sup>

Althusser conceives of his work as an ideological and theoretical intervention in a definite conjuncture - a conjuncture defined by the situation within the French Communist Party and French philosophy and most importantly within the international Communist movement.<sup>3</sup> In Althusser's view, the ideology of humanism is a principle feature of this conjuncture and to some extent, we may consider his work a reaction to it.<sup>4</sup>

The Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U. (1957) is a crucial event in the emergence of this conjuncture. At this time the Soviet State declared that the class struggle had disappeared in the U.S.S.R. and that the dictatorship of the proletariat had been superseded. The State now ruled on behalf of the "whole people" as the Soviet Union embarked on the road to communism. With the critique of Stalinist dogmatism there emerged political support to a humanist reaction.<sup>5</sup> The Soviet State claimed to be building communism in the name of the "People", "Man", consistent with a humanist reaction to Stalin's "errors". At the same time outside the U.S.S.R., the

Western' C.P.'s had pursued policies of unity with socialists, democrats, and Catholics predicated upon the belief in dialogue and socialist humanism.<sup>6</sup>

Thus a re-invigorated humanist marxism was given impetus from political transformations within the Soviet Union and changes in the policies of the Western C.P.'s. It is in this context that the appropriation of Marx's early works as texts of historical materialism is of political consequence. For here, within Marx's writings themselves, was theoretico-ideological justification for a humanism which, in Althusser's view functioned as an ideological mask for concrete problems within the U.S.S.R.<sup>7</sup> That is to say that concrete problems within the U.S.S.R. were being posed in terms which did not provide for the possibility of their resolution. The concepts of humanism functioned rather to obscure these problems.

In Althusser's view the ethical denunciation of Stalin's "errors" did nothing to explain the real conditions of existence of those errors.

"Simply put, the recourse to ethics so deeply inscribed in every humanist ideology may play the part of an imaginary treatment of real problems. Once known, these problems are posed in precise terms; they are organization problems of the forms of economic life, political life, and individual life. To pose these problems correctly and to resolve them in reality, they must be called by their names, their scientific names."<sup>8</sup>

Let us now situate Althusser, rather schematically, within the tradition of western marxism as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

In attempting to characterize the dominant trend within western marxism, Perry Anderson argues that the focus of theoretical concern has been a shift away from political and economic issues

toward philosophy.<sup>10</sup> The objective conditions of this shift are seen by Anderson in the overall divorce of theory from practice (the separation of marxist theoreticians from the working class movement) brought about by the defeats of the western working classes.<sup>11</sup> The Stalinization of the C.P.'s resulting in constraints upon theoretical activity,<sup>12</sup> and the objective consolidation of capitalism in the Post-War period are seen by Anderson as major determinants of the theory/practice split with the ensuing shift of concern towards philosophy.

However, the changes marxism underwent also had an important internal determinant - the reception of Marx's Paris manuscripts of 1844.<sup>13</sup> Again, the status of Marx's early works arises as a problem, for it is these texts which lend credence to a philosophical (philosophy of man) rendering of Marx. At a theoretical level it is these texts which defined the theoretico-ideological field.

"The peak of the influence of the philosophical writings of the early Marx was reached in the late fifties, when themes from them were diffused on the widest scale throughout Western Europe. So much so, that the first unequivocal rejection of these texts as constitutive of historical materialism at all - Althusser's initial essays - still perforce took them as the starting-point for any discourse within contemporary Marxism. Even in negation, they defined the preliminary field of discussion."<sup>14</sup>

Althusser's intervention within marxism can be seen to some extent, as both a reaction to humanist ideology within the international communist movement and a reaction to the reception of Marx's early texts within theoretical marxism.

It is within this context that we may situate a major thesis of Althusser's interrogation of Marx: that an "epistemological break" separates the problematic of the young Marx from the problematic of the mature Marx.<sup>15</sup> This transformation of Marx's thinking is seen as a necessary condition for the inauguration of historical materialism as a science - the science of the history of social formations. In Althusser's view this rupture represented a rejection of humanism or a philosophical anthropology which based a theory of society and history on a concept of the human essence. Althusser identifies three indissociable elements within this break with humanism.

- "(1) The formation of a theory of history and politics based on radically new concepts: the concepts of social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructure, ideologies, determination in the last instance by the economy, specific determination of the other levels, etc.
- (2) A radical critique of the theoretical pretensions of every philosophical humanism.
- (3) The definition of humanism as an ideology."<sup>16</sup>

Althusser has recently clarified his thesis of Marx's "epistemological break" with respect to the usage of pre-marxist concepts (at least in Althusser's view) such as alienation in Marx's later works. Here, we let Althusser defend himself.

"We can say, then, that this science does not emerge, ready-made, from Marx's head. It merely has its beginning in 1845, and has not yet got rid of all its past - of all the ideological and philosophical prehistory out of which it has emerged. There is nothing astonishing in the fact that for some time it continues to contain ideological notions or philosophical categories which it will later get rid of."<sup>17</sup>

In this study I will not spend a great deal of time defending this thesis. In my view, there is a fundamental change in Marx's thought in 1845 at the level of the German Ideology. In chapter 2 I wish to demonstrate rather schematically, this change with reference to the opposed methodological principles of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts and his later works.

My study thus begins (Chapter Two) with an examination of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts with respect to Althusser's thesis of the "epistemological break." It is argued that these texts of Marx are characterized by the principles of idealism, simplicity, expressive causality and subjectivity. These four principles are in my view, clearly opposed to the principles of Marx's mature works. It is argued that Marx's mature works are characterized by the principles of materialism, complexity, structural causality and objectivity.+

In chapters 3 - 5 I turn to Althusser's philosophical studies and attempt to show their importance to an understanding of Marx's method of class analysis, or if you will, his dialectic. I feel this project necessary in that Althusser does not systematize his studies with respect to Marx's method of class analysis. His reading of Capital was rather, a "philosophical" reading.

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+I am indebted to Henry Veltmeyer who helped me in identifying the principles of Marx's early works and his mature works. His study of Marx's early works has greatly influenced my understanding of Marx. See Henry Veltmeyer, The Idealist Problematic of Marx's Early Works (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University).

"... 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."<sup>18</sup>

I pose to Althusser the question of Marx's method, the question of its methodological principles (presuppositions) and its major categories of analysis.+

As has been pointed out, I feel the major principles of Marx's method (after 1845) are the principles of materialism, complexity, structural causality and objectivity. The only text where Marx comes close to outlining his method is the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859).<sup>19</sup> However, this text is beset by a number of ambiguities, especially as regards the base/superstructure metaphor and the principle of causality implied. In fact, it lends credence to the most vulgar interpretations of Marx - an "economic reductionism."

In chapters 3 through 5, Marx's methodological principles are discussed with reference to Althusser's "interrogation" of Marx. Chapter 3 deals with Marx's principle of materialism. The concept of mode of production is examined along a number of dimensions both epistemological and methodological. The marxist conception of social structure is compared/contrasted to the conceptualizations of both functionalism and structuralism. We focus on the "structuralist"

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<sup>18</sup>The object of this study is then somewhat similar to Durkheim's project of defining 'what is a social fact' and 'what are the rules for understanding them' in his Rules of Sociological Method.

project of constructing a general concept of mode of production.

Chapter 4 deals with Marx's principles of complexity and structural causality discussed with reference to Althusser's conception of the social whole as a structure-in-dominance. Here we focus on Althusser's concepts of overdetermination and structural causality.

Chapter 5 deals with Marx's principle of objectivity discussed with reference to Althusser's thesis that history is a process without a subject. Here we focus on Althusser's concepts of support and the differential forms of historical individuality.

My final chapter begins with a discussion of Althusser's notion of dialectics. Then, after assessing the results of my study, I will briefly outline what I take to be the relation between the science of historical materialism and humanism.

## NOTES

1. Works by Althusser employed in this study are For Marx, 1969, Reading Capital, 1975, Politics and History, 1972, Lenin and Philosophy, 1971, Essays in Self-Criticism, 1976.

Etienne Balibar's major paper, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism" is the result of a joint seminar with Althusser and is found in Reading Capital, 1975.

Maurice Godelier's major work is Rationality and Irrationality in Economics, 1972. See also his, "Structure and Contradiction in Capital", in R. Blackburn (ed.), 1972.

Works by Nicos Poulantzas consulted are Political Power and Social Classes, 1975, Classes in Contemporary Capitalism, 1975.

2. This discussion is based on two papers by Althusser, "To My English Readers" and "Marxism and Humanism" in For Marx, 1969.

I rely rather heavily here on Perry Anderson's, Considerations on Western Marxism, 1976. Reference is also made to Goran Therborn's Science, Class and Society, 1976.

3. Althusser, 1969, pp. 9-10.
4. See Althusser's essays, "To My English Readers", and "Marxism and Humanism" in For Marx, 1969. Also see Althusser's "Reply to John Lewis" and "Elements of Self-Criticism", in Essays in Self Criticism, 1976.
5. Althusser, 1969, pp. 10-11.
6. Ibid., p. 11. Also see Anderson, 1976, p. 39.
7. Althusser, 1969, pp. 238-239, pp. 240-241.
8. Therborn, 1976, p. 53. Also, see Althusser, 1976, pp. 78-93.
9. The discussion relies on the works of Anderson, 1976 and Therborn 1976.
10. Anderson, 1976, p. 49. On this point I feel Anderson has an unfortunate tendency to view philosophy and political-economy as mutually exclusive concerns. In my view, Anderson has asserted the existence of a dichotomy which, at least in the case of Althusser is misleading if not entirely meaningless. Why? Because Althusser's philosophical reading of Marx has decisive methodological consequences for the manner in which problems of political and economic concern can be posed.

11. Anderson writes "The hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is thus that it is a product of defeat. The failure of the socialist revolution to spread outside Russia, cause and consequence of its corruption inside Russia, is the common background to the entire theoretical tradition of this period," Anderson, 1976, p. 42. See also, Therborn, 1976, p. 39, p. 53.
12. Anderson, 1976, pp. 42-43.
13. Ibid., p. 50.
14. Ibid., pp. 51-52.
15. Althusser, 1969, pp. 33-39, pp. 227-231.
16. Ibid., p. 227.
17. Althusser, 1976, p. 67.
18. Althusser, 1975, p. 14.
19. Marx, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1970, pp. 20-21.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Marx's Epistemological Break

As I have pointed out in Chapter One, the principles of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts are the principles of idealism, simplicity, expressive causality and subjectivity. In this chapter, the 1844 Manuscripts are examined with respect to these principles and Althusser's thesis of an "epistemological break" distancing a young Marx from a mature Marx. I also examine the changes Marx's thinking underwent in 1845 in The German Ideology.

In my view, the unifying principle of 1844 is Marx's concept of the human essence constructed with reference to Feuerbach's anthropological concept of man and Hegel's historical concept of man.

Feuerbach, in his critique of religion, reversed the subject-predicate relation obscured or mystified by Hegel's dialectic (God as the subject-- man the predicate) and argued that the essence of religion is man himself. Religion represented a denial of man's own being in the sense that "man affirms in God what he denies in himself."<sup>2</sup> Man exteriorizes or objectifies his subjective essence in God who is then seen by man as the foundation for the being of man. The criticism of religion consists in affirming man as the foundation of God in order for man to be able to reappropriate that which he had lost to God.<sup>3</sup>

Marx applies this method of criticism to Political Economy but gives to Feuerbach's concept of "species-being" a more active side.<sup>4</sup>

"In applying Feuerbach's critique of alienation to the relation of Political Economy (ie. labour-capital), and thus moving from the sphere of consciousness to that of real life, Marx necessarily has to conceive of Man's relation to the real world as 'active' as well as 'passive'. This is to say, man 'objectifies his essence not only in thought-objects at the level of consciousness, but he does so in real life, in the objects of his labour."<sup>5</sup>

For Marx, the problem of Political Economy required a new content for the concept of "species-being" (Feuerbach) in that the alienated product of religion was a thought-object (God) whereas the alienated product of Political Economy was a real object (product, labour, capital - man's estranged being). Thus does Marx turn to Hegel.

"The outstanding achievement of Hegel's Phenomenology and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labor and comprehends objective man - true, because real man - as the outcome of man's own labour."<sup>6</sup>

Objectification as labour comes to be the defining feature of man's "species-being" for Marx.

"in creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, ie. as a being that treats the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species being."<sup>7</sup>

It is this ahistorical conception of man's true essence which functions as the ideal point of reference for Marx's encounter

with Political Economy. The idealism of Marx's method lies in the manner in which an historical problem (the problem of capitalist society) is referred back to a concept - the concept of man's true essence. This concept of man is based upon an a priori speculation (without reference to empirical conditions) into what it means to be truly human. Hence a dominant theoretical function is assigned to the conceptual couple 'the human/the inhuman' throughout Marx's early writings grasped in 1844 through the concepts of essence and existence. Marx sees his own task as a thinker in giving a philosophical basis to reality - in providing, from a speculative standpoint, insight into those fundamental reasons of reality and existence - a basis to which only the philosopher has access.<sup>8+</sup>

The purpose of the construction of this concept of the human essence is to provide a rational basis for the critique of capitalist society. The method of criticism consists in the employment of this concept as a normative model by which reality can be judged and criticized.<sup>9</sup> Thus man's essence is seen to be contradicted in his existence in capitalist society. The conceptual couple 'the human/the inhuman' functions throughout the text, on the basis of a concept of man, as a tool for criticizing capitalist society.

The method of analysis is characterized by a 'phenomenological reduction' of phenomenon to their essence - this essence having its ideal point of reference in a concept of man. Let us consider this

\*Hence the elitist conceptualization of the intellectual/proletariat relation in much of Marx's early works i.e. the intellectual as the head, the proletariat as the heart. See Marx On the Jewish Question in Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Goddat Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society.

methodological procedure in greater detail.

In my view, the 1844 Manuscripts are characterized by an ambiguity or tension between an historical and an anthropological discourse.<sup>+</sup> This tension lies in the manner in which a problem of history has as its resolution, a recourse to an anthropological concept of man. Consider the role assigned to the concept of alienated labour in this light.

In his critique of Political Economy, Marx begins with its inability to explain an historical fact.

"Political economy starts with the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us. It expresses in general, abstract formulas the material process through which private property actually passes, and these formulas it then takes for laws. It does not comprehend these laws, i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property."<sup>10</sup>

Marx however, is unable to comprehend this fact of Political Economy on terms wholly internal to an historical discourse.<sup>++</sup>

<sup>+</sup>By an anthropological discourse I refer to a philosophical anthropology which focuses upon "man's" existential condition - thus, its concern with man's essence, nature etc.

By contrast, an historical discourse deals with men insofar as they are constituted by the given conditions of a specific society.

In 1844, Marx walks a fine line between both. The tension between these problematics - their incompatibility - leads to a theoretical rupture in 1845 as Marx founds a new system of scientific concepts based on new principles.

++The fact Marx is referring to is the increasing impoverishment of the working class on the one hand and the increasing wealth of capitalist society on the other hand. See 1844 Manuscripts trans. M. Milligan. (International Publishers, N.Y. 1973), p. 106.

Veltmeyer comments upon Marx's method of resolving this problem.

"In the course of this critical discourse (supported by a concept of 'Man') the 'economic fact' or phenomenon of impoverishment emerges as a particular form of an essential contradiction (the separation of man from his objectified essence) whose point of reference is an original unity (worker-product). Thus does Marx start from a contradiction-in-appearance (the phenomenon of impoverishment) expressed by Political Economy as an 'economic fact' so as to formulate its concept - to resolve it into its universal form, which is to say its human meaning: the separation of man from his objectified essence, (expressed in the concept of 'alienated labour'.)"<sup>11</sup>

The concept of alienated labour is assigned the theoretical function of bridging the gap between an historical discourse and an anthropological discourse. The historical discourse is concerned with man's alienated existence in capitalist society having its conditions of existence in man's separation from his product, activity, other men and the species.<sup>12</sup> Man's alienated existence is thus, in this sense, a problem internal to history. However, the ideal point of reference for a comprehension of man's alienated existence in capitalist society is a concept of the human essence - an essence contradicted by history.

The tension and ambiguity of the 1844 Manuscripts is located in the translation of this historical problem into a contradiction between man's essence and his existence, a contradiction implied by the concept of alienated labour. Man in capitalist society is alienated for both historical reasons and reasons external to history: historical in that the conditions of existence of his alienation are internal to the system of private property and ahistorical in that alienation is a consequence of the fact that man's essence is denied

by his existence. Thus alienation is both a consequence of the system of private property (historical reason) and a consequence of man's separation or divorce from his essence in his existence (anthropological reason). The category, alienated labour, thus does service to both an historical discourse and an anthropological discourse. With this in mind an otherwise absurd text of Marx makes sense theoretically.

"...it is as a result of the movement of private property that we have obtained the concept of alienated labour (of alienated life) from political economy. But on analysis of this concept it becomes clear that though private property appears to be the source, the cause of alienated labour, it is rather its consequence, just as the gods are originally not the cause but the effect of man's intellectual confusion. Later this relationship becomes reciprocal."<sup>13</sup>

Here Marx attempts to establish the theoretical conditions for conceptualizing alienated labour as both the cause and the consequence of the system of private property. The theoretical justification for seeing alienated labour as the cause of the system of private property is, in my view, given with the methodological principles of subjectivity and idealism. The former principle is the basis upon which history can be conceptualized as a process with a subject. This principle co-exists with a principle of idealism - an a priori speculative construction of a concept of the human essence to which historical conditions are referred. Man is the subject of the historic process in that having alienated himself in history - private property is the consequence of alienated labour - the necessity of historic change (the communist revolution) is given with man's teleological mission to reappropriate his essence in

existence. As Althusser notes, within this humanistic problematic,

"History is the alienation and production of reason in unreason, of the true man in the alienated man. Without knowing it, man realizes the essence of man in the alienated products of his labour (commodities, state, religion). The loss of man that produces history and man must presuppose a definite pre-existing essence. At the end of history, this man, having become inhuman objectivity, has merely to re-grasp as subject his own essence alienated in property, religion and the State to become total man, true man."<sup>14</sup>

Thus the necessity of communist revolution is no longer entirely given with historical conditions (class struggle) but is rather given with the contradiction between man's essence and his existence.<sup>15</sup>

In my view, the method of analysis is thus characterized by the principle of simplicity - a phenomenological reduction of phenomenon to their simple inner essence. The system of private property is the phenomenon which the philosopher reduces to its essence - alienated labour - which is the 'truth of' the system of private property. It is simple in that the conception of the social whole is predicated upon a principle of expressive causality. This principle of causality is able to describe the effect of the whole on its parts, "...but only by making the latter an 'expression' of the former, a phenomenon of its essence."<sup>16</sup> Phenomena (the system of private property for Marx in 1844, the State in 1843, religion for Feuerbach) are reduced to their simple inner essence in the alienation of man.

In summarizing, in my view, the 1844 Manuscripts are based upon the methodological principles of subjectivity, idealism, simplicity and expressive causality. The principle of subjectivity

situates "Man" as the subject of the historic process. Man having alienated himself in history through his objectifying activity has given birth to a monster - the system of private property - which now is the cause of man's alienated existence. (The necessity of historic change is referred back to man's teleological mission to reappropriate his essence, alienated in existence. The ideal point of reference for this historic process is an a priori speculative concept of the human essence. The principle of simplicity is indicated by the method of the reduction of phenomenon (the system of private property) to their essence (alienated labour) which again refers back to an ideal point of reference in a concept of the human essence. The principle of causality is expressive, conceptualizing the effect of the whole on its parts as that of an essence to its phenomena ie. concrete historical conditions as manifestations of alienation.

Having reconstructed a conception of the methodological principles of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts we confront an epistemological and methodological question. Does the method of analysis of 1844 provide for the production of knowledge? I make no attempt to treat this question exhaustively here. I would only wish to assert that, in my view, the underlying/unifying principle of Marx's method of analysis - an a priori speculative concept of man's essence - functions in the theoretical discourse as an "epistemological obstacle." Here I accept a position of Althusser on one of the differences between Marx's early writings and a scientific discourse (This difference is epistemological). The former is a closed discourse in that the a priori speculation is already the answer/solution to the problem

at hand within the theoretical discourse. Thus religion, State and the system of private property are conceptualized as the phenomenon of an essence - the alienation of man. The theoretical resolution to each of these three separate problems is provided prior to analysis with the concept of the human essence. The 'truth of' each is the alienation which has as its theoretic justification a concept of man.

A scientific discourse, on the other hand, is characterized by an openness. The answer/solution to its problems are not immediately given in an act of a priora speculation. Althusser comments on this problem.

"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 'infinite' (Lenin) of its object that is, designed ceaselessly to pose and confront new problems and ceaselessly to produce new pieces of knowledge. Let us say: 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, definite and absolute knowledge of History, in short as a closed system, excluding development because lacking an object in the scientific sense of the term, and thus only ever finding in reality its own mirror reflection."<sup>17</sup>

In Althusser's view, and it is a position I adopt wholeheartedly, Marx was only able to found historical materialism as a science on condition of breaking with a theory of society and history predicated upon an abstract, a priora concept of "Man". Through abandoning this concept and its terrain Marx founds a radically new concept based upon entirely different methodological principles - the concept of mode of production. In the German Ideology Marx and

Engels speak directly of this "settling of accounts with their erstwhile philosophical consciousness" and the founding of a new worldview.

"This sum of productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse, which every individual and generation finds in existence as something given, is the real basis of what the philosophers have conceived as 'substance' and 'essence of man'."18

Here in the German Ideology Marx begins to formulate the concept of mode of production as the principle concept of the science of historical materialism. However, this concept did not spring ready-made from Marx's head but was rather the result of a long theoretical labour within definite material conditions - economic, political and ideological. Here, I will make no attempt to give an account of these historical conditions but will only point out that to deal adequately with this problem, historical materialism must be applied to itself. Its emergence, as a science must itself be the object of analysis within a discourse based on the principles and categories of historical materialism.19

In the German Ideology we find only the beginnings of the science of historical materialism. However, the profound transformation that Marx's thinking underwent is indicative of his search for new principles adequate to an understanding of history. Thus he breaks with any method of a priori speculation.

"Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production."20

Gone is the idealist concept of "Man" as Marx formulates a principle of materialism. That is, he will study individuals not as they appear in their own or other's imagination but,

"...as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions..."<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the study of history is no longer concerned with a "subject" alienating itself in existence but rather with,

"...conditions independent of their will."<sup>22</sup>

Again, this is not to say that historical materialism was produced in some miraculous act all at once. It is beset by ambiguities and inadequate formulations later to be rectified. The concept of the social relations of production is an example of the ambiguity of the first text of Marx and Engel's new world view,+

Marx formulates the concept of relations of production alternatively as forms of intercourse (interaction), co-operation, and property. Therborn even argues that the first formulation (forms of intercourse) is a pre-marxist concept restricting itself to the commercial aspect of capitalism.<sup>23++</sup> On the basis of this distinction Therborn argues that the contradiction of capitalism formulated as that between the forces of production and forms of intercourse in the German Ideology is very different from the

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+A very rigorous and serious work by Lucia Colletti locates the emergence of the concept of social relations of production at the level of 1844. Although I think Colletti's work is excellent I do not feel the 1844 Manuscripts authorize such an interpretation. See Lucia Colletti, "The Emergence of the Concept of Social Relations of Production", in Marxism and Hegel (NLB, 1973)

++Therborn makes this point by arguing that the German work Verkehr, translated in English as either intercourse or interaction, contains no idea of the relations of production.

contradiction between the forces and relations of production found in Capital.

"In The German Ideology there is no contradiction between the social character of the forces of production and private Verkehr. On the contrary, it is stressed that a 'universal' Verkehr develops, manifested above all in the world market. The contradiction is that the universal Verkehr makes the oppressions of the prevailing Verkehr intolerable (unertraglich) for the masses. Within the given Verkehr storm the development of the productive forces involves wealth, civilization and universal human interaction on the one side, and on the other propertylessness and misery. The universality of the capitalist form of Verkehr makes it universally intolerable, and the revolutionary negation of the negation follows. The forces of production and the Verkehrsform do not form a structural contradiction, resulting in crises of the economic system.<sup>24</sup>

Although I would agree with Therborn that there is a serious ambiguity in the manner in which Marx formulates the concept of relations of production and contradiction I feel that the various concepts - forms of intercourse (interaction), co-operation, property - occupy the same theoretic space as does the concept of relations of production in Capital. In my view, the essential point is that these concepts and the concept of contradiction become the unifying principles for an explanation of the historical process. As Althusser and Veltmeyer point out, Marx breaks with a notion of simple contradiction between man's essence and his existence, and begins to speak in terms of a contradiction between two complex structures.<sup>25</sup>

"Thus all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse."<sup>26</sup>

However, perhaps the clearest formulation of this contradiction, and that which is closest to the conception of contradiction found in

Capital is where Marx speaks on the relation of big industry to private property.

"Our investigation hitherto started from the instruments of production, and it has already shown that private property was a necessity for certain industrial stages. In industrie extractive private property still coincides with labour; in small industry and all agriculture up till now property is the necessary consequence of the existing instruments of production; in big industry the contradiction between the instrument of production and private property appears for the first time and is the product of big industry; moreover, big industry must be highly developed to produce this contradiction. And thus only with big industry does the abolition of private property become possible."<sup>27</sup>

It is this formulation of contradiction which will receive its most explicit and clear conceptualization in Capital Vol III.<sup>28</sup>

#### Summary

I have attempted to reconstruct the methodological principles of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts in order that we may see the differences at the level of method separating the young Marx from the later Marx. I have also attempted to show the changes Marx underwent at the level of The German Ideology (1845) - a change that is so marked that we may designate it as both an epistemological and a methodological break.+  

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"For the purposes of this study epistemology shall refer to the problem of knowledge and the ontological status of a science's object. With respect to the problem of knowledge, epistemology is concerned with the relation between knowledge and, that which it is the knowledge of, as a problem. It's concern with the ontological status of a science's object concerns the thought/reality relation. For example in chapter 3 I examine the concept of social structure as defined by marxism, functionalism, and structuralism. We shall see that marxism and structuralism differ from functionalism in their ontological conception of social structure. That is, functionalism restricts the concept to visible social relations whereas both marxism and structuralism define social structure as an aspect of ....

In my view, Althusser's thesis that there is an "epistemological break" in Marx stands the test of a critical reading of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts. The transformation Marx's thinking underwent in 1845 offers a good example for a sociology of knowledge and as Althusser points out, for an understanding of the birth of a science. ✓

reality but not visible reality. See chapter 3.

Methodology shall refer to the concepts and the principles (presuppositions) on which they are applied to a given theoretical object.

#### NOTES

1. Here I rely quite heavily on Henry Veltmeyer's work, *The Idealist Problematic Thesis*, McMaster, 1975. esp. ch. 2, "Marx's Philosophical Encounter with Political Economy."
2. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, trans. Zawar Hanfi, 1972, p. 125.
3. *Ibid.* pp. 127-130
4. Veltmeyer, *op cit.*, 1975, pp. 304-305.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
6. Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk V. Struik, Trans. Martin Milligan, 1973, p. 177.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
8. Maurice Godelier, *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics*, 1972, p. 117.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
10. Marx, 1973, p. 106.
11. Veltmeyer, 1975, p. 300.
12. In my view, Bertell Ollmen provides the most rigorous discussion of this aspect of the problem of alienation. See his *Alienation: Marx's Concept of Man in Capitalist Society*, 1973.
13. Marx, 1973, p. 117.
14. Althusser, 1969, p. 226.
15. Godelier, 1972, p. 117.
16. Althusser, 1975, p. 310.
17. Althusser, 1976, p. 154.
18. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur, 1973, p. 59  
For an excellent discussion of Marx's break with his humanistic problematic see Veltmeyer's "Marx' Epistemological Break: From Philosophy to Science", ch. 9, in Veltmeyer, 1975.

19. Althusser, 1969, pp. 38-39.
20. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1973, p. 46.
21. *Ibid.* pp. 46-47.
22. *Ibid.* p. 47.
23. Therborn, 1976.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 369.
25. Veltmeyer, 1975, p. 403. See also Althusser's, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in Althusser, 1969.
26. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1973, p. 89.
27. *Ibid.* p. 91.
28. Karl Marx, *Capital*, v. III, Part III, especially ch. XV., 1974.

## Chapter Three

The General Concept of Mode of Production

In chapter one it was argued that Marx's scientific discovery was the production of the concept of mode of production as the materialist principle of explanation for the understanding of society and history. In this chapter I shall reconstruct and assess the "structuralist" interrogation of Marx with respect to this concept and discuss some of the problems thereby encountered.

A number of epistemological and methodological questions are raised with respect to the concept of mode of production. What kind of scientific object is the concept of mode of production? What are its differences or similarities to the objects of other social science discourses, ie. structuralism, structural-functionalism? What is the nature of the activity which produces and uses it? And finally, how successful have the "structuralists" been in constructing the general concept of mode of production?

I shall begin with a comparison of marxism (à la Althusser), structuralism (Levi-Strauss) and structural-functionalism (Parsons) on a number of methodological and epistemological points. This comparative exposition will lead to a discussion of Althusser's epistemology and his conception of theoretical activity. The concluding section deals with the "structuralist" attempt to construct a general concept of mode of production.

## System and Structure

With reference to a systems frame of reference, marxism, structuralism and structural-functionalism are in agreement on two points: (1) that society is to be conceived of as an objective system independent of the intentions of individuals; (2) that the structural articulation of the components of the system is to be investigated prior to that of its historical genesis.<sup>1</sup>

Marx's statement in the 1859 Preface that the relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of the productive forces are conditions independent of individual wills is indicative of an objective systems frame of reference.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, individuals are treated only insofar as they function as "embodiments" or "personifications" of specific class relationships.<sup>3</sup> This latter point is developed more systematically in chapter four in a discussion of Althusser's thesis that "history is a process without a subject".

However, this agreement of both marxism and functionalism on society as an objective system should not obscure the very real differences in how this system is conceived. Functionalism conceives of the social system on the basis of an organicism systems model+ which applies the concept of function to an objective system of social relations. Primary emphasis is on the functioning of concrete social units on behalf of the total social system. Marxism however, gives

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+Note: There is an inherent conservatism in this model because of the biological metaphor. The analogy of a body and its organs can lead to serving social systems as somehow "natural". This is evident in Durkheim's discussion of the normal and the pathological based on the metaphor of a diseased organism. See Ch. III, in Emile Durkheim, The Rules of Sociological Method, trans. S.A. Solray and J.H. Mueller, ed. G.E.G. Catlin, (The Free Press, N.Y. 1964).

gives primacy to the concept of class in relation to that objective system. When units of the system are conceived of functionally, it is with reference to their role in effecting the reproduction of a system of class domination.<sup>+</sup>

As has been noted, all three approaches agree on the priority of structural over historico-genetic study.

"It would therefore be unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development. The point is not the historic position of the economic relations in the succession of different forms of society. Even less is it their sequence 'in

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<sup>+</sup>The reader is encouraged to see Levi-Strauss's paper, Social Structure for a more in depth discussion of his method. He sets up a number of criteria for designating a phenomenon as a structure.

"First, the structure exhibits the characteristics of a system. It is made up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change with out effecting changes in all the other elements.

Second, for any given model there should be a possibility of ordering a series of transformations resulting in a group of models of the same type.

Third, the above properties make it possible to predict how the model will react if one or more of its elements are submitted to certain modifications.

Finally, the model should be constituted so as to make immediately intelligible all the observed facts. "Claude Levi-Strauss, "Social Structure" in Structural Anthropology, (N.Y.: Basic Book Inc.) pp. 279-280.

All three approaches are in agreement with only one problem. Althusser's present position is incompatible with the second criteria. This criteria implies that it is possible to construct a theory of all possible modes of production - a possibility which Althusser denies. See below.

the idea' (Proudhon) (a muddy notion of historic movement). Rather, their order within modern bourgeois society."<sup>4</sup>

This issue of priority however, ought not to be construed as an argument against historical analysis. There is no question here of restricting ourselves to structuralist analysis. The point that is being made, is that the study of structure is prior to the analysis of the genesis of the components of structure, in the order of research. Further, in terms of the method of exposition of the results of research, the structural or logical order again has priority over the historical order.<sup>5</sup> The structure of the argument of Capital is evidence of this priority. The historical genesis of elements of the capitalist mode of production - ie., the sections on primitive accumulation, the expropriation of peasant lands - is only introduced after the major structural components of the cmp have been examined.

This is how we should understand the presentation of the categories - commodity - money - capital - in the first volume of Capital. It is not a 'history' of the different forms of money.+ Lucio Colletti's discussion of the first chapters of Capital is right to the point.

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<sup>4</sup>As Godelier notes, "Such a 'history' is possible, and can be scientific, only on the basis of results won by preliminary structural research, and the results of these historical researches will also contribute to the development of structural research. In this circular movement of cognition, the starting-point of which is always analysis of functions and of the structures that realize them in defined conditions, a single science of man is constituted, which does not isolate in closed fetishized compartments, or oppose to each other, ethology and anthropology, history and theory etc." Maurice Godelier, Preface to Rationality and Irrationality in Economics, tr. Brian Pearce, (Monthly Review, N.Y. 1972)

"Beginning with the 'form of value' or commodity form, one descends to the 'form of money' and from this to the 'form of capital' just as, in logic, one passes from the universal to the particular, and from the particular to the individual. First of all one begins with the commodity; then money, which is itself a commodity, although it has a particular function; finally capital, which is itself money, designed for a particular use. All of the links of the deductive chain appear to be suspended from the logical prius from which they started, so that, as Marx says, 'it may appear that we had before us a mere a priori construction'. In actual fact, what prevents any a priorism is that the category, besides having its meaning as a generality or idea and therefore as a logical prius, is here grasped in relation to the particular object from which it was abstracted. In other words, it is taken as the most generic and superficial characteristic, the last element which has been reached in the course of the inquiry or the analytic dissection of the object (hence the crucial importance of the process of the formation of concepts)."<sup>6</sup>

The point Colletti is making here is that the first chapters of Capital are not a 'history'. Marx begins with a discussion of the commodity-form and the money-form in preparation for the analysis of capital. Here we touch upon Marx's method of scientific abstraction, a point to be developed later in this chapter.

Although all three approaches agree on the priority of structural study they diverge on their views of history. Now one must be careful in 'lumping' various functionalists and structuralists together on this point. Here I note only that amongst some functionalists there is a tendency to assume that,

"...the historian can only provide us with the succession of accidental events which have caused a society to become what it is."<sup>7</sup>

Levi-Strauss also has a tendency to see history as a kind of compilation of contingent historical events, although he has urged a greater convergence between historical and structural study.<sup>3</sup>

Althusser's point here has been to argue that an empiricist conception of history which sees the "given" historical events as the proper domain of its inquiry is not adequate to a scientific explanation of history. The "givenness" of history consists of the ideological representations of past historical situations and thus the historian's practice must involve a principle of reading through these representations if empiricism and ideological mystification are to be avoided. For Althusser this requires constructing the object of history with the concepts of mode of production and the levels of the social formation.<sup>9</sup> Indeed the very question of what is an historical event has to be raised.+

For the "structuralists" historical events are to be defined and understood with respect to the social structures which are the necessary conditions of existence of an event. As against Levi-Strauss's notion of "irreducible contingency" at the heart of all historical study, Godelier argues for the primacy of necessity with respect to historical events.<sup>10</sup>

"From the moment, however, when one accepts the assumption of the existence of necessary conditions for the appearance and disappearance of social structures, for their specific articulation and causality, history as reality can no longer be reduced to a succession of purely accidental events. Events have their own necessity, and accidents are seen to impose a necessity which ultimately does not depend on them since it expresses the objective properties of social relations properties of compatibility

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+The question of historical relativity and Althusser's proposal for a science of history is dealt with by Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975), pp. 303-323. They point to the very real problem of the relativity of a marxist history as opposed to other 'histories' (p. 311).

and incompatibility, which underlies the limited system of their possible transformations."<sup>11</sup>

#### Visible Appearance or Internal Logic: Defining Social Structure

So far we have two points of agreement with our three approaches: (1) the objectivity of social systems; (2) the priority of structural research. However, as the question of viewing history, Marxism clearly diverged from both structuralism and functionalism. This is a problem of both epistemology and methodology.

On the epistemological side, we may note the convergence of marxism and structuralism on the ontological status of the concept of social structure. Both approaches reject functionalism's empiricist definition of social structure. For functionalism, social structure refers to the visible relations between individuals - the social structure is readable in visible social relations. Note here that it is not a question of the objective nature of social structure which is at issue, but rather, a question of its readability. Both Marx and Levi-Strauss reject functionalism's empiricist reading of structure and conceptualize social structure as a reality that exists,

"...beyond the visible relations between men, and the functioning of which constitutes the underlying logic of the system, the subjacent order by which the apparent order is to be explained."<sup>12</sup>

In anthropology, both A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and S.F. Nadel have restricted the concept of social structure to visible social relations.<sup>13</sup> Social structure is conceived of as the totality of interacting individuals - in Radcliffe-Brown's words, as the totality of "relations of person to person."<sup>14</sup>

Social structure is thus readable in an empiricist sense - is available to our senses, to direct observation. Consider the following statement from Radcliffe-Brown.

"But direct observation does reveal to us that these human beings are connected by a complex network of social relations. I use the term 'social structure' to denote this network of actually existing relations. ...My view of science is that it is the systematic investigation of the structure of the universe as it is revealed to us through our senses."<sup>15</sup>

In sociology, both M. Levy Jr. and Talcott Parsons have accepted this empiricist conception of social structure.<sup>16</sup>

Consider two statements from Levy.

"The term structure as used here means a pattern, an observable uniformity, of action or operation."<sup>17</sup>

"...one can observe such norms in operation. One can observe what people in fact do and what they refrain from doing, what they say and refrain from saying, and so forth, and uniformities in such action can be observed."<sup>18</sup>

Again, the focus is on a reality directly accessible to observation. Both Levi-Strauss and Marx reject this empiricist reading of social structure. In both approaches,

"...what is visible is a reality concealing another, deeper reality, which is hidden and the discovery of which is the very purpose of scientific cognition."<sup>19</sup>

Both approaches reject an epistemology which restricts theoretical conceptualization to, what we might term, the phenomenal manifestations of a deeper, more complex reality. Goddard emphasizes the poverty of such an empiricist view of theory.

"The status of reality is only accorded to observable phenomena, therefore, there are no hidden relations, principles, or forms, nor is the scientist engaged in the construction of models or theories of such relations or principles in order thereby to explain what he observes. Such a view of science leads no further than to description of observable regularities, their classification through comparison with apparently similar phenomena, and the abstraction of general uniformities discerned as a result of classifying the forms of the phenomena in question."<sup>20</sup>

Within the discipline of anthropology, Levi-Strauss's structuralism is quite antithetical to this empiricism. He takes Radcliffe-Brown to task for failing to distinguish between social structure and social relations.

"...the term 'social structure' has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built up after it.

...It will be enough to state at this time that social relations consists of the raw materials out of which the models making up the social structure are built, while social structure can by no means, be reduced to the ensemble of social relations to be described in a given society."<sup>21</sup>

Marxism concurs on this anti-empiricist conception of what constitutes social structure. We shall interrogate Althusser's epistemology more fully in a moment. Here we may well ask what is the importance of criticizing an approach as empiricist.

It is important in my view both for the production of adequate scientific theory and for the struggle, at a theoretical level, against the dominant practical ideology. Let us elaborate on this latter point by way of a deeper consideration of the functionalist conception of what constitutes a social structure.

We may begin by noting the aspect of visible social reality to which functionalism restricts the concept of social

structure. Following Durkheim, functionalist sociology has conceived of a society as a normative structure. Attempting to push beyond the false obviousness of nineteenth-century bourgeois ideology - an ideology which conceived of society as a composite of freely contracting individuals - Durkheim emphasized the non-contractual elements of any contract which specified the frame of reference within which contracts could be constructed.<sup>22</sup> Thus, prior to any contract, there exists an institutional structure consisting of generalized norms which allowed for the negotiation of contracts and alliances without "the creation of a complete social structure de novo."<sup>23</sup>

Social structure is thus conceptualized as the norms or rules of social behaviour between interacting persons. This conception has figured very importantly in the work of Talcott Parsons. Parsons sees the object of sociology as the social system consisting of "the interaction of pluralities of human individuals."<sup>24</sup> The system's constant features are conceptualized as structure. Social structure as a constant feature of social systems is then seen as "institutionalized patterns of normative culture".<sup>25</sup> It is cultural in the sense of patterns of meaning and value expressed through symbols - normative in that it is prescriptive of human action through internalized values - and institutionalized in that it is embedded in concrete social institutions. Parsons feels that the theorist is able to abstract the "patterns of institutionalized normative culture" from the observable relations between individuals. Abstraction then becomes a process by which the theorist analytically distinguishes aspects of the given. One is able to construct the structure conceptually from the empirically

given social relations by observing the regular features of interaction and positing a normative structure as regulating that interaction. As Goddard notes,

"Its consequences for the development of theory is that all concepts are necessarily empirical concepts referring to the observable processes of social life. There can be no analytic 'break' with the phenomena in order to penetrate their inner nature. Sociological analysis cannot progressively strip away the outer forms of the real (as in psychoanalysis) in order eventually to reveal the immanent structure of the real, but is limited to finding an observable social order at the phenomenal level."<sup>26</sup>

Both structuralism and marxism are clearly then, antithetical to functionalism's position on the theoretical status of norms and rules as the constitutive elements of social structure. For Levi-Strauss, norms are not structures.

"For conscious models, which are usually known as 'norms' are by definition very poor ones, since they are not intended to explain the phenomena but to perpetuate it."<sup>27</sup>

At this point an important link between structuralism and the marxist theory of superstructure is established.+ Norms and rules in marxist terms are components of the ideological superstructure - a reality which masks the actual process of social life. Marx demonstrated that the visible appearance of social life may in fact assume a form that is the direct opposite of the actual processes - the theory of the fetishism of commodities is a case in point.

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+Indeed, Levi-Strauss conceives of his work as a contribution to the marxist theory of superstructure. Claude Levi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, (Weidenfeld und Nicolson, London, 1972), p. 117, p. 130.

Consider the labour contract as an illustration of these points. Here the actual process is the direct opposite of the appearance that process assumes at the phenomenal level.

"The final pattern of economic relations as seen on the surface in their real existence and consequently in the conceptions by which the bearers and agents of those relations seek to understand them, is very much different from, and indeed quite the reverse, of their inner but concealed essential pattern and the conception corresponding to it."<sup>28</sup>

That is, it appears (in social formations dominated by the emp) as if the worker is paid for his/her labour. It appears as if the worker is paid for the entire labour which he performs in the workplace - equivalents appear to be exchanged for equivalents. Thus, in capitalist ideology there is the notion that there is a "fair day's pay for a fair day's work."

A problem then arises - from where does surplus-value come. If the worker actually is paid for the entire labour which he performs in the workplace, surplus-value cannot come from the unpaid labour of the working class - exploitation disappears. Profit (a component of surplus-value) then appears to be a product of capital itself. At this point the entire labour theory of value would collapse as labour could not be seen as a source of wealth.

However, Marx demonstrated that this was the phenomenal form of a more basic reality. That is, the worker does not actually receive a wage for his/her labour but rather for the use of his/her labour-power. Through the wage, the capitalist buys the right to employ the use-value of the worker's labour-power for his own purposes. The worker is paid enough to reproduce his/her labour-power in an acceptable

form to capital.+ He is only paid for part of the labour which he performs. Another portion - unpaid labour - is appropriated by the capitalist. Thus what appeared as an essentially equal contract between labour and capital, i.e., equivalents exchanged for equivalents; becomes an exploitative process. Labour (and nature of course) then becomes the source of all wealth. Profit is therefore no product of capital, but rather, is a component of surplus-value which is the product of the labour of the working class - a product of the exploitation of one class by another.++

Normative structures are therefore the phenomenal manifestations of an underlying structure not directly visible in the empirically given social relations - the structures of capitalist production, the exploitation of the working class. Thus we follow Marx in leaving behind the world of Bentham with its freely contracting individuals and the world of Durkheim and Parsons with its non-contractual elements of a contract, and depart from the sphere of circulation (the exchange of labour-power as a commodity) and proceed to the site where the social actor's scripts are written - the capitalist process of production.

#### Epistemology and Theoretical Practice

The structuralist and marxist definition of social structure as non-empirical entails both a categorical ontological statement about

+See Marx's discussion of the value of labour-power in Capital, V.I. pp. 167-176.

++For an introduction to these problems and other related economic issues the reader is encouraged to see Ernest Mandel's Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory.

the forms of social life and a dictum for the very practice (theoretical) of the social scientist. Both of these points are considered with respect to Althusser's epistemology and his conception of theoretical practice. More precisely, here we are concerned with the ontological status of the concept of mode of production and the nature of the practice which constructs it. The reader is cautioned as to the tentativeness of the points elaborated in this section. An adequate account/assessment of Althusser's epistemology would require a detailed study in itself.

Firstly, a categorical ontological statement: the World or Being contains a fundamental schism between two domains - the realm of lived experience and the realm of the real dynamics responsible for those experiences - in short, a split between appearance or phenomenal manifestation and essence. The latter is the proper object of scientific discourse - to move from the outward appearance to the essence of things. Althusser quotes Marx on this point,

"All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things coincided."<sup>29</sup>

It is this ontological position which is shared by any structuralism.

Althusser applies this ontological principle to all the forms of social life, i.e. economy, ideology, a text. This will become clearer if we consider his principle of reading any text. Althusser argues that just as in psychoanalysis Freud treated the patient's utterances as symptomatic of a deeper, more complex reality, so too for the reading of a text.<sup>30</sup> What an author says can be considered symptomatic of an underlying structure of the text - that which unifies and provides coherence to the text - in short, its problematique.<sup>31</sup>

Now this treatment of a text is essentially the same procedure which is demanded by a non-empiricist definition of social structure. That is, what a society says about itself - its ideological definition of itself - is only the surface effects, the visible symptoms of an underlying reality - the complex unity of a social formation's different structures and practices.

Further, at the level of phenomenol appearance, a systematic distortion is involved which maintains the opacity of social structure to society's members. In a sense, the social structure is communicated through the lived experiences of members in a systematically distorted form. This distorted form is one mode of existence of ideology which Althusser identifies and it is seen to be eternal. That is, class and non-class societies alike, share in this fundamental opacity of their social structures.<sup>32</sup>

"Of course, it is also necessary to pose the problem of ideology's function in a society without classes - and this would then be resolved by showing that the deformation of ideology is socially necessary as a function of the very nature of the social whole; more specifically, as a function of its determination by its structure which renders this social whole opaque to the individuals who occupy a place in it determined by this structure. The representation of the world indispensable to social cohesion is necessarily mythical, owing to the opacity of the social structure."<sup>33</sup>

It is this very opacity of all social structures which establishes the relative autonomy of science from all forms of ideology.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the very existence of social science can only be validated by this schism between members' spontaneous knowledge of their social forms and that of the scientist. One of the possible political effects of this disjuncture between science and ideology is the relegation of the masses

to the sphere of inferior knowledge. Thus we have a possible Althusserian position of, science for the intellectuals, ideology for the masses. The relation of intellectuals to the masses then becomes, as Geras notes, an exterior and pedagogical one.

"It's final effect is to make the relation between Marxist theory and the working class a unilateral and purely pedagogic one; the intellectuals 'give' the class the knowledge it needs.

...When knowledge celebrates its autonomy, the philosophers celebrate their dominance."<sup>35</sup>

The Althusserian theory of ideology will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five. Here we note only the underlying ontological principle which authorizes the disjunction between science and ideology through the opacity of all social structures. An example used by Levi-Strauss will help to make the point and reveals a symptomatic point of weakness in Althusser's marxism.

"Linguistics thus presents us with a dialectical and totalizing entity but one outside, (a beneath) consciousness and will. Language, an unreflecting totalization, is human reason which has its reasons and of which man knows nothing. And if it is objected that it is so only for a subject who internalizes it on the basis of linguistic theory, my reply is that this way out must be refused, for this subject is one who speaks: for the same light which reveals the nature of language to him also reveals to him that it was so when he did not know it, for he already made himself understood, and that it will remain so tomorrow without his being aware of it, since his discourse never was and never will be the result of a conscious totalization of linguistic laws."<sup>36</sup>

The analogy to social structure is revealing. Knowledge of social structure does not dissipate the distortions of members' spontaneous conceptions. However, and here we touch a weak point in Althusser's marxism, the "light" (marxism as a science) which provides this knowledge can/should provide one of the tools for the conscious

transformation of a social formation. This raises the complex problem of the relation between knowledge and political practice, science and value-commitment - the possibility of revolutionary transformation of a social formation.

Althusser's ontological position on the status of the concept of mode of production also has consequences for the manner in which theoretical activity is conceived. Defined as a non-empirical existence, the mode of production is a reality, knowledge of which is not immediately available to the bearers of its processes. In Althusser's view knowledge of a social formation cannot be reduced to the self-consciousness of the working class.<sup>37</sup> In short, knowledge is distinct from the real and cannot be simply reduced to proletarian class-consciousness.

Althusser's epistemology therefore demands that we register the distinction between the real and thought about the real.<sup>38</sup> The concept of mode of production is thought about the real produced by a specific practice entirely within the process of thought. The question of correspondence between a concept and the real, formulated by Althusser as the relation between the object of knowledge and the real object, is designated by Althusser as a false problem. The "problem of knowledge" is false insofar as it makes the relation between the object of knowledge and the real object problematic - insofar as it is a search for a guarantee - that we really do have knowledge. Indeed, for Althusser it is an ideological problem.

If the problem of knowledge is false, what then is the primary problem as regards knowledge? For Althusser it is the problem of the

knowledge effect.<sup>39</sup> This problem shifts the locus of philosophical concern from the problem of a relation between thought and the real to a problem entirely within thought - the question of the mechanism of knowledge.

"... by what mechanism does the process of knowledge, which takes place entirely in thought, produce the cognitive appropriation of its real object, which exists outside thought in the real world? Or again, by what mechanism does the production of the object of knowledge produce the cognitive appropriation of the real object, which exists outside thought in the real world? The mere substitution of the question of the mechanism of the cognitive appropriation of the real object by means of the object of knowledge, for the ideological question of guarantees of the possibility of knowledge, contains in it that mutation of the problematic which rescues us from the closed space of ideology and opens to us the open space of the philosophical theory we are seeking."<sup>40</sup>

In my view however, Althusser in no way provides adequate discussion of these problems. For example, why is the problem of knowledge ideological? What is meant by the mechanism of knowledge - the dialectic? In what way does the substitution of a question rescue us from the closed space of ideology? What does it mean to refer to ideology as a closed space? One does not solve philosophical problems by declaring them false. If pushed, Althusser's only answer to the question of the adequacy of the object of knowledge to the real object is that it just is so - so be it. Once we have a science it automatically generates knowledge of the real. But why? how? Again, a silence on Althusser's part. Indeed, as Veltmeyer notes,

"Althusser's verbal solution to the central problem of structuralist epistemology - the 'mechanism' of the 'knowledge-effect' - betrays a 'silence' in an effective presupposition: an underlying correspondence or homology between the order of the world and the nature of thought."<sup>41</sup>

By defining the relation between thought and reality as a false problem, Althusser runs the risk of a formalist epistemology. That is, the concepts of thought become mere heuristic devices for organizing the real in a meaningful pattern. Indeed, Levi-Strauss has been subjected to this kind of interpretation.<sup>42</sup> I find it difficult to see the problem Althusser finds with Engels statement that,

"...the concept of a thing and its reality, run side by side like two asymptotes, always approaching each other yet never meeting. This difference between the two is the very difference which prevents the concept from being directly and immediately reality, and reality from being immediately its own concept."<sup>43</sup>

In short, if one accepts the distinction between thought and the real and the primacy of the real over thought, the minimal basis of a materialist epistemology<sup>44</sup> in Althusser's view, what grounds can there be for rejecting Engel's statement as empiricist.<sup>45</sup>

In Lenin and Philosophy, Althusser makes more explicit his underlying presupposition of a correspondence between the object of knowledge and the real object.

"What makes abstraction scientific is precisely the fact that it designates a concrete reality which certainly exists but which it is impossible to 'touch with one's hands' or 'see with one's eyes'. Every abstract concept therefore provides knowledge of a reality whose existence it reveals: an 'abstract concept' then means a formula which is apparently abstract but really terribly concrete, because of the object it designates."<sup>46</sup>

The relation between the abstract and the concrete raises the question of Althusser's formulation of Marx's theoretical practice - a movement from the abstract to the concrete. Again, it is with reference to empiricism that Althusser constructs his position.

Althusser takes as his point of departure, Marx's 1857 Introduction. In this text, Marx develops a non-empiricist conception of the abstract/concrete and thought/real relations and also hints at a conception of theory as a kind of labour.

For Althusser, theory is included within the general definition of practice, for theory too, works on a raw material.<sup>47</sup>

"By theory, in this respect, I shall mean a specific form of practice, itself belonging to the complex unity of the 'social practice' of a determinate human society. Theoretical practice falls within the general definition of practice. It works on a raw material (representations, concepts, facts) which it is given by other practices, whether 'empirical', 'technical' or 'ideological'."<sup>48</sup>

As a practice, theory involves a labour upon a given raw material resulting in a transformation of that material. This transformation consists of a movement from the abstract to the concrete - a movement conceived in a non-empiricist manner as taking place entirely within the process of thought. That is, abstract thought is not opposed to the concrete real. Both the abstract and the concrete refer to the thought process.

Marx formulates this rather ambiguously in distinguishing between the concrete and the concrete in the mind.

"...the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind."<sup>49</sup>

In For Marx, Althusser formulates this as the distinction between the concrete-in-thought and the real concrete.<sup>50</sup> In Reading Capital it is formulated as the difference between the object of knowledge and the real object.<sup>51</sup>

Thus the concrete is not the real but the real as appropriated by a system of concepts and theoretical propositions. It is the end result of a theoretical labour. In Marx's words,

"The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation (Anschauung) and conception..."<sup>52</sup>

The abstract - certain general determinations - is only one stage in the process of the production of knowledge.

"...the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought."<sup>53</sup>

The concrete is the end point of knowledge.

"...the concrete totality is a totality of thought, concrete in thought, in fact a product of thinking and comprehending..."<sup>54</sup>

This movement from the abstract to the concrete will be better understood when we discuss below, the "structuralist" attempt to produce the general concept of mode of production.

Althusser argues that in Marx's epistemology, theory is not a process of abstraction from the real (presupposing the opposition of a given subject to a given object), but is, as we have noted, a practice/production within thought. This is counter to empiricist conceptions of knowledge which postulate some magical moment when the real is directly available to us. The theorist then simply abstracts from the real.

Against this position (and this is by no means original with, or specific to, Althusser), Althusser argues that the real is always

encountered by us in thought.+ There is no question of a direct access to the real, followed by thought. Rather, it is a question of the differential forms of the real's encounteredness. Theory (theoretical practice) is a labour upon one of the real's differential forms of being encountered. Althusser formulates this as a movement from Generality I to Generality III. At this point however, Althusser confuses two distinct processes within Marx's method.++ This shall become clear below.

Althusser argues that any science must work on a raw material in order to transform it into specified concepts.<sup>55</sup> Science never encounters the real in an encounter of pure immediacy.

"Contrary to the ideological illusions- illusions which are not 'naive', not mere 'aberrations', but necessary and well-founded as ideologies - of empiricism or sensualism, a science never works on an existence whose essence is pure immediacy and singularity ('sensation' or 'individuals'). It always works on something 'general' even if this has the form of a 'fact'. At its moment of constitution, as for physics with Galileo and for the science of the evolution of social formations (historical materialism) with Marx, a science always works on existing concepts, 'Vorstellungen', that is, a preliminary Generality I of an ideological nature. It does not 'work' on a purely objective 'given', that of pure and absolute 'facts'. On the contrary, its particular labour consists of elaborating its own scientific facts through a critique of the ideological 'facts' elaborated by an earlier ideological theoretical practice."<sup>56</sup>

In my view, Althusser is quite right to criticize empiricist conceptions of scientific practice. However, we may well ask why

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+Althusser does not use the term encountered. However, I feel this to be a good term to express his point.

++In my view, Althusser confuses the method of moving from the abstract to the concrete with the emergence of a science. The move from Generality I to Generality III refers to the former process. This shall be discussed in more detail below.

the pre-existing concepts of Generality I are of an "ideological nature".<sup>57</sup> With this conception of the pre-existing concepts prior to science, which define the field of "facts", theory becomes a labour through which the scientist exorcizes the demons of ideology. Error becomes truth - ideology becomes science.<sup>58</sup> Ideology then becomes the false Other of science and the complex relation between them is theorized away. Indeed, if as Althusser suggests, ideology provides the "raw material" for science, then it cannot be simply the false Other of science but in fact must be seen as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the existence of science in the first place.

Further the opposition of science to ideology does not allow us to theorize the relation of a science to all the other practices of a social formation.

"The notion that the intervention of ideology within historical materialist analysis can only act as an obstacle, establishes a real barrier to posing the question of the relations between theoretical, ideological, political and economic practice, or simply between theory and politics, since it blocks any attempt to theorize the 59 interventions of the other practices within the theoretical."

Another problem with this conception of theoretical practice is that it presupposes a conception of scientificity by which the pre-existing concepts may be designated as Other-than-science. Althusser nowhere raises this as a problem other than to assert that science is its own criteria of scientificity. This amounts to saying that science is scientific because it is so - so be it.

However, from what space does one work when labouring upon the pre-existing concepts? From science? If so we have already presupposed a criterion of scientificity and have already designated the poles of the theoretical process - ideology there, science here.

Althusser is aware of this difficulty when he raises the question:

"But who or what is it that works? What should we understand by the expression: the science works."<sup>60</sup>

Althusser's answer: it is Generality II,

"...constituted by the corpus of concepts whose more or less contradictory unity constitutes the 'theory' of the science at the (historical) moment under consideration, the 'theory' that defines the field in which all the problems of the science must necessarily be posed."<sup>61</sup>

But again, we have already presupposed a criterion of scientificity and a distinction between ideology and science. These presuppositions can only take place within the space of a science. But then, of what does the scientificity of science consist? Althusser, however, argues that we must rest content (for the moment) with his own schematic gestures. The main point is that Generality I does become Generality III within a theoretical practice.<sup>62</sup>

In my view, Althusser's conception of theoretical practice obscures two distinct practices at work in the method of Marx's capital: (1) the "critique" of the pre-existing field of theories; (2) the order and usage of concepts within the space of a scientific discourse. That is, Althusser conceptualizes the distance between Generality I and Generality III as constituted by an "epistemological break".<sup>63</sup> However, in the next breath he confuses this with the movement from the abstract to the concrete.

"The work whereby Generality I becomes Generality III, that is - abstracting from the essential differences that distinguish GI and GIII - whereby the 'abstract' becomes the 'concrete'..."<sup>64</sup>

Althusser has muddled two processes here - the constitution of a science and the practice of introducing/using concepts within the

space of a scientific discourse.<sup>65</sup> The former process is Marx's method of "critique", and consists of the epistemological separation of scientific discourse from ideology through the demonstration of the latter's necessary mystification and its relative truth.

"If the science founded by Marx makes the theoretical conceptions inscribed in its own pre-history appear as ideological, it is therefore not just in order to denounce them as false: it is also in order to say that they present themselves as true and were and still are accepted as true - and in order to provide the reasons for this necessity."<sup>66</sup>

Thus does Marx, throughout Capital, seek to demonstrate the necessity of the relative truth/mystification of the political economists' conceptions. Their utterances are necessary illusions of the capitalist mode of production - a necessity which it is incumbent upon Marx to show in order to distinguish his own discourse from theirs.+ Thus, one aspect of Marx's method consists of the move from ideology to science.

A second aspect of Marx's method involves the introduction/application of concepts within a scientific discourse. Here we are concerned with Marx's method of rising from the abstract to the concrete.++ This will become clearer in the following discussion of the "structuralist" attempt to construct a general concept of mode of production.

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+This raises a number of philosophical questions which cannot be adequately dealt with here.

++See pp. 33-36 *ibid*

### The General Concept of Mode of Production

The "structuralist" enterprise is concerned with the production of a general scientific theory of history - the systematization of a full-blown set of comparative concepts for the analysis of all modes of production. The general concept of mode of production is seen as the cornerstone of this scientific endeavor. In Baliburs' words:

"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 which, on the contrary, the concrete knowledge of this period and type depends. Hence the importance of defining them at the level of generality that they demand, i.e., in fact, the importance of posing a number of problems which the science of history has been waiting for since Marx."<sup>66</sup>

This theoretical enterprise, of defining the concepts, "at the level of generality that they demand", consists of a symptomatic reading of Marx's analysis of one mode of production - the emp. Althusser and Balibar hope to read into the spaces of Marx's own discourse, the discourse of a more systematic theory of history.

There is however, some ambiguity concerning the nature of this systematic theory revolving around the distinction between a general theory of modes of production and the general concept of mode of production. Our problem: is it possible to construct a general theory of all modes of production - past, present and future?; if not, what have the "structuralists" given us with the general concept of mode of production?

With respect to the first question, Althusser, in Reading Capital, indicates that he feels it is possible to construct such a general theory of all modes of production.

"By combining or inter-relating these different elements - labour power, direct labourers, masters who are not direct labourers, object of production, instruments of production, etc. - we shall reach a definition of the different modes of production which have existed and can exist in human history."<sup>67</sup>

However, in his latest clarification of his position, Essays in Self-Criticism, Althusser argues that,

"...there is no question of deducing (therefore of predicting) the different 'possible' modes of production by the formal play of the different possible combination of elements; and in particular, it is not possible to construct in this way, a priori...the communist mode of production!"<sup>68</sup>

What are we to make of these clearly opposed statements? In my view, the "structuralists" are working at the level of a general concept and not a general theory, despite Althusser's own earlier formulations.<sup>+</sup> This will become clearer if we consider the differences between the structuralist concept of a combinatory and the "structuralist" marxist concept of a combination.

The concept of a combinatory implies that,

"...only the places of the factors and their relationships change, but not their nature, which is not only subordinate to the system in general, but also indifferent..."<sup>69</sup>

With this presupposition, that the elements remain the same whereas only the relations between them changes, it would then be

<sup>+</sup>By general concept I understand certain general concepts at a very abstract level which the theorist then employs for the understanding of a specific social formation. General concepts are thus a precondition of knowledge.

A general theory implies actual knowledge of a specific object or set of objects. It thus implies an unmediated view of scientific practice in which knowledge is already provided prior to actual analysis - in short, it is formalistic.

feasible to proceed towards a formal theory of all possible modes of production. Balibar writes that,

"...this would presuppose that the 'factors' of the combination were the very concepts I have listed, that these concepts directly designated the elements of the construction only mediately; what I have called the 'differential analysis of forms' is an essential intermediate step in the determination of the historical forms taken by labour-power, property, 'real appropriation', etc. These concepts designate only what might be called the pertinences of historical analysis."<sup>70</sup>

The combination changes not only the relations between the elements, but the very nature of the elements. For example, in all modes of production there are direct producers. In each determinate mode the direct producers is specified by an historical form i.e., in the slave mode, there are slaves who are the actual property of a non-producer, ;in the feudal mode there are peasants/serfs who have possession of the land but not economic control, and in the cōmp, there is the working-class, completely divorced from possession and economic control of the means of production.

In my view, it is possible to construct a formal model of all modes of production. This however is not a theory of all modes in the sense of deducing theory of a determinate mode and is located at the level of abstract determinations common to all modes which provides the starting point for knowledge of determinate modes.

"... the formalist approach does not, strictly speaking, give knowledge of any actual system, but rather an explanation of some of the conditions of possibility of this knowledge, through revelation of the formal structures of all possible economic systems. The formalist approach thus belongs to the sphere of epistemological reflexion by economic science upon itself, through the formal properties of its subject-matter."<sup>71</sup>

Thus, the general concept of mode of production has to do with the formal properties of all modes of production. In my view, Marx hints at such a general concept without ever systematizing it as such. The "structuralists" have attempted to systematize Marx's pregnant comments. Consider a rather lengthy text from the 1857 Introduction.

"Whenever we speak of production, then, what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development - production by social individuals. It might seem, therefore, that in order to talk about production at all we must either pursue the process of historic development through its different phases, or declare development through its different phases, or declare beforehand that we are dealing with a specific historic epoch such as eg. modern bourgeois production, which is indeed our particular theme. However, all epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics. Production in general is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings about fixes the common elements and thus saves us repetition. Still, this general category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations. Some determinations belong to all epochs, others only to a few. (Some) determinations will be shared by the most modern epoch and the most ancient. No production will be thinkable without them; however, even though the most developed languages have laws and characteristics in common with the least developed, nevertheless, just those things which determine their development, ie., the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity - which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object nature - their essential difference is not forgotten. The whole profundity of those modern economists who demonstrate the eternity and harmoniousness of the existing social relations lies in this forgetting."<sup>72</sup>

In this text Marx indicates that it is possible, at an abstract level, to construct a general concept of mode of production. This general concept would be an abstract, formal object which does not exist in reality, but which provides the concepts of those general

determinations which are valid for all modes of production. The general concept would not immediately provide knowledge of specific modes - ie., it would not be a general theory of all modes - but would be the precondition of knowledge of determinate modes.++

It would be the starting point in thought - the means of theoretical production - for grasping a determinate mode and constructing a specific theory. Marx's method is thus a conceptual move from the abstract (the general concept of mode of production) to the concrete (knowledge of a determinate mode).

Ultimately this movement from the abstract to the concrete could lead to the analysis of conjunctures. Quite schematically then, this conceptual move would look as follows:

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+ "There are characteristics which all stages of production have in common, and which are established as general ones by the mind; but the so-called general preconditions of all production are nothing more than those abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped." Karl Marx, Grundrisse, p. 88

++ Althusser's conception of the thought-object is somewhat related to Weber's theory of the ideal-type. However, Althusser would strongly deny such a relation. He argues that the theory of "ideal-types" is empiricist in that it implies an inadequacy of the thought-object to the real. Althusser argues that the concept of the comp is perfectly adequate to its object. "...it connotes the concept of the specific difference of the mode of production concerned." L. Althusser, Reading Capital, (NLS, 1972). p. 196.

At the level of distinguishing say the comp from the feudal mode, Althusser is perhaps correct - the concept of the comp is adequate to its object. However, the comp is realized in varied material conditions in different social formations. Thus the concept of the comp is not immediately adequate to understanding each and every social formation in which it exists. In this sense we may consider the concept of the comp as an "ideal type".

✓ General Concept of Mode of Production

✓ A Determinate Mode i.e., the CMP

The CMP in a specific social formation i.e., Canada

Phases of That Mode in

A Specific Social Formation i.e., monopoly stage in Canada

Conjunctures i.e., recent crisis

An example from Capital will help to illustrate the point I am trying to make. In Chapter VII, "The Labour-Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-Value", Marx begins the discussion with a consideration of the labour-process in general.

"We shall therefore, in the first place, have to consider the labour-process independently of the particular form it assumes under given social conditions."<sup>73</sup>

Marx then proceeds through a discussion of the general conditions/presuppositions of labour in any social formation.<sup>74</sup> He identifies the invariant elements of any labour process.

✓ "The elementary factors of the labour-process are  
1, the personal activity of man, i.e. work itself,  
✓ 2, the subject of that work, and 3, its instruments."<sup>75</sup>

Marx cautions that the identification of the formal elements of any labour process does not provide knowledge of a determinate labour process. It does not tell,

"...of itself what are the social conditions under which it is taking place, whether under the slave-owner's brutal lash, or the anxious eye of the capitalist, whether Cincinnatus carries it on in killing his modest fawn or a savage in killing wild animals with stones."<sup>76</sup>

Marx goes on to distinguish the capitalistic labour process

from other forms of the labour process.<sup>77</sup> The labour process as a process of the production of surplus-value is thus clearly demarcated from the labour process as the production of use-values or as the production of commodities.

"We now see, that the difference between labour, considered on the one hand as producing utilities, and on the other hand, as creating value, a difference which we discovered by our analysis of a commodity, resolves itself into a distinction between two aspects of the process of production.

The process of production, considered on the one hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of creating value, is production of commodities; considered on the other hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of producing surplus-value, it is the capitalist process of production, or capitalist production of commodities."<sup>78</sup>

The general concept of mode of production is located at the same level of abstraction as is Marx's discussion of the labour-process in general. Just as Marx's comments on the abstract, general determinations of any labour process are not meant to provide knowledge of any specific labour-process, so also the general concept of mode of production is not meant to provide knowledge of a specific mode. Rather, these abstract, general concepts are the conditions for the possibility of knowledge of determinate modes. Therefore, the general concept of mode of production is not a general theory of all modes of production but is rather the possibility of a theory of each determinate mode.

Historical materialism is thus necessarily concerned with the opposition between that which is universal (general determinations) and that which is historically specific (particular determinations). Marx always has in mind the distinction between formal aspects of

the human condition and aspects of a social condition. This distinction is of the utmost crucial importance theoretically. That is, one can use concepts valid for one's own society to view other societies resulting in a distortion of the actual dynamics of those societies. Or, one can see one's own society (a particular social condition), as universal and absolute, which results, as Marx suggests in a "forgetting" of its relativity.<sup>79</sup> This is precisely where Marx attacks the political economists.

The problem we arrive at then, is one of the identity and differences of various modes of production. In my view this problem can only be dealt with through comparative historical research. As Godelier suggests, this requires concrete, empirical analysis of various modes of production.<sup>80</sup> This is precisely one of the real contributions of the "structuralist" marxists - they have inspired a great deal of research on non-capitalist modes of production, contributing to a possible enrichment of the understanding of our own society.<sup>81</sup>

Now however, we shall deal briefly with the problem of identity and difference with respect to the works of Godelier and Balibar.<sup>82</sup> Both are concerned with the problem of a general concept of mode of production. Godelier however, is concerned with that which establishes the identity of various modes whereas Balibar is concerned with that which establishes their differences.

Godelier has attempted to isolate the formal properties of the structures of production, consumption and distribution in order to develop a formal model valid for all economic systems.<sup>83</sup>

"In building my formal 'model' of a possible economic system, I deliberately ignored all the differences that exist between the actual systems. This method enables one to isolate the formally identical elements that are common to all these systems. 'Formally', however, does not mean 'really'. At the level of a formal analysis which, on principle, proceeds by ignoring real differences, no 'criteria' is available for deciding whether two systems are really identical or different. To decide this one has to analyse the systems as they are, so as to find out whether they belong to the same actual kind of system. This analysis therefore proceeds by subjecting itself to the concrete facts, which cannot be deduced from formal principles. By this road progress is made towards a genuine general theory that undertakes to picture both the identity and the difference between systems."<sup>84</sup>

Needless to say, the entirety of Godelier's attempt cannot be reproduced here. Here I should only like to note that Godelier does not give enough attention to the unity of the formal structures of production, consumption, and distribution through the concept of mode of production. Balibar, on the other hand, does establish this unity in his attempt to construct a general concept of mode of production.

The object of Balibar's theoretical project however, as has been noted, is not to establish that which reveals the identity of various modes, but that which reveals their "pertinent" differences. He argues that it is possible to extract from Marx's answers to the question of periodization<sup>+</sup>, the criteria for the identification of a

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<sup>+</sup>Periodization refers to the theoretical procedure of distinguishing between different historical epochs. Thus when Marx comments that 'what defines a historical epoch of production is...' or 'what defines an historical mode of production is the specific way in which it...', he is indicating his own method of periodizing history. Marx distinguishes epochs or stages according to the mode of production dominant in a given social formation.

mode of production - the pertinent differences which establishes the singularity of determinate modes.<sup>85</sup>

As Balibar points out, the definitions Marx gives of the cmp are always comparative indications - indications which distinguish the cmp from other modes.<sup>86</sup> Behind the descriptive terminology, Balibar argues that is an indication of,

"...what makes the comparisons possible at the level of the structures, the search for the invariant determinations (for the 'common features') of 'production in general', which does not exist historically, but whose variants are represented by all the historical modes of production..."<sup>87</sup>

In my view, the real question becomes: is it possible at the level of an abstract formal model to establish the pertinent criteria for distinguishing between modes of production and theoretically establishing them in their singularity? That is, it may be possible (and I think it is) to establish that which reveals the identity of various modes of production, but it might be impossible to establish that which reveals their differences without recourse to concrete empirical study.+ We must then ask whether Balibar has adequately dealt with the problem of difference. Let us consider his work in more detail.

In commenting upon Marx's 1859 Preface, Balibar argues that there is,

"...a reduction to an absolute invariance in the elements which are found in every social structure (an economic base, legal and political forms, and ideological forms); second, there is a division into periods which replaces historical continuity with a discontinuity, a succession of temporarily invariant states of the

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+ This is the position of Codelier. Rationality p. 272

structure which change by rapid mutation ('revolution'): the antagonism that induces the mutation can only be defined by this invariance itself, i.e., by the permanence of the terms which it opposes.

These states of the structure are the modes of production and the history of society can be reduced to a discontinuous succession of modes of production."<sup>89</sup>

Salibar then proceeds to draw up a table of the invariant elements of any mode of production.

- (1) the labourer
- (2) means of production
  - (i) object of labour
  - (ii) means of labour
- (3) non-labourer <sup>89</sup>

This set of elements is articulated through two distinct connexions:

(1) the property connexion; (2) the real or material appropriation connexion.<sup>90</sup> Salibar rigorously maintains the distinction between them.<sup>91</sup>

With reference to our problem of identity and difference, the set of formal elements establishes identity whereas the connexions (the combination of the elements) reveal difference.

As illustration, let us consider the relationship between these two connexions in the emp. The distinction between these two connexions arises in Capital where Marx distinguishes between control and property.

"The labour process, turned into the process by which the capitalist consumes labour-power, exhibits two characteristic phenomena. First, the labourer works under the control of the capitalist...Secondly, the product is the property of the capitalist and not that of the labourer, its immediate producer..."<sup>92</sup>

Thus in the emp, the working class is separated both from control of

the means of production and economic possession of the means of production.

Both connexions are a social relation which gives the lie to all readings of the concept of "forces of production" as simply, technology. The forces of production are precisely the material appropriation connexion, a definite relation between men and things.

"...from the theoretical point of view, the 'productive forces', too, are a connexion of a certain type within the mode of production, in other words, they, too, are a relation of production; precisely the one I have tried to suggest by introducing into the constitutive connexions inside the mode of production, as well as a 'property' connexion, a connexion, B, of 'real appropriation', between the same elements: means of production, direct producers, even 'non-labourers', ie., in the context of the capitalist mode of production, the non-wage-earners."<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, Althusser refers to the forces of production as the "technical relations of production".<sup>94</sup>

It is the relationship between the property connexion and the material appropriation connexion which is supposed to deal with the problem of the pertinent differences between modes of production. For example, that which distinguishes the cmp from other modes is a homology between the two connexions: the worker is separated from the means of production both with respect to the property connexion (the product, tools, means of production belong to the capitalist) and the material appropriation connexion (works under the control of the capitalist).

In the feudal mode of production, however, there is a non-homology between the two connexions: the serf is separated from the means of production through the property connexion (does not have economic control of the means of production, and the product) but is

not separated through the material appropriation connexion (has control over the labour-process). Some "primitive" modes would provide another example of homology in the two connexions in that the direct producers have both control and economic possession of the means of production.

It seems to me however, that the relation between the two connexions does not allow us to establish the criterion of pertinent differences between modes of production. As Glucksmann suggests,

"The notions of 'control', of 'separation' or 'non-separation' of the 'direct producer' from the means of production are essentially ambiguous when pre-capitalist societies are compared with one another."<sup>95</sup>

For example, what does it mean to say that in the feudal mode of production the serf retains control of the means of production?

"...we might just as well assert the opposite - in so far as the lord's power maintains the division of labour, permits and organizes economic exchange, protects the economic units against external dangers..."<sup>96</sup>

Thus, with respect to the feudal mode, the notion of separation must involve some discussion of the other instances of the social formation, i.e., the political power of the lords. We can well imagine the problems involved with so-called primitive modes.

In my view, the isolability of the economic may in fact, only be valid for social formations dominated by the emp.+ If a theory of pertinent differences makes the assumption of a universal isolability of the economic with no reference to the political or cultural-ideological, the same may be already lost for many non-capitalist

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<sup>95</sup>This is of course open to discussion. My point is only that it cannot be immediately assumed.

modes of production.<sup>97</sup>

"The comparative analysis is thus reduced to propounding not a theory of all modes of production but a theory of the originality of capitalism: only capitalism radically separates worker and means of production; only capitalism poses a homology between labour process and surplus process; only capitalism makes it possible to pin-point an autonomous (economic) process of value creation. What else can this mean but that the economy, in its autonomous movement (the value-creating process), is the characteristic feature of capitalism, one which distinguishes it from the other modes of production but which does not distinguish between the other modes?"<sup>98</sup>

This problem however, should not lead us to dismiss too quickly Balibar's work. Clearly there is much theoretical and empirical work to be done with respect to non-capitalist modes which will hopefully point towards where we must go in order to establish a theory of pertinent differences.

#### Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have dealt with the "structuralist" interrogation of Marx with respect to the concept of mode of production along a number of dimensions. We have noted the similarity/difference between the concept of mode of production and the object of other social science discourses, i.e., structuralism, structural-functionalism. We have interrogated Althusser's conception of theoretical practice and Marx's method with respect to the general concept of mode of production. Finally we have dealt with the "structuralist" project of constructing an adequate concept of mode of production.

We concluded with a critique of Balibar on the possibility of a universal isolability of the economic. This problem leads directly to the "structuralist" concept of the social whole. It is to an

account/assessment of this concept that I now turn.

#### NOTES

1. Godelier, 1972, p. xxi.
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3. Karl Marx, Capital V. I, 1974, p. 10.
4. Karl Marx, Grundrisse, trans. Martin Nicolaus, 1973, p. 109.
5. See Althusser's paper, "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy", in Althusser, 1975, pp. 46-51.
6. Lucio Colletti, Marxism and Hegel, 197 , pp. 126-127.
7. Godelier, 1972, p. xxiii.
8. Ibid., pp. xxxvi-xxxvii
9. See Althusser's paper, "The Errors of Classical Economics: An Outline for a Concept of Historical Time" and Balibar's "Preface: The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism" in Althusser, 1975.
10. For a fascinating debate on the problem of historical contingency and necessity, see the article "Anthropology, History and Ideology", C. Levi-Strauss, M. Godelier, M. Auge, in Critique of Anthropology, No. 6 vol. 2, Spring 1976.
11. Godelier, 1972, p. xxix.
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14. Radcliffe-Brown, 1952, p. 191.
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24. Parsons, 1961,
25. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
26. Goddard, 1972, p. 68.
27. Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 281.
28. Marx, *Capital V. III*, 1974, p. 205.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 817.
30. For Althusser's use of the concept of a symptomatic reading, see Althusser, 1975, pp. 23-29.
31. See Ben Breuster's definition of problematic in Althusser, 1975, p. 316.
32. Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism", in Althusser, 1969, p. 232.
33. Althusser, as quoted by Jacques Ranciere in *On The Theory of Ideology (the politics of Althusser)*, *Radical Philosophy* 7, Spring, 1974, p. 29.
34. See chapter 4 below for a discussion of Althusser's notion of relative autonomy.
35. Norman Geras, *Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment*, *MLR* # 71, Jan/Feb., 1972.
36. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 1972, p. 252.
37. See Althusser's paper, "Marxism is not a Historicism", in Althusser, 1975.
38. See Althusser's paper, "From 'Capital' to Marx's Philosophy", in Althusser, 1975. especially pp. 36-37.
39. Althusser, 1975, p. 36.

40. Ibid., p. 56.
41. Henry Veltmeyer, "Towards an Assessment of the Structuralist Interrogation of Marx: Claude Levi-Strauss and Louis Althusser", *Science and Society*, Vol. 38, no. 4 (Winter 1974-75), p. 391.
42. See Godelier's discussion of this line of interpretation, "Forward: Functionalism, Structuralism and Marxism", in Godelier, 1972.
43. Althusser, 1975, p. 82.
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53. Ibid., p. 101.
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55. Althusser, 1969, p. 183.
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57. Ibid., p. 184.
58. See Althusser's own formulation of this problem in "On the Evolution of the Young Marx", Althusser, 1976.
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61. Ibid., pp. 184-185.

62. Ibid., p. 135.
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64. Ibid., p. 135.
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66. Etienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism", in Althusser, 1975, p. 201.
67. Althusser, 1975, p. 176.
68. Althusser, 1976, p. 129.
69. Balibar in Althusser, 1975, p. 226.
70. Ibid., p. 226.
71. Godelier, 1972, p. 279.
72. Marx, 1973, p. ;85.
73. Marx, *Capital*, V. I, 1974, p. 177.
74. Ibid., pp. 177-184.
75. Ibid., p. 173.
76. Ibid., p. 134.
77. Ibid., pp. 134-138.
78. Ibid., p. 197.
79. Marx, 1973, p. 85.
80. Godelier, 1972, p. 279.
81. Maurice Godelier, Nicos Poulantzas, Ernest Laclau, Goran Therborn, Emmanuel Terray, Charles Bettelheim, Claude Maillassoux, Marshall Sahlins, Harold Wolpe, Samir Amin, Pierre-Phillipe Rey and George Dupre are a few of the researchers inspired by the Althusserian problematic.
82. Godelier, "The Object and Method of Economic Anthropology" in Godelier, 1972. Balibar, 1975.
83. Godelier, 1972, pp. 263-279.

84. Ibid., p. 279.
85. Balibar, 1975, p. 209.
86. Ibid., ff. p. 209.
87. Ibid., p. 209.
88. Ibid., p. 204.
89. Ibid., p. 215.
90. Ibid., p. 215.
91. Ibid., pp. 213-216.
92. Marx, Capital V. I, 1974, pp. 184-1;85.
93. Balibar, 1975, p. 235.
94. Althusser, 1975. See Also Goran Therborn, 1976.
95. Andre Glucksmann, "A Ventriloquist Structuralism", NLR, 1972, p. 81.
96. Ibid., p. 81.
97. Balibar makes this unwarranted assumption. see Balibar, 1975, pp. 206-207.
98. Glucksmann, 1972, p. 81.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Social Whole: A Structure-in-Dominance

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account and assessment of the "structuralist" interrogation of Marx's conception of the social whole. My point of departure is the 1859 Preface where Marx rather ambiguously formulates the base-superstructure metaphor and his entire principle of causation. It is in this discussion of Marx's conception of the social whole where we shall see Marx's methodological principles of complexity and structural causality at work.

Marx's 1859 Preface will be treated as problematic - in need of theoretical interrogation. In my view, we must not uncritically accept and apply Marx's all too brief comments on the metaphor of a base and a superstructure. Their ambiguity necessitates systematic theoretical reflexion. As Althusser suggests, Marx has only 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."<sup>1</sup>

What then does Marx say of the base-superstructure relation?

"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. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

The base - the mode of production of material life (the economic)-is said to "condition" the superstructure (legal/political and ideological forms). The superstructure is said to "correspond" to its economic base. Marx thus establishes the primacy of the concept of mode of production in explaining the structure and history of a social formation.

"The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure."<sup>3</sup>

Are we then to formulate the base-superstructure relation as base as cause, superstructure as effect? This interpretation, coupled with the following quote from the Poverty of Philosophy, can authorize the worst forms of "economic" and/or technological determinism.

"In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist."<sup>4</sup>

What posture then, should we adopt towards Marx's 1859 Preface?

Balibar, I think, is correct to assert that,

"These concepts and all the terms which designate the peculiar articulation of their objects ('correspond', 'on which rises', etc.) are remarkably vague and yet they have sustained all Marxist reflexion on the problem of ideologies and superstructures. They have no other function than to indicate where, provisionally, Marx is not going to go on this occasion; they do not .. constitute a knowledge of these levels and their mutual relations, but merely a practical registration (practical in the sense of theoretical practice, of course) which disengages the level of the economic structure which Marx is now undertaking to study, in its relative autonomy."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Marx's 1859 text can in no way be considered definitive - much theoretical work is in order.

"...it has to be said that the theory of the specific effectivity of the superstructures and other 'circumstances' largely remains to be elaborated; and before the theory of their effectivity or simultaneously (for it is by formulating their effectivity that their essence can be attained) there must be elaboration of the theory of the particular essence of the specific elements of the superstructure."<sup>6</sup>

In my view, Althusser has provided three major concepts (or sets of concepts) with which to think the complexity and causality of the base - superstructure relation - overdetermination, structural causality, and differential historical time. It is clear that Althusser is seeking to avoid any kind of economic reductionism and is urging us to work towards an "open" marxism. He takes a letter of Engels as his point of departure.

"...According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, - also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form...

"...Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree." (Engels to Block 1890, M + E.S.W. p. 682)

Engels however, fails to adequately conceptualize the determining effects of the superstructure.+ Althusser attempts to do so

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+For example, he argues that the various superstructural elements interact to cancel out their determining effects in the long run such that they may be regarded as negligible. (p. 632)

with respect to his definition of the instances or levels which form the components of any social formation. The instances - the economic, the political and the ideological - are the structures within which various practices takes place. A practice is defined as,

"...any process of transformation of a determinate given raw material into a determinate product, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of 'production'). In any practice thus conceived, the determinant moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense; the moment of the labour of transformation itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means."<sup>7</sup>

Social practice is thus a complex unity of the various practices existing in a given social formation.<sup>8</sup>

It is this distinction between the instances of a social formation which allows Althusser to describe Marx's conception of the social whole as a complex structural whole - more specifically as a structure -in-dominante.<sup>9</sup> As opposed to the Hegelian totality which conceives of the whole as animated by a simple inner essence - various concrete practices being the phenomenal manifestations of this essence - Althusser argues that Marx's conception of the social whole has no centre (as an essence) but is rather a decentred structure.<sup>+</sup> Each of the various instances have their own degree of specific effectivity authorized by their relative autonomy from the economic base. The concepts of specific effectivity and relative autonomy are constructed so as to avoid conceiving the relation of the superstructure to the base as if a phenomenon to its essence. In understanding a given social

<sup>+</sup>From a very different problematic Jean-Paul Sartre also argues against forms of reductionism urging us to understand the other levels of society (ie. pol.) on their own terms. see Search for a Method pp. 41-42, pp. 43-49, p. 51, p. 54.

formation the various instances of the superstructure (political-legal, ideological) are not reducible to or deducible from the economic instance.<sup>+</sup>

The determinative effects of the superstructural instances are ultimately related to the determinative role of the economy. However, the economy is understood to be determinative only in the last instance.<sup>10</sup>

Engels comments on the ultimately decisive role of the economy is the point of departure for Althusser's theory of the dominant and the determinant.<sup>++</sup>

"It is not that the economic situation is cause, solely active, while everything else is only passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself."<sup>11</sup>

Althusser is thus lead to develop his theory of determination in the last instance and the distinction between the dominant and the determinant instance in a social formation. A text of Marx is seen to authorize this conceptual move. In Capital Marx writes in a footnote.

"...my view that each special mode of production and the social relations corresponding to it, in short, that the economic structure of society, is the real basis on which the juridical and political superstructure is raised, and to which definite social forms of thought correspond; that the mode of production determines the character of the social, political, and intellectual life generally, all this is very true for our own times, in which material interests preponderate, but not for the middle ages, in which Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where politics, reigned supreme.

<sup>+</sup>See Contrad. + Overdet., The Mat. Dialectic, in F.M. and The Errors of Classical Economics: An outline of a conception of Historical Time in R.C. for Althusser's critique of Hegel's conception of totality.

<sup>++</sup>See Engel's letters in M.E.S.W. p. 682, p. 694.

...This much, however, is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part."<sup>12</sup>

\* Althusser maintains the determinative role of the economy by arguing that it depends upon the nature of the mode of production whether another instance of the social formation shall play the dominant role. In social formations dominated by the cmp in its competitive phase, the economy is both the determinant and the dominant. That is, the general conditions for the reproduction of the economic base are given with its structure and its mode of functioning. This is to be clearly distinguished from social formations dominated by the fmp where the economy is determinant but politics is dominant.

A text from Capital ViIII is seen to require such an interpretation.

"...in all forms in which the direct labourer remains the 'possessor' of the means of production and labour conditions necessary for the production of his own means of subsistence, the property relationship must simultaneously appear as a direct relation of lordship and servitude, so that the direct producer is not free, a lack of freedom which may be reduced from serfdom with enforced labour to a mere tributary relationship. The direct producer, according to our assumption, is to be found here in possession of his own means of production, the necessary material labour conditions required for the realization of his labour and the production of his means of subsistence. He conducts his agricultural activity and the rural home industries connected with it independently..

Under such conditions the surplus-labour for the nominal owner of the land can only be extorted from them by other than economic pressure, whatever the form assumed may be... Thus, conditions of personal dependence are requisite, a lack of personal freedom, no matter to what extent, and being tied to the soil as its necessary, bondage in the true sense of the word.

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers - a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity - which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state.

So much is evident with respect to labour rent, the simplest and most primitive form of rent. Rent is here the primeval form of surplus-labour and coincides with it. But this identity of surplus-value with unpaid labour of others need not be analysed here, because it still exists in its visible, palpable form, since the labour of the direct producer for himself is still separated in space and time from his labour for the landlord, and the latter appears directly in the brutal form of enforced labour for a third person." <sup>13</sup>

Thus, there is something about the dynamics of feudal relations of production which requires a greater role to be played by the political instance than we have in the emp. Because the direct producer retains possession of the means of production, a political element is required to reproduce the relation of exploitation between the serf and the lord.

In light of these preliminary comments on Althusser's reading of the base-superstructure relation I think we are now prepared to more fully understand the meaning of the concept of overdetermination.

Althusser borrowed the concept of overdetermination from Freud where it was used to describe the condensation of a number of thoughts in a single dream image. The point of departure for Althusser's use of the term is a discussion of the concept of

contradiction and Lenin's theory of the 'weakest link'. Lenin had argued that Russia was ripe for revolution in that it was the weakest link in the imperialist chain - it had,

"...accumulated the largest sum of historical contradictions then possible; for it was at the same time the most backward and the most advanced nation, a gigantic contradiction which its divided ruling classes could neither avoid nor solve. In other words Russia was overdue with its bourgeois revolution on the eve of the proletarian revolution; pregnant with two revolutions, it could not withhold the second even by delaying the first."<sup>14</sup> (F.M. p. 97)

Russia was ripe for revolution because of the cumulative and exacerbative effects of its many contradictions. Thus, Althusser argues that the contradiction between the forces and relations of production is never sufficient to define a revolutionary situation nor even to help us understand the complexity of a given social formation. The pure and simple contradiction between the forces and relations of production is always overdetermined by its real conditions of existence - conditions which can only be theorized with reference to the other instances of the social formation (politics, ideology) and other 'circumstances' of a revolutionary situation. The contradiction between the forces and relations of production only becomes historically active in the strong sense through the unity of the accumulation of her contradictions and the determinations from the other instances. A ruptural unity is this fusion of contradictions and historical circumstances. To think this theoretically requires a conception of the social whole which has complexity and multiple determinations inscribed in its very existence.

"This means that if the 'differences' that constitute each of the instances in play (manifested in the 'accumulation' discussed by Lenin) 'merge' into a real unity, they are not 'dissipated' as pure phenomena in the internal unity of a simple contradiction. The unity they constitute in this 'fusion' into a revolutionary rupture, is constituted by their own essence and effectivity, by what they are, and according to the specific model is of their action. In constituting this unity, they reconstitute and complete their basic animating unity, but at the same time they also bring out its nature: 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."<sup>15</sup>

Althusser finds authorization for his own principle of complexity - overdetermination - in the work of Mao - more specifically, in Mao's paper On Contradiction. In this important text Mao gives expression to a principle of complexity as opposed to any idea of simple contradiction, through the concepts of principal and secondary contradiction, and principal and secondary aspects of a contradiction,<sup>16</sup>

From the idea of the complexity of contradiction, Althusser concludes that,

"...the Capital-labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised. It is specified by the forms of the superstructure (the State, the dominant ideology, religion, politically organized movements, and so on); specified by the internal and external historical situation which determines it on the one hand as a function of the national past (completed or 'relapsed' bourgeois revolution, feudal exploitation eliminated wholly, partially or not at all, local 'customs', specific national traditions, even the 'etiquette' of political struggles and behaviour, etc.), and on the other as functions of the existing world context (what dominates it - competition of capitalist nations, or 'imperialist internationalism', or competition within imperialism, etc.), many of these phenomena, deriving from the 'law of uneven development' in the Leninist sense."

Contradiction is therefore always overdetermined by the very fact of its historical existence. Althusser further suggests that this overdetermination may be in the direction of an historical inhibition (ie., blockage of development) or towards a revolutionary rupture.<sup>18</sup>

For Althusser, the very idea of a simple contradiction is an absurdity - or as Engels put it, "...an abstract meaningless phrase." For Engels, dialectics is almost (at times) equivalent to the idea of the complexity of contradictions. In a letter to Schmidt, he takes the young economists to task for the simplicity of their method.

"What these gentlemen all lack is dialectics. They always see only here cause, there effect. That this is a hallow abstraction, that such metaphysical polar opposites exist in the real world only during crises, while the whole vast process goes on in the form of interaction - though of very unequal forces, the economic movement being by far the strongest most primordial, most decisive - that here everything is relative and nothing absolute - this they never begin to see."<sup>19</sup>

This determining effect of the economy however, is something which requires greater theoretical reflexion and empirical substantiation - especially with respect to non-capitalist modes of production. Yet, as a working principle of materialist analysis, we can agree with Althusser that,

"From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' (economic) never comes."<sup>20</sup>

From the concept of overdetermination, a number of theoretical and political conclusions can be drawn. For example, Althusser points out that the,

"...overdetermination of any contradiction and of any constitutive element of a society, which means:

(1) that a revolution in the structure does not ipso facto modify the existing superstructures and particularly the ideologies at one blow (as it would if the economic was the sole determinant factor, for they have sufficient of their own consistency to survive beyond their immediate life context, even to recreate, to 'secrete' substitute conditions of existence temporarily; (2) that the new society produced by the Revolution may itself ensure the survival, that is, the reactivation, of older elements through both the forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international) 'circumstances'. Such a reactivation would be totally inconceivable for a dialectic deprived of overdetermination."<sup>21</sup>

However, at a theoretical level, on Althusser's own admittance, the concept of overdetermination is yet to be grounded theoretically within the basic categories of historical materialism. That is, it is a descriptive category or heuristic principle which points quite correctly to the complexity of contradictions and historical situations.<sup>22</sup>

With this in mind, we can better understand the introduction of new concepts in Reading Capital, with which Althusser thinks Marx's principle of complexity. In fact, the major concepts of For Marx - overdetermination and the law of uneven development - are directly transposed into the concepts of structural causality and differential historical time in Reading Capital.

Althusser argues that Marx introduces a radically new conception of determination and causality in his conception of the base-superstructure relation. However, Marx failed to fully systematize this conception. Althusser sees his own investigations as an attempt to make explicit the silent discourse of Marx's own texts - thus does he pose for himself the problem of conceptualizing Marx's theory of causality.

"...by means of what concept is it possible to think the new type of determination which has just been identified as the determination of the phenomena of a given region by the structure of that region? More generally, by means of what concept, or what set of concepts, is it possible to think the determination of the elements of a structure, and the structural relations between those elements, and all the effects of those relations, by the effectivity of that structure? And a fortiori, by means of what concept or what set of concepts is it possible to think the determination of a subordinate structure by a dominant structure; In other words, how is it possible to define the concept of a structural causality?"<sup>20</sup>

Althusser argues that before Marx there were two theories of causality - analytical or transitive causality and expressive causality. The former theory is mechanistic and designates the relation between a cause and its effects, thus providing a theory of the effect of one element on another element. Recall here, Engels critique of the young economists, "...They always see only here cause, there effect." If one were to apply this theory of causality to the base-superstructure relation, the superstructure would be reduced to an effect of the base, its cause.

Expressive causality was used by Leibniz to think the effectivity of a whole on its elements.

"This is the model that dominates all Hegel's thought. But it presupposes in principle that the whole in question be reducible to an inner essence, of which the elements of the whole are then no more than the phenomenal forms of expression, the inner principle of the essence being present at each point in the whole, such that at each moment it is possible to write the immediately adequate equation: such and such an element (economic, political, legal, literary, religious, etc. in Hegel) = the inner essence of the whole. Here was a model which made it possible to think the effectivity of the whole as each of its elements, but if this category - inner essence/outer phenomenon - was to be applicable everywhere and at every moment to each of the phenomenon, arising in the totality in question,

it presupposed that the whole had a certain nature, precisely the nature of a 'spiritual' whole in which each element was expressive of the entire totality as a 'pars totalis'." <sup>24</sup>

Thus, for Hegel, the various concrete practices of a social formation are conceptualized as manifestations of an essence - a spiritual (cultural) principle which animates the social whole. For example, Rome is reduced to a principle of the abstract legal personality - all its concrete practices are seen to be expressive of this inner principle. <sup>25</sup>

This conception of totality is very popular in many of the social sciences today. For example, Emmanuel Terray points out that classical social anthropology shares such a conception of the social whole. Two examples (suggested by Terray) should make this clear. One conception of the "inner essence of the whole" is offered by Malinowski who sees the various practices of a society as expressive of the satisfaction of organic needs.

"Every culture must satisfy the biological system of needs, such as those dictated by metabolism, reproduction, the physiological conditions of temperature, protection from moisture, wind, and the direct impact of damaging forces of climate and weather, safety from dangerous animals or human beings, occasional relation, the exercise of the muscular nervous system in movement, and the regulation of growth.... Every cultural achievement that implies the use of artifacts and symbolism is an instrumental enhancement of human anatomy, and refers directly or indirectly to the satisfaction of a bodily need." <sup>26</sup>

Another conception of the "inner essence of the whole" is provided for through a reduction of the concrete practices of the social whole to a grouping in psychological variables. Margaret Mead's work is a good example of such a conception.

"This hypothesis is an extension of that advanced by Ruth Benedict in her *Patterns of Culture*. Let us assume that there are definite temperamental differences between human beings which if not entirely hereditary at least are established on a hereditary base very soon after birth. (Further than this we cannot at present narrow the matter.) These differences finally embodied in the character structure of adults, then, are the clues from which culture works, selecting one temperament, or a combination of related and congruent types, as desirable, and embodying this choice in every thread of the social fabric - in the case of the young child, the games the children play, the songs the people sing, the structure of political organization, the religious observance, the art and the philosophy."<sup>27</sup>

A more concrete example is provided by Kenneth Burridge's ethnographic research on a "primitive" social formation (Tangu). In all the practices of this social formation Burridge sees a simple inner principle at work - from their economics to their children's games he reads a principle of equivalence as the cultural pattern which animates the whole.<sup>28</sup>

Within sociology we find that Talcott Parsons' conception of the social whole is remarkably similar to Hegel's. For example, Parsons distinguishes various societies according to their degree of realization of his pattern variables schema. Various societies are conceptualized in their structure and functioning insofar as they are expressive of a pattern variable type.<sup>29</sup> Thus the effect of the whole on its parts is theorized but only insofar as the whole is seen to be a cultural (spiritual for Hegel) whole. It is perhaps no accident that Parsons sees his own work as in the Hegelian idealist tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Applied to the base-superstructure relation, the theory of expressive causality can result in a kind of reductionism - i.e., the

superstructure as mere manifestation of an essence, even if it is the economic.

It is in opposition to both of these theories of causality that Althusser formulates what he takes to be Marx's theory of structural causality. He argues that Marx often thinks his new theory of structural causality through the concept of "Darstellung" which designates the "existence of the the structure in its effects."<sup>31</sup>

"...The structure is not an essence outside the economic phenomena which comes and alters their aspect, forms and relations and which is effective on them as an absent cause, absent because it is outside them. The absence of the cause in the structure's 'metonymic causality' on its effects is not the fault of the exteriority of the structure, as a structure, in its effects. This implies therefore that the effects are not outside the structure, are not a pre-existing object, element or space in which the structure arrives to imprint its mark; on the contrary, it implies that the structure is imminent in its effects, a cause imminent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects, in short that the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects."<sup>32</sup>

This, in my view, is a rather ambiguous formulation of the concept of structural causality. Althusser is trying to avoid an empiricist conception of structure which sees reality as composed of two components - a phenomena and an essence. The essence is located in the real itself - it is indeed the essential, the truth of the real. The phenomena is merely the exterior of the essence, the interior.

Althusser argues that the structure is not the essence in the real but is rather the concept - knowledge of the real. The essence is the concept of the structure - an aspect of knowledge, not of the real.

"If the 'inside' is the concept, the 'outside' can only be the specification of the concept, exactly as the effects of the structure of the whole can only be the existence of the structure itself." (R.C. p. 191)

Althusser is here raising epistemological questions which I am not prepared to pursue here.

Rather, I shall examine the concept of structural causality with respect to the dynamics of the social whole.

As regards the former usage, consider a text of Marx from the 1857 Introduction.

"The conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity. Production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well. The process always returns to production to begin anew. That exchange and consumption cannot be predominant is self-evident. Likewise, distribution as distribution of products, while as distribution of the agents of production it is itself a moment of production. A definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these different moments. Admittedly, however, in its one-sided form, production is itself determined by the other moments. For example if the market i.e., the sphere of exchange, expands, then production grows in quantity and the divisions between its different branches become deeper. A change in distribution changes production, e.g. concentration of capital, different distribution of the population between town and country, etc. Finally, the needs of consumption determine production. Mutual interaction takes place between the different moments. This the cause with every organic whole."<sup>33</sup>

Production is thus the determining element with respect to both consumption and distribution. Let us consider this determination of consumption and distribution briefly here.

To say that production as a region of the 'economic' is

determinant with respect to consumption is to say that the sphere of consumption is grounded within a materialist base - with the social relations of production. Thus, the 'economic' region of a social formation cannot be properly understood if one begins with the sphere of consumption i.e., with the needs of homo economicus as one's starting point. ✓

Needs can only be realized in and through the sphere of production.

"Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption."<sup>34</sup>

The productive process both defines needs and provides for their relation. However, consumption does have an effect upon production.

"Consumption likewise produces the producer's inclination by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need."<sup>35</sup>

In this sense, we have a structural causality operating here - production is determinative of consumption, however consumption acts back upon the real basis of its existence - production. production determines the determining effects of consumption.

It is very important to see the effects of consumption upon production, especially as regards the ideological implications which consumption can have. For example, recent marxists such as Henri Lefebvre and Herbert Marcuse have explicated the mystifying effects of the sphere of consumption.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Lefebvre sees these effects as so profound that he designates our society the "bureaucratic society

of controlled consumption."<sup>37</sup> Advertisements which are super-individualistic in orientation and those which drive home the point that the good life can only be found through the consumption of products going beyond the absurd have powerful ideological influences. A humorous example should show the heights to which these ideological effects can reach.

"The individual choice of garnishment of a burger can be an important point to the consumer in this day when individualism, in my mind, is an increasingly important thing to people." - Donald N. Smith, president of Burger King<sup>38</sup>

This is also relevant to Lenin's idea of the "labour aristocracy" which to some extent is "bought off" through the sphere of consumption.

Distribution is also grounded in the sphere of production.

"An individual who participates in production in the form of wage labour shares in the products, in the results of production, in the form of wages. The structure (Gliederung) of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production. Distribution is itself a product of production, not only in its object, in that only the results of production can be distributed, but also in its form, in that the specific kind of participation in production determines the specific forms of distribution, i.e., the pattern of participation in distribution."<sup>39</sup>

Thus does Marx see the manner in which individuals participate in distribution as determined by their manner of participation in production. Marx goes on to broaden the definition of distribution finally subsuming it within the sphere of production.

"In the shallowest conception, distribution appears as the distribution of products, and hence as further removed from and quasi-independent of production. But before distribution can be the distribution of products, it is: (1) the distribution of the instruments of production, and (2), which is a further

specification of the same relation, the distribution of the members of the society among the different kinds of production. (Subsumption of the individuals under specific relations of production.) The distribution of products is evidently only a result of this distribution, which is comprised within the process of production itself and determines the structure of production. To examine production while disregarding this internal distribution within it is obviously an empty abstraction; while conversely, the distribution of products follows by itself from this distribution which forms our original moment of production."<sup>40</sup>

Distribution is therefore more than a mere distribution of products but is also a distribution of the means of production amongst social classes and a distribution of the agents among the various kinds of production. These latter two distributions are included within the sphere of production.

The relevance of this for sociology should not be overlooked. These sociologists who focus on wage differences and income levels when doing "class" research are focusing on the effects of a more crucial "variable"- the sphere of production which decides the basis of distribution.

When we examine the sphere of production proper we find a structural causality operating here in the determining effects of the social relations of production over the forces of production. That is, in the articulated combination of forces and relations of production - the articulation of the property connexion and the material appropriation connexion - which is the mode of production - the relations of production are dominant. As Foulantzas states,

"The production process is thus composed of the unity of the labour process and the relations of production. But within this unity, it is not the labour process, including technology and the technical process, that plays the dominant role; the relations of production always dominate the labour process and the productive forces, stamping them with their own pattern and appearance."<sup>41</sup>

The forces of production, or as Althusser calls them, the "technical relations of production" are not neutral as some technological theorists would have it. Technology is always overdetermined by its real conditions of existence in and through the social relations of production. Listen to Marx as he carefully distinguishes between machinery and the capitalist use of machinery.

"Since therefore machinery, considered alone, shortens the hours of labour, but, when in the service of capital, lengthens them; since in itself it lightens labour, but when employed by capital, heightens the intensity of labour; since in itself it is a victory of man over the forces of Nature, but in the hands of capital, makes man the slave of those forces; since in itself it increases the wealth of the producers, but in the hands of capital, makes them paupers - for all these reasons and others besides, says the bourgeois economist without more ado, it is clear as noon-day that all these contradictions are a mere semblance of the reality, and that, as a matter of fact, they have neither an actual nor a theoretical existence. Thus he saves himself from all further puzzling of the brain, and what is more, implicitly declares his opponent to be stupid enough to contend against, not the capitalistic employment of machinery, but machinery itself."<sup>42</sup>

Herbert Marcuse and all those romantic critics of technology and science would do well to re-read this passage and think through the kind of causality which operates in the articulated combination of the forces and relations of production. The structural causality we find here precludes any identification of technology and capital. On the one hand then, technology and the forces of production are not neutral in that they are overdetermined by the social relations of production. On the other hand however, they have a kind of autonomy in that they have the 'possibility' of being set to other uses besides those decided in the boardrooms of the great corporations.

In my view, the very idea of "industrial" or "technological" society shared by thinkers as diverse as Ellul, Dahrendorf and Marcuse, is indicative of a theoretical failure to think adequately the causality operating in the sphere of production. As Colletti notes, because of this, some marxists easily step over into an uneasy compromise with the bourgeois sociologist or economist. Consider again Marcuse:

"Marcuse equates machinery and capital, not in order to attribute to the latter the advantages of the former, but rather to impute to machinery the enslavement and oppression of the labourer for which in fact capital is responsible. In the first case, the result is the apologetic approach of Vulgarökonomie. In the second case, it is that of the so-called 'romantic critique' of bourgeois society - ie, a critique of the present, not in the name of the future but in the name of, and inspired by, 'nostalgia' for the past. For the economist, whoever wants modern productive forces, ie, machinery and modern industry, modern industry, must also want capitalist relations of production.

...For Marcuse, on the contrary, whoever does not want exploitation, or rather (given that for Marcuse, in the final analysis, exploitation does not exist) whoever does not want... 'integration', must return to patriarchal conditions of life, or even perhaps to feudalism - a subject upon which our author expatiates like any high-thinking social prophet. Taken to its extreme, Marcuse's approach leads to that cult of 'primitivism' and 'barbarism' which the abstract spiritualism of the bourgeois intellectual so easily turns into."<sup>43</sup>

(2) A second (perhaps the major) usage of the concept of structural causality designates the reciprocal effectivity of the various instances of the social formation. As has been pointed out, it is this conception of the social whole as a hierarchy of levels or instances structured-in-dominance, which is introduced to allow us to think the determination of the base (the economic) in a non-dogmatic manner. In For Marx this was conceptualized through the

concept of overdetermination. In Reading Capital it is the concept of structural causality.

Within this conception of causation, the superstructural instances (politics, and ideology) are allowed an effectivity of their own which is ultimately delegated to them by the base (economic). A text from Capital VIII is seen to authorize such a conception.

"The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element."<sup>44</sup>

Thus a reciprocal effectivity a determination is seen to operate between the base and the superstructure.

However, the base is seen to call forth a certain kind of superstructure - the base authorizes the specific mode of determination of the superstructure.

"Upon this (the base), however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers - a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity - which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state."<sup>45</sup>

Here we have a conception of correspondence operating between the base and superstructure. However, this correspondence includes the idea of an autonomy of the superstructure ultimately determined in the last instance by the base. It is therefore autonomy in the sense that it has an effectivity of its own - but an effectivity of

its own decided by the base. Althusser has appropriated this text as meaning that the superstructural forms are so many conditions of existence of the base.

"This shows that certain relations of production presuppose the existence of a legal-political and ideological superstructure as a condition of their peculiar existence, and why this superstructure is necessarily specific (since it is a function of the specific relations of production that call for it). It also shows that certain other relations of production do not call for a political superstructure, but only for an ideological superstructure (classless societies). Finally, it shows that the nature of the relations of production considered not only calls or does not call for a certain form of superstructure, but also establishes the degree of effectivity delegated to a certain level of the social totality. Irrespective of all these consequences, we can draw one conclusion at any rate where the relations of production are concerned: they relate to the superstructural forms they call for as so many conditions of their own existence. The relations of production cannot therefore be thought in their concept while abstracting from their specific superstructural conditions of existence"<sup>46</sup>

The basis for this conceptualization of the base-superstructure relation, i.e., the idea of the determination of superstructural effectivity by the base, is also authorized by a text of Marx . Marx argues that there are properties of the base which determine the modality of the superstructural dynamics - whether a certain form of superstructural effectivity is necessary. That is, in those modes in which the "direct labourer remains the 'possessor' of the means of production", ... "other than economic pressure is needed."<sup>47</sup> Thus in the feudal mode, political power is necessary to ensure that the serf will contribute surplus-labour to the lord.

On the other hand, in the capitalist mode of production the 'separation' of the direct producers from the means of production means that the economic, in and of itself, ensures the conditions of its reproduction, to some extent. That is, out and out political

coercion is not necessary (varying with certain conditions, i.e., fascism in Germany) to reproduce the conditions for exploitation.

However, Glucksmann quite correctly locates a fundamental ambiguity in the idea of - something about the economic calling forth from the superstructure a certain kind of effectivity - which threatens the very basis of a structural causality for non-capitalist modes of production. This ambiguity concerns the idea of separation and non-separation as regards the the difference between the capitalist mode and the feudal mode.

"The obviousness of this distinction is only a result of the imprecision of the terms employed. We may say that the serf is not separated from the means of production and that he control his production, but we might just as well assert the opposite - in so far as the lord's power maintains the division of labour, permits and organizes economic exchange, protects the economic units against external dangers, i.e., in so far as he exercises control functions analogous to those of the 'Kings of Asia and Egypt' or the 'Etruscan Theocrats' in another type of society. The notions of 'control', of 'separation' or 'non-separation' of the 'direct producer' from the means of production are essentially ambiguous when pre-capitalist societies are compared with one another."<sup>43</sup>

The ultimate arbitrator in such a conceptual problem must ultimately be further empirical research on non-capitalist modes of production.

Here I should like to give an example of the relation between the levels as they function in both the competitive and monopoly phases of capitalism. First however, let us isolate a number of propositions given with the concept of structural causality:

(1) each instance or level contributes to the overall structure and functioning of the social whole.

(2) each instance is determined by the global structure of the social whole.<sup>49</sup>

Carchedì has further specified these rather general propositions into six propositions.

"...the determinant instance...determines the determined instances...in the sense that the former calls into existence the latter as a condition of its own existence."

...the determined instances react upon (modify) the determinant instance, i.e., the determinant instance is overdetermined by the determined instances.

...The determined instances have a relative autonomy vis-a-vis the determinant which circumscribes the degree of autonomy."

...The dominant role can revert also to the determined instance and not only necessarily to the determinant instance; but it is the latter which determines which determined instance has a dominant role.

...There can be either correspondence or contradiction between the determinant and determined instance. There is correspondence when the determined instance helps in the process of reproduction of the determinant instance and there is contradiction when the opposite is the case....

...the determinant instance sets the limits of variation of its own over determination".<sup>50</sup>

In distinguishing between the competitive and monopoly phases of capitalism in order to illustrate the relation between the instances I shall of necessity be somewhat schematic.+ In the competitive phase of capitalism, the economic is both determinant and dominant. That is, the major conditions for the reproduction of the system are given within the economic base itself. Of course, in this phase the political instance, the liberal-capitalist state does play a role, i.e. setting the limits of the working day through

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+That is, we should treat these distinctions as "ideal-types" in Weber's sense of the term.

Each section of the social whole is thus consistent with every other section in that they are expressions or manifestations of the same inner principle which animates the totality. This, of course presupposes a specific kind of totality - a spiritual totality in which each part "contains in the immediate form of its expression the essence of the totality itself."<sup>54</sup> This conception of the social whole as contemporaneous in its existence is presupposed by marxist historicism. That is, theory is seen as contemporaneous with all the other limbs of the social whole such that it is argued that theory is a direct expression of that social whole, ie., vis a vis proletarian class consciousness for Lukacs. Thus,

"The present constitutes the absolute horizon of all knowing, since all knowing can never by any-think but the existence in knowing of the internal principle of the whole."<sup>55</sup>

Against this conception of historical time premised on the Hegelian conception of the social whole, Althusser constructs a concept of differential historical time premised upon a conception of the social whole as a structure-in-dominance. In this conception, each of the instances of the social whole have their own histories and times. Each has its own rhythms and punctuations in their development.

"The specificity of these times and histories is therefore differential, since it is based on the differential relations between the different levels within the whole: the mode and degree of independence of each time and history is therefore necessarily determined by the mode and degree of dependence of each level within the set of articulations of the whole. The conception of the 'relative' independence of a history and of a level can therefore never be reduced to the positive affirmation of an independence in-itself, nor even to the mere negation of a dependence in-itself; the conception of this 'relative'

independence defines its 'relativity', i.e., the type of dependence that produces and establishes this mode of 'relative' independence as its necessary result at the level of the articulation of component structures in the whole, it defines that type of dependence which produces relative independence and whose effects we can observe in the histories of the different 'levels'."56

Althusser opposes this conception of historical time to "everyday practice's ideological time"<sup>57</sup> The time of each level is essentially opaque to members and requires a theoretical labour to produce its concept.

"...in no sense is it a time (the time of the economic) that can be read immediately in the flow of any given process. It is an invisible time, essentially illegible, as invisible and as opaque as the reality of the total capitalist production process itself. This time, as a complex 'intersection' of the different times, rhythms, turnovers, etc., that we have just discussed, is only accessible in its concept, which, like every concept is never immediately 'given', never legible in visible reality: like every concept is never immediately 'given', never legible in visible reality: like every concept this concept must be produced, constructed."<sup>58</sup>

Again, with respect to the science/ideology disjuncture, Althusser banishes the masses to the twilight zone of false ideological time while he remains standing in the light of the true time of the scientific concept. The relation between the two is never theorised nor raised as a problem, opening Althusser to the change of theoreticism.

However, Althusser has identified an important dimension of Ideology and history here and I think it is worthwhile to elaborate. For example, the linearity of ideological time posits a progression of historical events, one upon the heels of another, giving birth to the present. Thus, each society has a conception, within its Ideological-cultural forms, of its origin and the events which lead

from its origin to its present. Now Althusser is arguing that this conception of linear time (the time of the chronicler) is ideological in that it leads to an apologetic for the present. We get a sense of what he is saying if we consider evolutionist theories of history.

To put it more crudely, it is the powers that be, which define what is an historical event. Althusser argues that this is by definition then, ideological, and that we must yet construct the theory of what is an historical event, which he briefly defines as "a fact which causes a mutation in the existing structural relations."<sup>59</sup>

However, it is not clear why this definition should avoid the pitfalls of ideology. At this point then, I think we can only say that the whole concept of differential historical time is yet to be theorized in a systematic and rigorous fashion by Althusser or any of the "structuralists".

(3) The final usage of the concept of structural causality concerns the relationship between two modes of production within a social-formation or between two social formations. Althusser argues that within any social formation we find at least two modes of production, one of which is dominant. This dominance of one mode with respect to another means that the dynamics of one mode can only be properly understood by reference to the dynamics of the other mode. As Marx noted,

"In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular other which determines the specific gravity

of every being which has materialized within it."<sup>60</sup> +

For example, in capitalist social formations we do not find the *emp* pure and simple but rather find other modes of production (ie., petty-commodity production) and other kinds of productive activity which articulate with the dominant capitalist mode in a very complex way. Mandel distinguishes six kinds of production besides capitalist production within capitalist social formations.

- ✓(a) The sector of petty commodity production which survives in capitalist society (craftsmen and small peasants working for the market without employment wage-labour);
- ✓(b) The sphere of distribution and that of transport which is not indispensable for the consumption of commodities. The wages paid in this sphere come out of society's capital; the capitalists obtain part of the surplus-value of society.
- ✓(c) The sector of private services, the enterprises in which capitalist entrepreneurs and wage-earners provide specialized labour services to the consumers;
- ✓(d) The sector of public services in which the employees are paid by the State...
- ✓(e) The public services provided free by the State or by public enterprises (free primary education, etc.)...
- ✓(f) The production of use-values which do not appear on the market: production by subsistence forms, household production, 'do-it-yourself'."<sup>61</sup>

It is crucial to provide a theory of the dominance of one mode of production over another in order to provide an understanding of the structural determination of social classes not embedded in capitalist relations of production. The petty-bourgeoisie is a case in point, having its structural determination in petty-commodity production which, in capitalist social formations, articulates with the *emp* in a relation of dependence. Marx understood this in his

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Althusser has wrongly used this quote to show the dominance of the sphere of production over distribution and consumption within the region of the economic. In my view (supported by the opinion of Manuel Lefebvre) Marx is here pointing to the relationship between modes of production.

attempts to deal with the opposition between the town and the country, industry and agriculture.

Althusser also argues that primitive social formations are also characterized by the dominance of one mode of production over another. The recent work of Emmanuel Terray demonstrates this dominance of one mode over another with respect to the Guro.<sup>63</sup>

This problem of domination of modes is also crucial with respect to the dominance of a mode within one social formation over a mode within another social formation - imperialism. An example of this course, is the dominance of the cmp of the imperialist metropolises over the modes of production of the dependent social formations. A structural causality is involved in the effects which the cmp has on the subordinate modes.

As Poulantzas notes, these effects take the form of a complex tendency of the cmp to dissolve/conservate the subordinate modes.

"The differential form that these effects assume on the international scale delineates the phases of the imperialist stage; these thus correspond to specific forms of capital accumulation, or even to specific forms of global relations of production and of the international imperialist division of labour."<sup>64</sup>

There is a great deal of research done and being done on this problem and in the future we can expect fresh theoretical insight into the problems of imperialism and dependency.<sup>65</sup>

✓ In summing up then, I wish to reiterate that the concept of structural causality designates three complex relations:

(1) the dominance of production over distribution and consumption within the region of the (economic) mode of production;

✓ (2) the determination in the last instance of the political

and ideological instances by the economic base; and the reciprocal effectivity of all the instances;

✓3) and finally, the relationship of domination and subordination between modes of production.

Before considering two points of weakness in the "structuralist" conception of the social whole as a structure-in-dominance I would like to briefly consider the immediate consequences this concept for class analysis. Here I let Althusser point out the direction.

"To conceive of the nature of a social class it is essential to bring together the determinations of the economic base, of the juridico-political superstructure, and of the ideological superstructure. It is equally essential to be aware of the interplay within this combined determination so as to account for the way in which dominance may shift between the different determinations....(Social classes) are superdetermined because their nature can only be understood by invoking the structural causality of the three levels in the society, economic, political, and ideological. This structural causality takes the form of a conjunction of the three structural determinations in a single object, and in the variation of the dominant element within this conjunction."<sup>66</sup>

Foulantzas's recent work, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, has attempted to show the complex interrelations of these determinations in the structural determination of a social classes. It is clear that this conception of the determination of social classes has nothing to do with Marx's Hegelian schema of the class-in-itself and the class-for-itself of the *Seventy of Philosophy*.<sup>67</sup> That is to say,

"...every objective class place in the productive process is necessarily characterized by effects on the structural determination of this class in all aspects, i.e., also by a specific place of this class in the political and ideological relations of the social division of labour. For example, I say that there is a working class in economic

relations necessarily implies a specific place for this class in ideological and political relations, even if in certain countries and certain historical periods, this class does not have its own 'class consciousness' or an autonomous political organization. This means that in such cases, even if it is heavily contaminated by bourgeois ideology, its economic existence is still expressed in certain specific material politico-ideological practices which burst through its bourgeois 'discourse': this is what Lenin designated, if very descriptively, as class instinct. To understand this, of course, it is necessary to break with a whole conception of ideology as a 'system of ideas' or a coherent 'discourse', and to understand it as an ensemble of material practices. This gives the lie to all those ideologies arguing the 'integration' of the working class, and ultimately it means only one thing: there is no need for there to be 'class consciousness' or autonomous political organizations for the class struggle to take place, and to take place in every domain of social reality."<sup>63</sup>

Thus, social classes can only be properly theorized with respect to the complex manner in which all three instances account for their reproduction. We have already noted a case of the political determination of the conditions of existence of social classes through the idea of the political element of wage levels, ie., wage and price controls, corporatism.<sup>69</sup> Here we shall make reference to the manner in which the ideological instance functions in the reproduction of social classes.

Althusser's views on ideology are not easily summarized or assessed in the limited space available here. However I would like to illustrate his conception of the manner in which the ideological instance is a condition of the existence of social classes,†

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†For Althusser's views on ideology see "Marxism and Humanism", for Marx, (Penguin Books 1969), "Freud and Lacan", "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Lenin and Philosophy, (Monthly Reviews, N.Y., 1971). An interesting critique, which argues that Althusser's 'relative autonomy of ideology' is a more sophisticated form of economism, is Paul W. Hirst, Althusser and the theory of Ideology, Economy and Society Vol. 5 No. 7.

Althusser begins by taking the point of view of reproduction - what accounts for the maintenance of the given relations of production. In discussing the reproduction of labour-power he notes that,

"...the reproduction of labour 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, ie, 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, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words.'"70

Not only does ideology secure the conditions for the reproduction of the productive forces (labour-power as one component) but also the social relations of production. Althusser proceeds to examine the manner in which ideology functions to reproduce the capital-labour relation.

Ideology is defined both as a system of representations and as a material practice.

"Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations having nothing to do with 'consciousness'; they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness'. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them."71

Ideology is not a question of consciousness for Althusser but is rather profoundly unconscious. Ideology is a representation - an unconscious one - of the imaginary relation of men to their real conditions of existence.

"In ideology men 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: this presupposes both a real

relation and an 'imaginary', 'lived' relation. Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world', that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence."<sup>72</sup>

Althusser emphasizes the unconscious nature of ideology in order to deny a conspiratorial view of ideology.

"...the ruling class does not maintain with the ruling ideology, which is its own ideology, an external and lucid relation of pure utility and cunning."<sup>73</sup>

The ruling class believes and lives the very myths it perpetrates.

Althusser adds to this definition of ideology as an unconscious structure of representations, a definition of ideology as a material practice. That is, ideology exists in concrete institutions and practices.<sup>74</sup> This leads to Althusser's discussion of the state and the ideological state apparatus's.

In order to account for the reproduction of the relations of production, Althusser argues that we must examine the manner in which ideological practices embodied in social institutions secure the conditions for the existence of the relations of production. He provides a listing of the apparatus's of the State which realize this function - religion (the different churches), the educational system, the family, law, the political system including the various parties, the trade-union bureaucracy, the communications systems, the cultural practices (i.e., literature, art, sports).<sup>75</sup>

Although these apparatus's are incredibly diverse, behind this 'apparent' diversity there is a unity - their functioning.

"If the ISAs (ideological state apparatuses) function massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, insofar as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions,

beneath the ruling ideology which is the ideology of the 'ruling class'."<sup>76</sup>

For Althusser, the reproduction of the relations of production requires a legal-political and ideological superstructure to fulfill certain functions - the superstructure must have the effect of reproducing the capital - labour relation.

Althusser takes as an example the educational system in capitalist social formations. He argues that the school-family couple has replaced the church-family couple (in feudal societies) in having the function of reproducing class relations.<sup>77</sup> The School he argues, is now the dominant ideological state apparatus. It is schooling which reproduces and distributes social agents in a form amenable to capitalist exploitation.<sup>+</sup> Education is seen as an,

"...apprenticeship in a variety of know-how wrapped up in the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class..."<sup>78</sup>

It is through this institution that "...the relations of exploited to exploiters to exploited, are largely reproduced."<sup>79</sup>

Thus, ideology's function is commanded by the economic. It is this relation which prompts Hirst to seriously question Althusser's 'relative autonomy of ideology.' That is, if the economy requires that ideology fulfil certain functions can we really talk about autonomy at all. For Hirst, Althusser's 'relative autonomy' is a sophisticated economism.

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<sup>+</sup>An excellent paper arguing precisely this point is "IQ in the United States Class Structure", Daniel Foxles and Herbert Gintis in *The New Atlantic on Equality*, (ed.) Alan Kartner, Colin Leeder, Frank Riessman, (Krieger and Lee, N.Y. 1984).

"ISA's become agencies for the realization of a functional task given by the economy. The theses of the 'relative autonomy of the superstructure' and 'reciprocal action of the base' complicate but do not alter economism. The economy is here conceived as an auto-existent instance with 'needs'. Complexification results from the fact that these needs require agencies other than the economic in order that they may be met. In all this Althusser retains the problem of the primacy of the economy; the relations of production and classes are given in the economic and require only to be maintained by adequate ideological conditioning."<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, there are ambiguities in Althusser's theory of ideology and relative autonomy which requires future investigation.

In closing this section on ideology we should note the two types of ideology identified by Althusser - types which he sometimes is not careful to separate. There is ideology, or better, ideologies, which function to reproduce the relations of production in all class societies and there is ideology which renders the social whole opaque to members in all societies (class or classless). The latter type of ideology always interpellates individuals as the imaginary subjects of the social practices.<sup>31</sup> That is, it appears to social agents as if they really are the constitute subjects of society whereas in reality they act a drama written by the real Subject - the social whole always rendered opaque to members.+

Althusser distinguishes these types as functions - ideology has the function of reproducing class relations and the function of rendering the social whole opaque to social agents.

"...in a class society ideology is necessarily distorting by the opacity of society's determination

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-See chapter 3 for a discussion of Althusser's ontological position of the opacity of all social structures.

by the structure, and because it is made distorting by the existence of class divisions."<sup>32</sup>

Thus, one of the functions of ideology is given with our existential condition - in all social formations the social structures are opaque to members. Althusser is thus making an ontological judgement on our social existence. The other function of ideology is given with specific historical conditions - the existence of social classes.

The idea of a conscious transformation of social structures is then made problematic - we are always condemned to live the unsurpassable opacity of our social existence. I shall return to this point in Chapter Six.

In my view there are two major points of weakness in Althusser's interrogation of Marx's conception of the social whole as a structure-in-dominance. Both concern the problem of the instances:

(1) firstly, is the autonomy of the instances real or fictitious, and does the idea of autonomy of instances itself adequately capture real autonomy?;

(2) secondly, is the base-superstructure metaphor or the topographical model of a hierarchy of instances historically specific? A second part of this question concerns the isolability/separability of the economic in non-capitalist modes of production. I, of course, do not intend to put forth definitive positions on these questions, but rather, hope to raise certain critical questions and point out the direction in which further marxist theorizing and empirical research ought to go.

With respect to the base (the economic) - superstructure relation, Althusser argues that the base "calls forth" certain forms of superstructure as so many conditions of the base's existence. The base calls for a certain form of the superstructural instances and also grants to them their degree of effectivity.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the superstructural instances are specific to the relations of production as so many conditions of the latter's existence.

This, in my view, clearly contradicts any theory of differential historical time and negates the possibility of real autonomy. That is, the idea of differential historical time means that each instance has its own (because of its relative autonomy) time, its own history and rhythms of development. The instances do not have to be of the same time. For example, certain ideological forms may survive the relations of production which at one point "called them forth" as so many conditions of the latter's existence.

However, if Althusser is going to be consistent with the idea of differential historical time, it would be incorrect to say that the ideological or political instance is always specific to the relations of production which called them forth. They do not, of necessity, have to be of the same time. If they were, then it would be possible to do an "essential section" - precisely what Althusser hoped to avoid in arguing against the Hegelian idea of the contemporaneity of the limbs of the social whole.

There is however, a further manner in which Althusser's theory negates real autonomy and ultimately slides into a form of reductionism as equally dogmatic as economism. That is, Althusser argues that

there is a basic homology between all the instances of the social whole - the class struggle occurs at all levels. Now it is one thing to say that the class struggle occurs at all three levels but quite another to say that the class struggle defines in and of itself the dynamics of those levels. Just as the anthropologist E. Tyler once said "if law is anywhere, it is everywhere", so too Althusser might say if "the class struggle is anywhere, it is everywhere." For example, with respect to the ideological instance, Althusser argues that ideologies, "...whatever their form (religious, ethical, legal, political), always express class positions"<sup>34</sup> Poulantzas at least, has gone in this direction. For him, the class struggle occurs "in every domain of social reality."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, although the instances may be relatively autonomous with respect to each other, economic, political and ideological practices may be conceptualized as manifestations of the class struggle. We thereby slip back into a kind of expressive causality - ~~the class struggle is the essence whilst the economic, political and ideological instances are phenomenal manifestations.~~

The implications of such a reductionism are not without political consequence. For example, it becomes impossible to think the specificity of the oppression of women. A vulgar marxism then immediately sees sexism and the family as yet another example of capitalist domination. Women's struggle then becomes secondary or fused to working class struggle. In my view this fails to take cognizance of the complex determinations of women's position. As West notes, sexual domination has very complex "psychic dimensions", "...the significance of which are hardly yet understood."<sup>36</sup> We

ought never to assume that a transformation of the capitalist class relation (at all three levels) will result in the eradication of women's subordination. In my view, sexual domination is compatible with socialization of the means of production. This then, demands that we theorize the specificity of women's oppression in order that autonomous feminist struggle is not negated by vulgar marxism.<sup>87</sup>

This idea of real autonomy which I am trying to convey is also relevant to other forms of personal or institutional life. For example, the west, has a specific cultural tradition which has a specific conception of the individual. This conception of the individual is not simply a manifestation of bourgeois individualism but is rather a result of a multiplicity of determinations. That is, to understand "western" individualism one must understand the western religious tradition ie., Protestantism, which authorizes a particular conception of individualism.<sup>88</sup> Any revolutionary programme will have to take this conception of individualism into account, even if only to combat it.

Bureaucracy, science and technology are other phenomenon which also must be theorized with respect to their possible autonomy from capitalist social relations. Time and space, of course, do not allow for such an investigation here however.

Our second concern is with the possible historical specificity of the base-superstructure metaphor. That is, does the topographical model of a hierarchy of instances with the economic determinant in the last instance help us to understand the dynamics of non-capitalist modes of production. At issue here, is the question of whether it is possible or worthwhile to isolate a domain of social practice called

the "economic" within primitive social formations. In fact, this is a problem in our own society as well. This is not a question without political consequence because as Terray points out, each social formation has an "ideological concept of its economic base."<sup>39</sup>

Let us consider this problem with respect to our own society. Our ideological superstructure has a very specific conception of what is and what is not "economic" activity. This conception does not include the activity of the housewife.

"Of course, bourgeois economists have always ignored the housewife as a labourer. For those held spell-bound by the fetishism of price theory, any operation not tagged with a price is a priori not economic. Since this is the status of the domestic labourer, she stands beyond their field of inquiry - no part of the official economy. Adding, of course, that the housewife has tremendous 'purchasing power' and that her 'changing tastes' affect the market place dramatically, they portray housewives as superficial social parasites, consuming but never producing."<sup>40</sup>

This ideological definition of the housewife's activity is a problematic or disputed definition however. For example, the Royal Commission of the Status of Women tried to resolve the uneasy tension between the domain of the "economic" and the "non-economic" through the category of "unpaid labour".<sup>41</sup> The housewife's activity was, in a sense, both economic and non-economic - economic in that it sure looks like work, yet non-economic because it has no price.

With the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement and the development of feminist struggle we see that the definition of the housewife's activity is ultimately a question of political consequence. That is, what feminists say (and quite rightly) is that the housewife does make a contribution to society in an "economic" way. They argue that women are devalued in our society precisely because our ideological

superstructure does not provide for the recognition of women's contribution. Thus women's work remains invisible - work which appears as its opposite - not-work. The wages for housework movement is a political demand for the recognition of women's work - for a redefinition of the economic.<sup>92</sup>

There is a greater theoretical problem at hand here which makes problematic the very possibility of a comparative science of history. That is, what is the economic in non-capitalist modes of production.

In my view (and Glucksmann's too), Althusser's programme for the identification of the economic in primitive social formation is contradictory. He argues that,

"...in primitive societies it is not possible to regard any fact, any practices apparently unrelated to the 'economy' (such as the practices which are produced by kinship rites or religious rites, or by the relations between groups in 'potlatch' competition), as rigorously economic, without first having constructed the concept of the differentiation of the structure of the social whole into these different practices or levels, without having discovered their peculiar meaning in the structure of the whole, without having identified in the disconcerting diversity of these practices the region of economic practice, its configuration and its modalities. It is probable that the majority of the difficulties of contemporary ethnology and anthropology arise from their approaching the 'facts', the 'givens' of (descriptive) ethnography, without taking the theoretical precaution of constructing the concept of their object: this omission commits them to projecting on to reality the categories which define the economic for them in practice, i.e., the categories of the economics of contemporary society, which to make matters worse, are often themselves empiricist."<sup>93</sup>

Althusser is quite right to argue that many anthropologists and economists project the categories of our own society onto other societies.<sup>94</sup> However, his solution to the problem entails a fundamental contradiction. That is, he argues that before we define

the region of the economic as such, we must define the structure of the whole, of which the economic is only one of its regions. However, what is the social whole but a hierarchy of regions (instances). Thus to construct the concept of the whole is to presuppose the concepts of the economic and the other regions- precisely the problem we began with.<sup>95</sup>

We then are forced to confront the possibility of the historical specificity of the base-superstructure metaphor. The work of Maurice Godelier is a valuable contribution to the discussion in that he has confronted the problem of defining the economic directly in his own fieldwork.<sup>96</sup> With respect to the autonomy and separability of the instances he writes,

"The more complex the division of labour, the more do economic activities acquire relative autonomy in the social totality and the easier is it to define elementary economic categories, that is, categories and laws that are 'simply' economic. Contrariwise, the simpler our society is, the less possible is it to isolate the economic from the other elements in social life, and the more complex will be the analysis of an apparently economic mechanism, since the entire social configuration is directly present at the heart of this mechanism."<sup>97</sup>

Clearly marxists working in the field of anthropology will need to confront these problems in order that an adequate concept of the social whole can be constructed for non-capitalist modes of production. I will only note here that Tarray's work on a primitive social formation retains the topographical model of a hierarchy of instances - an economic base and an ideological superstructure.<sup>98</sup>

Summary

This chapter has been an attempt to give an account and assessment of the "structuralist" interrogation of Marx's concept of the social whole. We have seen that the major concepts through which Althusser thinks the complexity of Marx's social whole are the concepts of overdetermination, structural causality and differential historical time.

I have distinguished three separable meanings of the concept of structural causality:

- (1) (i) The dominance of production in the region of the economic.
- (ii) The dominance of the relations of production in the articulated unity of the relations of production and the forces of production.
- (2) The determination of the social whole by the economic in the last instance. Here we dealt with the concepts of determination, dominance, relative autonomy, specific effectivity.
- (3) The dominance of one mode of production over another.

We noted the immediate consequences for class analysis and I raised some questions concerning the relative autonomy of ideology.

The final section dealt with two points of weakness in Althusser's conception of the social whole as a structure-in-dominance. Althusser's notion of relative autonomy was questioned in that I felt it did not allow us to think real autonomy. Secondly, the possible historical specificity of the base-superstructure metaphor was raised as a problem.

NOTES

1. Althusser, 1969, p. 11.
2. Marx, 1859 Preface to A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, 1970, pp. 20-21.
3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, 1973.
5. Althusser, 1975, p. 206.
6. Althusser, 1969, pp. 113-114.
7. Ibid., p. 167.
8. Ibid., p. 167.
9. Ibid., pp. 193-213.
10. Ibid., p. 113.
11. Frederick Engels, Letter to W. Borgius (1894), in Marx and Engels, Selected Works in One Volume, 1970, p. 694.
12. Marx, Capital Vol. I, 1974, p. 32.
13. Marx, Capital, Vol. III, pp. 790-792.

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14. Althusser, 1969, p. 97.
15. Ibid., pp. 100-101.
16. See Mao-Tse-tung's paper "On Contradiction" in Selected Readings from the Works of Mao", pp. 85-129.
17. Althusser, 1969, p. 106.
18. Ibid., p. 106.
19. Engels, Letter to C. Schmidt, 1890, in Marx and Engels Selected Works in One Volume, 1970, p. 639.
20. Althusser, 1969, p. 113.
21. Ibid., pp. 115-116.

22. Ibid., p. 107.
23. Althusser, 1975, p. 136.
24. Ibid., pp. 136-137.
25. G.F. Hegel, Philosophy of History,
26. B. Malinowski as quoted in Emmanuel Terray, Marxism and "Primitive Societies", 1972, pp. 130-131.
27. Ibid., p. 131.
28. Kenneth Burridge, Tangu Tradition,
29. Talcott Parsons, The Social System, 1964, pp. 177-200.
30. Talcott Parsons, Societies: Evolutionary Perspectives,
31. Althusser, 1975, p. 188.
- ✓ 32. Ibid., pp. 188-189.
33. Marx, Grundrisse, 1973, pp. 99-100.
34. Ibid., p. 92.
35. Ibid., p. 92.
36. Henri Lefebvre, Everyday Life in the Modern World, 1971.  
See also Herbert Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man, 1964.
- ~~37. Lefebvre, 1971.~~
38. Donald N. Smith, president of Burger King, Rolling Stone, Apr. 1977, p. 53.
39. Marx, Grundrisse, 1973, p. 95.
40. Ibid., p. 96.
41. Nicos Poulantzas, Classes in Contemporary Capitalism, 1975, p. 21.
42. Marx, Capital, Vol. I, 1974, p. 441.
43. Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society, 1972, pp. 138-139.
44. Marx, Capital Vol. III, p. 791.
45. Ibid., p. 791.

46. Althusser, 1975, p. 177.
47. Marx, Capital Vol. III, p. 791.
48. Glucksmann, 1972, p. 31.
49. G. Carchedi, On Dialectical Determination,
50. Ibid., pp. 50-54.
51. Jurgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, 1975, p. 38.
52. Poulantzas, 1975, pp. 45.
53. Althusser, 1975, p. 94.
54. Ibid., p. 94.
55. Ibid., p. 95.
56. Ibid., p. 100.
57. Ibid., p. 101.
58. Ibid., p. 101.
59. Ibid., p. 102.
60. Marx, Grundrisse, 1973, pp. 106-107.
61. Ernest Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory, 1974, pp. 305-306.
62. Terray, 1972, p. 179.

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63. Ibid.
64. Poulantzas, 1975, p. 43.
65. Pierre-Phillipe Rey, Georges Dugre, Samir Amin, and Harold Wolpe have all done interesting work in this area.
66. Terray, 1972, p. 144.
67. Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, 1973, p. 173.
68. Poulantzas, 1975, pp. 16-17.
69. see pp. 54-57 above.
70. Althusser, 1975, p. 132-133.
71. Althusser, 1969, p. 233.

72. Ibid., pp. 233-234.
73. Ibid., p. 234.
74. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus", in Althusser, 1976.
75. Ibid., p. 143.
76. Ibid., p. 146.
77. Ibid., p. 154.
78. Ibid., p. 156.
79. Ibid., p. 156.
30. Paul Q. Hirst,
31. Althusser, 1976, pp. 170-171.
32. Althusser as quoted by Ranciere, 1974, p. ;29.
33. Althusser, 1975, p. 177.
34. Althusser, 1976.
35. Poulantzas, 1975, p. 17.
36. Hirst,
37. See the works of Kate Millet and S. Firestone for different perspectives on the specificity of women's oppression.
38. See Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus,
39. Terray, 1972, p. 174.
90. Wally Secombe, The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism, Red Pamphlet No. 8, IKG Publications, p. 2.
91. Royal Commission on the Status of Women.
92. Thus the definition of the "economic" is a political question which is of more than academic interest.
93. Althusser, 1975, p. 179.
94. Godelier, 1972, pp. 279-303.
95. See Glucksmann, 1972.

96. Todelier, 1972.

97. Ibid., p. 302.

98. Terray, 1972.

CHAPTER FIVE

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account and assessment of Althusser's conceptualization of history as a process without a subject(s). Here we are dealing with Marx's methodological principle of objectivity. My point of departure - a statement of Marx's from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*,

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>1</sup>

This remark has been taken not simply as a starting point for reflecting upon Marx's conception of history, but as an authorization for a dialectic of the subject/freedom (men make their own history) and the object/necessity (circumstances directly encountered). Indeed, with Sartre, it authorizes an entire philosophy of praxis.<sup>2</sup>

In my view however, Marx's statement must be subjected to theoretical interrogation. Thus, a number of questions are raised: In what sense can the statement that men "make" history under certain conditions be considered a scientific utterance? Who are the men of men make history? How do social classes "make" history?

The "structuralists" offer to us a position on these questions - a position not without certain ambiguities. I shall now proceed to investigate this position with respect to the thesis that history is a process without a subject.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis implies both a negative and affirmative proposition: negative in that it denies that there is a subject of the historical

process or that history can be understood with reference to some notion of a subject, whether it be individuals as subjects (Cartre) or the working class (Lukacs); affirmative in that it leads to a conceptualization of history as a resultant of the unintentional properties/dynamics of social structures. That is, for the purposes of the understanding, it is argued that history must be conceptualized as a determinative process with reference to the unintentional properties of social structures over which individuals have no (or little) control.

In Godalier's words"

"...the conditions for the rise, functioning and evolution of any system are twofold, some belonging to the sphere of men's intentional activity, while others, of more decisive importance, give expression to the unintentional properties inherent in social relations, properties that do not belong to men's consciousness, having neither their origin nor their basis in that sphere, and that are latent with the possibility of transforming these social relations."<sup>4</sup>

For the "structuralists", the science of historical materialism has to do with the transformations social formations undergo independently of the will of individuals. Various statements of Marx from the German Ideology and in his later works, authorize such a position. For example, in the 1859 Preface Marx conceptualizes the social relations of production and the productive forces as conditions independent of the wills of men.<sup>5</sup>

Althusser has transcended this conceptualization into the thesis that "men" are not the locatable subjects of the historical process. In Lenin and Philosophy Althusser asserts that Marx's principal positive debt to Hegel was this conception of a process without a subject.<sup>6</sup> The concept of process was labelled scientific whereas the notion of

subject was labelled ideological.<sup>7</sup> These almost cryptic comments are quite groundless unless considered with respect to Althusser's investigations as a whole. For example, we get a better sense of Althusser's point if we remember the ontological premiss which authorizes the science/ideology disjuncture. Historical materialism as a science, has to do with the unintentional social structures of a society which are always opaque to members. Marx's scientific object - the mode of production - is located at this level where we find structures, not subjects. It is at the level of phenomenal appearance and hence at the level of necessary mystification where we find subjects - where it appears as if men are indeed the subjects of the historical process.<sup>8</sup> For Althusser, ideology always interpellates individuals as imaginary subjects of the historic process - as "...centres of free initiative - of society, so as to assure their real subjection to the social order, as blind supports or victims of it."<sup>9</sup>

~~Put more poetically, for Althusser, at the level of social structure and historical process, we find an "authorless theatre".~~  
 "Men" are seen to be captured by,

"...the constraints of a script and parts whose author they cannot be, since it is in essence an authorless theatre."<sup>10</sup>

Historical materialism therefore leaves no role for a discourse on the subject qua subject, or any principle of explanation premised upon a concept of "man" or the "human essence." For Althusser, this denial is one of Marx's great advances.

"By rejecting the essence of man as his theoretical basis, Marx rejected the whole of this organic system of postulates. He drove the philosophical categories of the subject, of empiricism, of the ideal essence, etc., from all the domains in which they had been supreme. Not only from political economy (rejection of the myth of homo oeconomicus, that is, of the individual with definite faculties and needs as the subject of the classical economy); not just from history (rejection of social atomism and ethico-political idealism); not just from ethics (rejection of the Kantian ethical idea); but also from philosophy itself: for Marx's materialism excludes the empiricism of the subject (and its inverse: the transcendental subject) and the idealism of the concept (and its inverse: the empiricism of the concept)."<sup>11</sup>

For classical economy, explanation was based precisely on the "givenness" of economic phenomena with reference to the human subject with specified needs, faculties etc.<sup>12</sup>

In *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Althusser elaborates more on his thesis of history as a process without a subject. Here I must apologize for the length of the quotation.

"In my opinion: 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. And I will go even further: 'men' are not 'the subjects' of history.

...That human, ie. social individuals are active in history - as agents of the different social practices of the historical process of production and reproduction - that is a fact. But, considered as agents, human individuals are not 'free' and 'constitutive' subjects in the philosophical sense of these terms. They work in and through the determinations of the forms of historical existence of the social relations of production and reproduction (labour process, division and organization of labour, process of production and reproduction, class struggle, etc)

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Thus, for Althusser, individuals are dealt with insofar as they are determined by the social relations of production and reproduction. This is not to say that this mode of conceptualization of

individuals is the last word on individuals, a point to which I shall return. It is to say however, that for the purposes of historical materialist analysis, individuals or subjects are replaced by social structures and social relations.

For Althusser, the subject-form is a necessary component of all ideological superstructures. This is to say that it appears as if individuals are the subjects of the historical drama when in fact their scripts are written at the level of social structure. This point is consistent with the presupposition of the opacity of all social structures.

"...No human, ie. social individual can be the agent of a practice if he does not have the form of a subject. The 'subject-form' is actually the form of historical existence of every individual, of every agent of social practices: because the social relations of production and reproduction necessarily comprise as an integral part, what Lenin calls '(juridico-) ideological social relations', which, in order to function, impose the subject-form on each agent-individual. The agent-individuals thus always act in the subject-form, as subjects. But the fact that they are necessarily subjects does not make the agents of social-historical practices into the subject or subjects of history (in the philosophical sense of the term: subject of). The subject-agents are only active in history through the determination of the relations of production and reproduction, and in their forms."<sup>14</sup>

This latter point however is in need of both theoretical elaboration and empirical substantiation. That is, Althusser is quite correct to assert that within the ideological superstructure of capitalism the individual is interpellated as subject or as abstract individual. One need only read the newspapers, especially the "New York Times", "Daily Mail" about "banking" or "financial" institutions of which, it is said that "individuals are seen to be the beneficiaries

subjects of society. The government argues that if only each individual will change his or her expectations our whole society will be able to move towards a better society, or at least survive.<sup>15</sup>

However, in social formations dominated by non-capitalist modes of production, we may find that the category of the individual and the interpellation of the individual as the constitutive subject of society, is absent from their ideological forms. Individuals may be conceptualized within the ideological superstructure as encapsulated within larger social units i.e. the household, clan etc. As Marx noted,

"The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole..."<sup>16</sup>

Althusser's thesis that history is a process without a subject raises the whole problem of the Marx-Hegel relation. For Hegel, men were not the subjects of the historical process but were rather the bearers of the Idea or Spirit. World-history was conceptualized as the coming to self-consciousness of the world spirit which assumes different forms in the spiritual life (cultural) of various societies at different points in time. Hegel's objective idealism gave priority to the spirit which animated the social whole over the individuals which realized its aims. Consider the following statements from Hegel.

"(The spirit's consciousness) is the substance of the spirit of a people; even if individuals are not aware of it, it stands there as a fixed presupposition. It is a kind of necessity; the individual is brought up in this atmosphere, he knows nothing else. Yet it is not simply upbringing and the result of upbringing; this consciousness is developed from within the individual himself, rather than taught to him; the individual is in this substance..."

No individual can transcend this substance; he can certainly distinguish himself from other particular individuals, but not from the Volkgeist.....The gifted are only those that understand the spirit of the people and can orient themselves to it... Thus individual personalities disappear from our point of view, and the only ones that are relevant are those that posit in the reality the will of the Volkgeist. In philosophical history one must avoid such expression as: 'a state would not have perished had there been a man who...'17

"However, world history does not begin with any kind of conscious purpose - in the way that in particular groups of men the simple drive for the society of their fellows has already the conscious purpose of acuring their life and property, and then, once this association has been achieved, the purpose straight away extends its determination... World history only commences in itself, with its general purpose, that is to satisfy the concept of spirit implicitly, ie., as nature...and the whole business of world history is... the work of bringing it to consciousness."18

It was precisely this conception of history as a process without a subject to which the young Marx reacted and thereby vehemently reversed the terms of Hegel's philosophy of history.

For example, in *The Holy Family*, Marx writes:

"History does nothing; it 'possesses, no colossal riches', it 'fights no battles'.--Rather it is man, actual and living man, who does all this, who possesses and fights; 'history' does not use man as means for its purposes as though it were a person apart; it is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his ends."20

However, this reaction against the conceptualization of individuals as mere bearers of the historical process must be situated within its theoretico-ideological field. As Althusser notes, Marx's reaction makes sense if we consider that he was reacting to a mystifying conception of the historic process as in the hands of the Spirit, Idea, or the Deity.<sup>21</sup> Obviously the theoretico-ideological field has changed and we need no longer struggle against a conception

of history as in the hands of Providence.

Marx moves off this terrain after 1845 and gives expression to a principle of objectivity - history as a process without a subject. Thus, Marx appropriates the very principle to which he had earlier reacted to so negatively. However, this theoretical appropriation radically transforms the problematic within which the principle of objectivity is situated. That is, Marx does not make reference to the determinative spiritual conditions (culture) of the historic process but to determinate material conditions (the mode of production of material life.).

For example, in Marx's analysis of an historical conjuncture in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, he focuses upon objective material conditions rather than on the individual personalities of the actors involved. Here we have echoes of Hegel's remark that

"...individual personalities disappear..."

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Let me clarify the Marx-Hegel-Althusser relation with respect to the idea of history as a process without a subject. Prior to 1845, Marx reacts against Hegel's conception of history as a process without a human subject. He thus asserts the primacy of men's praxis against Hegel's objective idealism.

Of course for Hegel, there is a Subject- the Spirit or the Idea - but not human subjects. After 1845, Marx accepts the thesis of history as a process without a human subject. However, he retains a conception of the Subject - the social relations of production.

Althusser accepts Marx's later position. For him, like Marx, the real Subject is the social relations of production. Althusser therefore is in agreement with Hegel that history is a process without a human subject.

Trotsky's discussion of the Czar in History of the Russian Revolution is another brilliant application of this principle to historical analysis.<sup>22</sup>

In this light we may also consider Marx's conceptualization of individuals in Capital and the "structuralist" concept of differential forms of historical individuality.

Althusser argues that for Marx, individuals are only treated insofar as they support (Traeger) the connexions of the capitalist mode of production and the various instances of the social formation.<sup>23</sup> Throughout Capital Marx conceptualizes individuals as Traeger which has the meaning of 'something which carries, bears, sustains or supports something.' For Althusser then, individuals are in no way the constitutive subjects of the social structure but are rather its supports.+  
"

"...the structure of the relations of production 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 the 'supports' (Traeger) 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 appearances, the 'obviousness' of the 'given' of naive anthropology, 'concrete individuals', 'real men' - but the definition and distribution of, these places

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\*there is a similarity in the structuralist-marxist concept of "support" and the functionalist concept of "role". Both give expression to a methodological principle of objectivity.

However the functionalist concept of role is restricted to the cultural dimension - a role is the institutionalized form of normative structures.

The concept of support refers to economic, political and ideological functions and is thus not restricted to cultural processes.

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. And if by chance anyone proposes to reduce these relations of production to relations between men, i.e., 'human relations', he is violating Marx's thought, for so long as we apply a truly critical reading to some of his rare ambiguous formulations, Marx shows in the greatest depth that the relations of production (and political and ideological social relations) are irreducible to any anthropological inter-subjectivity - since they only combine agents and objects in a specific structure of the distribution of relations, places and functions, occupied and 'supported' by objects and agents of production."<sup>24</sup>

Althusser and Balibar develop this theoretical treatment of individuals as 'supports' with the concept of differential forms of historical individuality. This concept asserts that in each mode of production individuals are determined by the specific structures and practices of each mode.

Balibar provides an excellent illustration of the concept of differential forms of historical individuality in his discussion of the transition from manufacture to industry. He argues that under manufacture the individual is specified by the unity of labour-power and the means of labour. Before the industrial revolution, this unity is expressed in the fact that a 'technique' was a fusion of a tool (means of labour) and a worker. The worker is moulded to the tool's use through a period of apprenticeship and tradition. Although the organization of work may have been collective, the 'technique' was individual. The manufacturing system employs this form of labour within the early factory systems, developing to the utmost the principles of this type of labour, i.e. specialization and increasing technical division of labour.<sup>25</sup>

with the transition from manufacture to industry - the labour-process most consistent with capitalist relations of production in Balibar's view - the individual is specified by a new connexion: the unity of the means of labour and the object of labour. <sup>26</sup>

"By replacing human strength in the function of tool-bearer, ie., by suppressing its direct contact with the object of labour, mechanization produces a complete transformation of the connexion between the labourer and the means of production. From then on, the information of the object of labour no longer depends on the culturally acquired characteristics of the labour-power, but is pre-determined by the forms of the production instruments and by their functioning mechanism. The basic principle of the organization of labour becomes the necessity to replace the operations of manual labour as completely as possible by the operations of machines. The machine-tool makes the organization of production completely independent of the characteristics of human labour-power; at the same stroke, the means of labour and the labourer are completely separated and acquire different forms of development. The previous relationship is inverted; rather than the instruments having to be adapted to the human organism, that organism must adopt itself to the instrument."<sup>27</sup>

Here we find individuals dealt with only insofar as they are determined by the differential connexions of the mode of production. Therefore, we do not have individuals here in the multiplicity of their determinations, but rather insofar as they function in 'support' of the structures and practices of the mode of production.

"...Marx formulated the very concept of the dependence of the forms of individuality with respect to the structure of the process or the 'node' of production. His terminology itself is marked by the epistemological fact that in the analysis of the 'combination' we are not dealing with concrete men, but only men insofar as they fulfil certain determinate functions in the structure: - bearers of labour-power with respect to the labour process, in his exposition of the theoretical concepts which refine the analysis, Marx does not, as we have seen, say 'man' or 'subject', but 'werktaetige Aktivitaet', activity which conforms to the norms of the mode of production; - representatives of capital.

To designate these individuals, he systematically used the term *trager*, which is most often translated into English as support. Men do not appear in the theory except in the form of supports for the connexions implied by the structure, and the forms of their individuality as determinate affects of the structure."<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, what real individuals are in various social formations is not something which is 'given' with the category of individual. A theoretical labour is required to read beneath the false obviousness of ideology to discover the differential forms of historical individuality.

"...the mode of historical existence of individuality in a given mode of production is not legible to the naked eye in 'history'; its concepts, too, must therefore be constructed, and like every concept it contains a number of surprises, the most striking of which is the fact that it is nothing like the false obviousness of the 'given' - which is merely the mask of the current ideology."<sup>29</sup>

For the "structuralists", the concept of 'individuals' or 'men' is a non-specific abstraction, an example of misplaced concreteness (Whitehead), in that individuals assume various historical forms.'

As Marx noted,

\* / "The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production."<sup>30</sup>

Althusser's argument that Marx treats individuals in his theory of the capitalist mode of production has inspired a good deal of criticism not without its own ambiguity. Reacting to Althusser's formulation of men as supports, as "simple effects of social structure", Veltreger claims that,

"...men do not permit these relations as mere supports or affects, but as concrete individuals with consciousness and will - although a certain form of social relations (under commodity production) tends to turn men into mere supports/affects and to reduce human relations to relations among things."<sup>31</sup>



as bearers of interchangeable functions in, within capitalist exploitation, which is the fundamental capitalist class struggle, to mark them inseparably in their flesh and blood, to reduce them to nothing but appendices of the machine, to cast their wives and children into the hell of the factory, to extend their working day to the maximum, to give them just enough to reproduce themselves, and to create that gigantic reserve army from which other anonymous bearers can be drawn in order to put pressure on those who are in employment, who are lucky enough to have work."<sup>34</sup>

Firstly, let us note that these criticisms of Althusser's first conceptualization of men as 'supports' echoes Marx's humanistic reaction against Hegel's philosophy of history. As has been noted, in the Holy Family Marx reacted against Hegel's treatment of individuals as "mere bearers" of the historical process. However Marx does reject the humanist/historicist terrain after 1845 and does begin to treat individuals only insofar as they function to 'support' the structures of the mode of production. The difference now however is that for Hegel it was the Idea or Spirit which was determinate of various forms of individuality whereas for Marx it is first and foremost the structures of the mode of production of material life.

The arguments made against Althusser, that men are more than mere "supports" amounts to saying that men are more than the concepts required to think that which determines and conditions them. And I agree, real individuals are always more than the concept of them - the object of knowledge is distinct from the real object.

Althusser's re-formulation is mistaken in that by historicizing the concept of 'support', (ie. only in capitalism are people reduced to being supports) he misses the point of Marx's method and obscures what is the object of Marx's discourse. The concept of 'support' is not

a moral notion which decries the inhumanity of capitalism's effects on individuals (Althusser). Nor does it mean that individuals do not have consciousness and wills ;(Veltmeyer) or that they are passive (Geras). Rather, in my view, it gives expression to the limits of the object of Marx's discourse. Capital is a treatment of individuals in the cmp only insofar as they may be understood as effects of the laws of operation of the system. This by no means exhausts the possible discourses which could or ought to be constructed to comprehend real individuals.

Althusser's historicization of the concept of 'support' gives it a reading as 'alienation'. For Althusser (the Althusser of Essays in Self-Criticism), only in the cmp are men reduced to 'supports'. But what of other modes. Surely in the feudal mode of production the peasant and the lord are 'supports' of feudal relations of production. In my view, the general concept of mode of production implies that individuals in all modes are treated theoretically only insofar as they support the structures and practices of the mode in question. As Marx notes, one does not do away with laws after capitalism where individuals somehow miraculously cease being 'supports' to production relations. If there is production then there are individuals who 'support' production relations.+

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"Every child knows that a nation which ceased to work, I will not say for a year, but even for a few weeks, would perish. Every child knows, too, that the masses of products corresponding to the different needs require different and quantitatively determined masses of the total labour of society. That this necessity of the distribution of social labour in definite proportions cannot possibly be done away with by a particular form of social production but can only change the mode of its appearance, is self-evident. No natural laws can be done away with. What can change in historically different circumstances is only the form in which these laws assert themselves.

(continued...)

In Capital, Marx emphasizes that he only treats individuals insofar as they are determined by dynamics of the emp.

"To prevent possible misunderstanding, a word. I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense couleur de rose. But here individuals are dealt with only insofar as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them."<sup>35</sup>

Two more examples from Capital should illustrate Marx's treatment of individuals in greater clarity.

"As the conscious representative of this movement, the possessor of money becomes a capitalist. His person, or rather his pocket, is the point from which the money starts and to which it returns. The expansion of value, which is the objective basis or mainspring of the circulation M-C-M, becomes his subjective aim, and it is only insofar as the appropriation of ever more and more wealth in the abstract becomes the sole motive of his operations, that he functions as a capitalist, that is, as capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will."<sup>36</sup>

"In the course of our investigation we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are but the personifications of the economic relations that exist between them."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, in my view, historical materialism as a science has a limited object - modes of production within determinate social formations.

As Nefham notes however, what Althusser

"...has neglected to emphasize (although he has never denied it and clearly believes it to be true) is that the science of social formations does not exhaust the

(Continued...)

...science consists precisely in demonstrating how the law of value asserts itself." (Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence, Marx to L. Feuerbach, July 11, 1846) p. 106) Individuals are thus in Marx's view always subject to the laws of operation of some system.



personal relations between elites and their class origin. This type of research reveals an underlying assumption of individuals as the constitutive subjects of social structure.<sup>42</sup>

This becomes very evident in Miliband's critique of the managerial thesis. The managerial thesis argued that because of the separation of ownership from control, power had been transferred to the managers of the corporation. Since they have no direct economic interests, i.e., they do not own the corporation, they were seen not to be motivated by profit. Miliband, fighting on the terrain of the managerialists, refutes their claims by demonstrating that indeed managers are motivated by profit. Poulantzas argues that this is a mistaken way of posing the problem. He argues that motivation of conduct cannot be a criterion for membership in the capitalist class. Marx's criterion, he argues, is always individual's objective place within the productive process and the ownership of the means of production.<sup>43</sup> Profit is not a motivation of individual conduct but is rather

"...an objective category that designates a part of realized surplus-value."<sup>44</sup> The characterization of the existing social system as capitalist in no way depends upon the motivations of managers but rather on the objective dynamics of surplus-value appropriation.

To emphasize individual's intentions or motivations when dealing with social structure is to display an underlying presupposition

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<sup>42</sup>That is, Marx does not see the profit motive as a determinant of individual capitalists as a criterion for capitalism. Rather, individual capitalists must realize a profit independent of their "pecuniary motives" (i. e. profit hills). They may or may not be motivated by greed but nevertheless, a profit hunter they must be.

of social structure as an expression of individual's intentional actions. This problematic of an action frame of reference is authorized by Max Weber's definition of social action and was appropriated by Parsons in his early work.<sup>45</sup> It ultimately leads to a subjectivistic and idealistic explanation of social structure.

Another example of relevance to our argument is the entire problematic of classical political economy and certain contemporary variants which take as their point of departure a conception of homo economicus.

The obvious example of course, is Adam Smith who postulates a universal feature of human nature - the propensity to truck, barter and exchange - as the basis of economic systems. Smith had preached that if only the State would not intervene in the economy, human nature would eventually cast off the bondage of ignorance to realize a system of perfect competition - a direct expression of individual action motivated by self-interest.<sup>46</sup>

The idea of homo economicus with certain needs which of necessity must be fulfilled gives primacy to the subjects, the individuals of a given economic system. This naive anthropology accepts and theoretically appropriates the empirically given needs of subjects without reading beyond the given to that which structures and defines needs within specific social formations. For Marx, needs are not given with the empirically visible individuals of a given social formation. They are historically determined by the internal logic of mode of production.<sup>47</sup> Althusser notes that for Marx,

"The only needs that play an economic part are those that can be satisfied economically: those needs

are not defined by human nature in general but by their effectivity, i.e., by the level of the income at the disposal of the individuals concerned - and by the nature of the products available, which are, at a given moment, the result of the technical capacities of production. The determination of the needs of individuals by the forms of productions goes even further, since production produces not only definite means of consumption (use-values), but also their mode of production, including even the wish for these products ...

In other words, individual consumption itself, which interconnects use-values and needs in an apparently immediate fashion (and therefore seems to derive directly from anthropology, but a historicized one), refers us to the technical capacities of production (the level of the forces of production) on the one hand, and on the other to the social relations of production, which fix the distribution of income (the forms of the division into surplus-value and wages). This last point leads on to the distribution of men into social classes, which then becomes the 'real' 'subjects' (insofar as that term is applicable) of the production process. The direct relationship between 'a needs' thus defined and an anthropological basis becomes therefore purely mythical; or rather, we must invert the order of things and say that the idea of an anthropology, if it is possible at all, must first take into consideration the economic (non-anthropological) definition of these 'needs'.<sup>1143</sup>

What then are we to make of the thesis that "men make history", in light of our argument that "men" are not the subjects of the historic process but are rather its supports? In my view the emphasis on the concept of "man" and the rather banal assertion that men make history, functions as an "epistemological obstacle". It does not orient the theorist towards the posing of concrete problems for class analysis. It is an abstract assertion which calls us little more than that history is not in the hands of God. If man is seen to "make" history in the strong sense - regular and unceasing in the sense - we can the risk of dissolving the labor force potential essential to "make" it. "The theory, the only scientific and practical method of knowledge - is to be found in the science of the production of surplus-value."

no earlier praxis itself to be negated through human praxis,

The point is not that individuals are not active in history, but rather that for the purposes of the understanding, we conceptualize that activity as it is realized through and by the determinate material conditions of given social formations. Yes, men make history under determinate material conditions, but it is precisely those material conditions, which are the true object of Marx's discourse.

In this sense we can then argue that it is not "man" who makes history but the masses - the class struggle is the motor of history (Lenin). Both of these theses are scientific (for Althusser) in that they orient us towards concrete problems of class analysis. They pose for us the problem of identity and union of social classes and the conditions under which they struggle. These are problems which cannot be solved by reference to "man" as the subject of the historic process.

"Then we started to sketch out a definition of the masses, when we talked about this idea of the masses, we saw that the whole thing was rather complicated. The masses are actually several social classes, social strata and social categories, grouped together in a way which is both complex and changing (the positions of the different classes and strata, and of the fractions of classes within classes, change in the course of the revolutionary process itself). And we are dealing with huge numbers: in France or Britain, for example, with tens of millions of people, in China with hundreds of millions. Let us do no more here than ask the simple question: can we still talk about a "subject", identifiable by the unity of its "personality"? Compared with John Lewis's subject, "man", as simple and neat as you can imagine, the masses, considered as a subject, pose very exacting problems of identity and identification."<sup>20</sup>

History for Marx is not a process of man objectifying himself in existence but rather is a struggle of social classes within determinate material conditions.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles..."<sup>50</sup>

Thus, in my view, historical materialism cannot base its principle of explanation on the categories of "subject", "individuals" or "men". As a science, it is necessarily concerned with the objective properties of social relations which are seen to account for the rise, functioning and dissolution of determinate modes of production. The proletarian revolution and the emancipation of the working class is not to be based on an a priori assumption of man's teleological mission of reappropriating his lost essence in his existence (Marx in 1844). Rather, the possibility of historical transformation depends upon determinate material conditions. In 1859 Marx claims that,

"No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation."<sup>51</sup>

It is this development of the productive forces and their relationship to the social relations of production which establishes the necessity of historical transformation. This represents a decisive "break" with the problematic of 1844. As Godelier notes,

"The necessity for the appearance of a new mode of production does not arise from any purpose hidden in the mysteries of man's essence and revealed to the philosopher alone, be he materialist or idealist, for it is no longer possible to behold, in the historically-determined contradiction between capitalist production-relations and a certain level of the productive forces, the philosophical drama of the revolt of the 'true essence' of man against the dehumanized existence imposed upon the workers by the bourgeoisie."<sup>52</sup>

The necessity for the rise, operation and dissolution of a mode of production is to be explained with reference to the law of necessary correspondence/non-correspondence between production relations and productive forces.<sup>53</sup> Marx formulates this law very explicitly in 1859.

"At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or - this merely expresses the same thing, in legal terms - with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From terms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution."<sup>54</sup>

Again, with reference to the thesis that history is a process without a subject, it should be pointed out that the concept of social relations of productions cannot be reduced to interpersonal or intersubjective relations, à la Sartre. As Althusser argues,

"...the social relations of production are on no account reducible to mere relations between men, to relations which only involve men, and therefore to variations in a universal matrix, to inter-subjectivity (recognition, prestige, struggle, master-slave relationship etc.). For Marx, the social relations of production do not bring men alone onto the stage, but the agents of the production process and the material conditions of the production process." (R.C.p. 174)

The relations of production are not expressive of relations between men but are rather that which structures and defines relations

+By contrast, Talcott Parsons sees the major variable in the dissolution of a society as the cultural apparatus (or in marxist terms, the ideological superstructure) Thus for Parsons, culture (or ideology) is always determinant. For Marx, ideology may be dominant but never determinant. See chapter 4 for clarification of these concepts. See Talcott Parsons, *Societies: An Evolutionary Perspective*.

between men through the combination of men and the material conditions of production.

Marx's conceptualization of contradiction in 1859, also clearly distances the mature Marx from the Marx of the Paris Manuscripts (1844). In Marx's first "critique" of political economy we should recall (see Ch.I) that he had sought to resolve the problems of political economy through a transposition of its problems into their human terms. That is, political economy had restricted itself to the phenomenal manifestations of a more essential reality - alienation - the true basis of private property. That which explains the historic process is the simple contradiction between man's essence and his existence.

In 1845 Marx rejects this idea of simple contradiction for a principle of complexity: the mode of production is a unity of two complex structures - the forces and relations of production - which are seen to come into contradiction with each other at a certain stage in their development. It is this conceptualization of contradiction which functions as Marx's principle of explanation of the historical process. We shall briefly consider this concept of contradiction and its relationship to the thesis that the "class struggle is the motor of history".

Marx's concept of contradiction is premised upon the idea of a unity of opposites.<sup>56</sup>

"The pattern of social determination discovered by historical materialism is characterized precisely by a unity and conflict of opposites. To speak of contradictions in society is to acknowledge a basic unity between the parties to fundamental conflicts and between the parts of fundamental structural incongruities."<sup>57</sup>

Contradiction is seen to be a defining feature of the relationship of the working class to the capitalist class and of the relationship between the forces and relations of production. With respect to the latter:

"What does it mean to say that the unity of the relations and the forces of production develops into a contradiction, if not simply that there develops a structural incongruity between them, and that it is the very development of their unity that leads to this incongruity. The contradiction between the private capitalist relations of production and the social character of the forces of production is generated, not by the uneven development of two different social structures (for instance the more rapid development of the forces of production), but by the specific tempo and form of development of the productive forces brought about by the capitalist relations of production."<sup>58</sup>

Within this unity of the forces and relations of production, it is the relations of production which are dominant (see Ch.3).

"...the relations of production always dominate the labour process and the productive forces, stamping them with their own pattern and appearance. It is precisely this domination of the forces of production by the relations of production which gives their articulation the form of a process of production and reproduction."<sup>59</sup>

The contradiction between the forces and relations of production finds a more specific expression in the cmp in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. The drive for profit, which is the motor of capitalist development, seeks to constantly increase the productivity of labour through expansion/dev. of the productive forces. (Increase in the organic composition of capital). This increase in the constant portion (machinery) of capital results in a tendency to overproduce which results in a decline in the rate of profit. (see Landel).

The contradiction between the forces and relations of production

only occurs at a particular stage in the development of capitalism.

"In the beginning, on the contrary, far from contradicting the development of the productive forces, capitalist production - relations stimulated them and caused them to progress impetuously, from the organization of the manufactories until the appearance of machine-production and large-scale industry."<sup>60</sup>

In the initial stages of the development of capitalism there is a functional correspondence between the forces and relations of production. At this point we find a non-correspondence between feudal production-relations and capitalist productive-forces which accounts for the conflict between the seignorial class and the capitalist class.

Later in the development of the cmp, at the stage of heavy industry, capitalist production-relations turn into fetters of capitalist productive-forces.

"The contradiction of the capitalist mode of production, however, lies precisely in its tendency towards an absolute development of the productive forces, which continually come into conflict with the specific conditions of production in which capital moves, and alone can move."<sup>61</sup>

The contradiction of capitalism is thus immanent to its very structures - the mode of production is contradictory in its very existence.

"The real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself. It is that capital and its self-expansion appear as the starting point and the closing point, the motive and the purpose of production; that production is only production for capital and not vice versa, the means of production are not mere means for a constant expansion of the living process of the society of producers. The limits within which the preservation and self-expansion of the value of capital resting on the expropriation and panperization of the great mass of producers can alone

move - these limits come continually into conflict with the methods of production employed by capital for its purposes, which drive towards unlimited extension of production, towards production as an end in itself, towards unconditional development of the social productivity of labour. The means - unconditional development of the productive forces of society - comes continually into conflict with the limited purpose, the self-expansion of the existing capital. The cmp is, for this reason, a historical means of developing the material forces of production and creating an appropriate world-market and is, at the same time, a continual conflict between this its historical task and its own corresponding relations of production."<sup>62</sup>

The conditions for the rise, operation and dissolution of a mode of production is thus rooted in the compatability or non-compatability between the forces and relations of production. The contradiction which can arise between forces and relations of production is an unintentional aspect of social structure.

"This contradiction appears without anyone having willed its appearance. It is thus unintentional. Though resulting from the actions of all the agents of the system and of the development of the system itself, it has never been anyone's conscious plan or the aim pursued by any individual. Marx thus brings out the existence of aspects of reality that do not relate to any consciousness and are not explicable by consciousness. It is the mode of production itself, the investment of capital, that produces this result 'unconsciously.'" 53

The necessary conditions for historic change are thus rooted in the objective properties of the mode of production. However, historic change (the transformation from a social formation dominated by one mode of production to a social formation dominated by another mode) is not deducible from knowledge of the contradictions of a determinate mode. The sufficient conditions for historic change can only be theorized with respect to analysis of a conjuncture. This requires knowledge of the other instances of the

social formation - ie., political and ideological social relations.<sup>64</sup>

That is, the pure and simple contradiction between the forces and relations of production does not in and of itself account for the intricacies of historical change. Marx's principle of complexity (ch. 3) precludes such reductionism. Rather, as Althusser argues, the pure and simple contradiction is always overdetermined by its conditions of existence. These conditions of existence can only be theorized with respect to the other instances of the social formation and the level of development of the class struggle.

This leads to a discussion of the concepts required to think strategy.

Again we find that the category of the "subject" is of little use. For example, Poulantzas, in distinguishing between the dominant and dominated classes uses the concept of power bloc to designate an alliance of dominant classes and fractions, whereas the concept of the people designates an alliance of the dominated classes and fractions.<sup>65</sup> Here we find no need for the abstraction "man", "subject", "individual", but rather deal with individuals as they are specified by both their class determination and their class position.<sup>66</sup>

#### Summary

In this chapter I have investigated Althusser's thesis that history is a process without a subject. It is this thesis which gives expression to Marx's methodological principle of objectivity. In Althusser's view, it is this principle which is shared by both Marx and Hegel.

I then proceeded to examine the concepts of support and differential forms of historical individuality. The change in Althusser's position, with respect to the concept of support was noted and I argued that he had quite unnecessarily historicized the concept. I argued that Marx only treats individuals in his theory insofar as they are determined by the objective properties of the mode of production. This theoretical treatment in my view pointed to the limits or boundaries of Marx's theoretical object.

I then examined the consequences for marxist analysis with respect to the capitalist state. I briefly touched upon the Miliband-Foulantzas debate. I also noted the relevance of Marx's treatment of individuals to a critique of the ideological conceptions of classical political economy.

It was then concluded that for Marx, it was only men who make history if we conceptualize that making as it is realized in and through determinate material conditions. This led to the conceptualization of history as the resultant of a struggle of social classes. For Marx, this struggle was the effect of the objective dynamics of modes of production. It was the objective contradiction between the forces and relations of production which resulted in the class struggle - the motor of history. I concluded by discussing Marx's conception of contradiction.

#### NOTES

1. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", in Marx and Engels Selected Works in One Volume, 1970, p. 96.
2. See Jean-Paul Sarte, Search for a Method, trans. Hazel Barnes, 1968.
3. Also, Jean-Paul Sarte, Critique of Dialectical Reason, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, 1976.
3. See Althusser's paper "Marx's Relation to Hegel", in Althusser, 1972 and his "Remark on the Category: 'Process without a Subject or Goal(s)'", in Althusser, 1976.
4. Godelier, 1972, p. viii.
5. Marx, 1859 Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, 1970, p. 20.
6. Therborn notes that this assertion of Althusser's, and it is only an assertion, obscures the complex relation of Marx to Hegel. See Therborn, 1976.
7. Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy, 1976, p. 185.
8. See my chapter 2 above.
9. Anderson, 1976, p. 85.
10. Althusser, 1975, p. 193.
11. Althusser, 1969, p. 228.
12. Althusser, 1975, p. 162.
13. Althusser, 1976, pp. 94-95.
14. Ibid., pp. 94-95.
15. John Kephau makes this point in his paper "Who Takes History? Althusser's anti-humanism", 1973.
16. Marx, Grundrisse, 1973, p. 34.
17. Therborn, 1976, pp. 340-341.
18. Ibid., pp. 340-341.

19. Marx, The Holy Family, in Writings of the young Marx on Philosophy and Society, trans. L.D. Easton and K.H. Guddat, 1967, p. 375.
20. Ibid., p. 385.
21. Althusser, 1976.
22. Leon Trotsky, The History of the Russian Revolution, Vol. I, trans. Marx Eastman, 1965, pp. 101-103.
23. Althusser, 1975, pp. 111-112.
24. Ibid., p. 180.
25. Ibid., p. 238.
26. Ibid., p. 239.
27. Ibid., p. 239.
28. Ibid., p. 252.
29. Ibid., p. 112.
30. Marx, The German Ideology, 1973, p. 42.
31. Veltmeyer, 1974-75, p. 416.
32. Norman Geras, Marxism and proletarian self-emancipation, 1973, pp. 20-21.
33. Ibid., p. 22.
34. Althusser, 1976, pp. 202-203.
35. Marx, Capital Vol. I, 1974, p. 10.
36. Ibid., p. 152.
37. Ibid., p. 85.
38. Kephau, 1973, p. 28
39. Ralph Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society, 1970, chapter 3.
40. Nicos Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State in Ideology in Social Science, ed. Robin Blackburn, 1973, p. 245.
41. John Porter, The Vertical Mosaic, 1970, Wallace Clement, The Canadian Corporate Elite, 1975.

42. Miliband, 1970, pp. 66-67.
43. Poulantzas in Blackburn (ed.), 1973, pp. 243-244.
44. Ibid., pp. 243-244.
45. See Max Weber, Economy and Society and also Talcott Parson, The Structure of Social Action, Vol II, 1968.
46. Godelier, 1972, p. 16.
47. Marx arrives at this position only in 1845 at the level of the German Ideology.
48. Althusser, 1975, pp. 166-167.
49. Althusser, 1976, p. 48.
50. Marx, The Communist Manifesto, in Marx and Engels Selected Works in one volume, 1970, p. 35.
51. Marx 1859 Preface to A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, 1970, p. 21.
52. Godelier, 1972, p. 83.
53. Ibid., pp. 83-84.
54. Marx, 1859 Preface to A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, 1970, p. 21.
55. Althusser, 1975, p. 174.
56. Therborn, 1976, p. 393.
57. Ibid., 1976, p. 393.
58. Ibid., p. 394.
59. Poulantzas, 1975,
60. Godelier, 1972, p. 79.
61. Marx, Capital Vol. III, 1974, p. 257.
62. Ibid., p. 250.
63. Godelier, 1972, pp. 30-31.
64. Falibar in Althusser 1975, p. 393. See also Althusser's paper "Contradiction and Overdetermination", in Althusser, 1969.

65. Poulantzas, 1975, p. 24.

66. Ibid., p. 24.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion: Marxism, Dialectics and Humanism

Before assessing the results of this investigation into the "structuralist" interrogation of Marx, I would like to make some brief comments upon the notion of dialectic in Althusser. A final section of this concluding chapter shall consist of a sketching out of what I take to be the relation between the science of historical materialism and humanism.

The ambiguity surrounding the notion of dialectics within marxism is considerable and motivates me to make explicit Althusser's position. Conan Therborn divides the different notions of dialectics into two major classes. Within the first there is the position of revisionist Social Democracy which "...dismisses the dialectic as a metaphysical obstacle to a science of society and history."<sup>1</sup>

A second position, displayed largely by the Frankfurt school, takes the opposite view - science is thrown out and dialectics is upheld. Here we find, in my view, a dogmatic critique of science qua science and not a critique of science in its capitalistic use and form.<sup>2</sup> A rather unique position is held by Lucio Colletti who argues that historical materialism contains both a scientific and a dialectical discourse.<sup>3</sup>

The second major class is the Marxist-Leninist tradition in which "...science is viewed as applied dialectics."<sup>4</sup> Within this second class, as Therborn points out, there is the position of Lukacs

who argues that "...the dialectic exists only in humanistic, historical sciences, as opposed to naturalistic studies of society or nature."<sup>5</sup>

Louis Althusser's notion of dialectic falls clearly within the second major class of positions. He takes Hegel, Mao and Lenin as points of departure - that is, he performs a theoretical labour on certain of their "dialectical" notions in order to construct the specificity of the marxist dialectic.

Althusser concurs with Lenin - dialectics is the study of contradiction in the very essence of things. The marxist dialectic, is for Althusser, a conception of contradiction which has as its principal feature - complexity.

"The specific difference of Marxist contradiction is its 'unevenness', or 'overdetermination', which reflects in it its conditions of existence, that is, the specific structure of unevenness (in dominance) of the ever-pre-given complex whole which is its existence. Thus understood, contradiction is the motor of all development. Displacement and condensation, with their basis in its overdetermination, explain by their dominance the phases (non-antagonistic, antagonistic and explosive) which constitute the existence of the complex process, that, 'of the development of things.'"<sup>6</sup>

It is this specificity of marxist contradiction (its complexity a' la Mao) as opposed to Hegel's simple contradiction which defines for Althusser, the Marxist dialectic itself.<sup>7</sup>

The marxist dialectic, for Althusser, is thus a method or approach to the study of contradictions in their complexity. With reference to the science of the history of social formations, dialectics is therefore a method for understanding the contradictions of social formations in their complexity. In short, it is the theory of the structure-in-dominance.

Thus, if the reader is surprised that throughout this study I seldom mention dialectic and wonders where is the discussion of dialectics, my answer is that it is everywhere throughout this investigation. The dialectic is precisely a system of concepts and the principles upon which they are applied to a theoretical object.

Marx's dialectic, or if you will, the marxist method of class analysis, can in my view be systematized with reference to a number of principles. I have identified four such principles - a principle of materialism, a principle of objectivity, a principle of complexity and a principle of structural causality. Althusser's work on Marx can be understood and interrogated with respect to these principles and this is what I have done in this study. These four principles have been interrogated in three chapters on "structuralist" Marxism. Marx's principle of materialism has been discussed with reference to the "structuralist" interrogation of the general concept of mode of production. (Ch. 3). Marx's principles of complexity and causation (structural causality) has been discussed with reference to Althusser's conception of the social whole as a structure-in-dominance (Ch. 4). His principle of objectivity has been discussed with reference to Althusser's thesis that 'history is a process without a subject'. (Ch. 5). Chapter two dealt with Althusser's thesis of the "epistemological" break" and in a sense, prepared the field for a discussion of Marx's method of class analysis.

At this point, we may well ask, why Althusser's marxism - what has been/is his contribution to marxist discourse? With this question in mind I would like the reader to consider a statement from Sartre commenting upon much of marxism and many marxists.

"The open concepts of Marxism have closed in. They are no longer keys, interpretative schemata; they are posited for themselves as an already totalized knowledge.

...Marxism possesses theoretical bases, it embraces all human activity but it no longer knows anything. Its concepts are dictates; its goal is no longer to increase what it knows but to be itself constituted a priori as an absolute knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

In my view Althusser's philosophical investigations of Marx create the possibility of an open marxism - a marxism open to reflexion on its presuppositions and a marxism committed to knowing something.

Althusser's first question was the status of Marx's work as a whole - indeed could Marx's work be even called a whole. His answer was that historical materialism was founded on condition of an "epistemological break" distancing the mature Marx from the young Marx. Only he and Lucio Colletti have seriously questioned the status of Marx's early works. Colletti however, whose work is superb in many respects, locates a break at the level of Marx's 1843 Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right.<sup>9</sup> His position I find untenable in light of my own reading of Marx's early works.

In my view, and I have tried to substantiate this view in chapter one, Marx's pre-1845 writings are in no way consistent with the principles of his later works. To ignore the profound and unmistakable transformation Marx's thinking underwent in 1845 would be to ignore both Marx's theoretical labour (his achievements) and the very history within which he laboured. Althusser is quite correct, Marxism must be applied to itself.<sup>10</sup>

The "structuralist" attempt to construct a general concept of mode of production (dealt with in chapter two) has been a fruitful endeavor in that it has supplied, tentatively, certain concepts for the understanding of non-capitalist modes of production, and other social formations in their relation to the advanced imperialist metropolises. Also, the non-empiricist definition of social structure constructed by the "structuralists" is a welcome counter to the empiricism in the social sciences today. In my view, Althusser has situated theory in its proper place - prior to empirical research. For, without questions inspired by theory, there is no possibility of answers provided by empirical research.

Althusser's conception of the social whole as a structure-in-dominance is in my view one of the most fruitful of his concepts. It allows for the possibility of a non-dogmatic understanding of the superstructural instances. Its consequences for political practice is the realization that the struggle for socialism occurs on many levels not reducible to each other. However, we have also seen that there is a real conceptual danger in Althusser's conception of relative autonomy. That is, it is questionable whether Althusser's relative autonomy is in fact real autonomy.

The "structuralist" thesis that history is a process without a subject is also crucial with respect to understanding how individuals are determined by the unintentional properties of social structures. Within Western Marxism it is a counter to a kind of subjective voluntarism which is common to Korsch, Lukacs, and most recently Sartre. With respect to Western sociology it is also a real alternative

to what Anthony Giddens calls the "crude voluntarism" inspired by the demise of structural-functionalism.<sup>11</sup>

There is no need here to repeat the criticisms I have of Althusser's work. However, there is one point which I think it worthwhile to raise, if only in the form of a question.

Nowhere does Althusser theorize a relation between marxist theory and revolutionary practice other than to say that both are practices. To do so, in my view, requires that one raise the question of consciousness, a question never raised by Althusser in that he denies the efficacy of consciousness. That is, ideology is profoundly unconscious. However, revolutionary practice implies some degree of consciousness or lucidity (amongst revolutionaries at least) of what is to be done.

Althusser however, never raises the question of a relation between a conscious practice and its unconscious and unintentional determinants. Thus the ensuing theoretical divorce of theory and intellectuals from the masses. That is, the intellectuals bathe in the pure light of a consciousness cleansed by science whilst the masses suffer the unsurpassable opacity of human existence.

In my view we really do require a theory of consciousness. Social agents can be seen both as actors of a drama written by the unconscious/unintentional properties of social structures (Althusser's "authorless theatre") and in certain situations - i.e., revolutionary conjunctures - as the authors of a new drama - socialist revolution.

Finally, I should like to comment upon the relation between the science of historical materialism and humanism. This is important in that Althusser's work is situated in a theoretico-ideological

field defined to a great extent by humanism.

At the level of principles of explanation humanism is anathema to "structuralist" marxism. Althusser would agree with Levi-Strauss who wrote in response to Sartre that,

"...the ultimate goal of the human sciences to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man."<sup>12</sup>

Humanism (humanistic marxism) takes as its point of departure for its principles of explanation, a conception of man as the constitutive subject of social structures and history. Althusser would have us dissolve this conception of man - in fact - man is non-existent as far as Althusser's conception of science is concerned.

What is existent is the unconscious/unintentional properties of social structures whether they be the economy, politics, ideology or indeed the very structure of the unconscious.<sup>13</sup>

What then happens to our humanistic concern for men and women and their experiences and sufferings in an exploitative world? Nothing - for it is as concern and commitment that humanism plays a role. As socialist intellectuals we are/or ought to be committed to the construction of a society which allows for a certain kind of human existence.

Thus, we of necessity must have a conception of what men and women ought to be like in a new society. This implies an ontological discussion of human being which is not necessarily opposed to marxism. We ought to raise questions concerning what is a human existence? What can another human existence look like?

However, what I do not accept is any science of social structure and history which takes this humanistic discourse as the

basis for its principles of explanation of existing society. Historical materialism is a science which can and ought to be a tool for the realization of defined goals with respect to a future human existence. A normative or humanistic conception of our "being-in-the world" can provide a conception of the future society. However, what it cannot do is provide the basis for the understanding of present society.

## NOTES

1. Therborn, 1976, p. 386.
2. See Colletti's critique of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse in *From Rousseau to Lenin, 1976* and *Marxism and Hegel*.
3. Lucio Colletti, *A Political and Philosophic and Interview*, NLR, No. 84, 1974, and also, Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and the Dialectic*, NLR, #93, 1975.
4. Therborn, 1976, p. 387.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
6. Althusser, 1969, p. 217.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
8. Sartre, 1968, pp. 27-28.
9. See Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*.
10. Althusser, 1969.
11. Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, 1975, p. 15.
12. Levi-Strauss, 1972, p. 247.
13. See Althusser's paper "Freud and Lacan", in Althusser, 1976.

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