all. From which it follows that one ought to change the order of one's thoughts rather than the order of the world....

Forgive me for confiding in you at such length, Merab. Here I keep all this to myself; with you, it's another matter.

You're in my thoughts. With all my affection,

Louis

Notes

1 Althusser, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, in *The Future Lasts a Long Time* and *The Facts*, trans. Richard Veasey, London, 1994.

2 A quip of André Breton's.

3 For the proceedings, see *Il Manifesto*, ed., *Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies*, trans. Patrick Camiller and Jon Rothschild, London, 1979. Among those who spoke at the conference were Leonid Plyusch, Jiri Pelikan, Charles Bettelheim, Bruno Trentin, Rossana Rossanda and Krysztof Pomian.

4 The text reads *il ne suffirait pas de démontrer* (it would not be enough to demonstrate), no doubt a mistake for *il ne suffirait pas de démonter*, the reading adopted here. [*Trans.*]

Marx in his Limits

Althusser wrote 'Marx in his Limits' in summer 1978, shortly after publishing, in the daily Le Monde, *a four-part article bearing the eloquent title 'What Must Change in the Party'* [Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le Parti communiste français].[1] *In this text, he attempts to draw up a balance sheet of the achievements of Marxist theory, something he had already begun to do in his February 1977 foreword to Gérard Duménil's* Le Concept de loi économique dans *Le Capital (Paris, 1978), in a paper, 'The Crisis of Marxism', that he read at a November 1977 conference organized by the group* Il Manifesto *in Venice, and in an article entitled 'Marxism Today', published in Italian in the* Encyclopedia Garzanti *in 1978.*[2] *'Marx in his Limits' is not one of the unpublished texts which Althusser circulated widely; indications are that only a few close friends had ever seen it before its posthumous publication in 1994.*

1. At Last, The Crisis of Marxism![3]

All the events that we have been living through for years on end, if not for decades on end, have today come to a head in what must forthrightly be called the crisis of Marxism.

Let us take Marxism in the broadest sense, in which it means not only Marxist theory, but also the organizations and practices inspired by Marxist theory, which, after a long and difficult history, led to the Russian and Chinese revolutions, and so on, only to culminate not just in the split within the *international workers' movement* after the October

Revolution and the *Union sacrée* of the Social Democratic parties, but also, following the dissolution of the Third International, in a *split within the international Communist movement itself*: an open split between the USSR and China, and a veiled split between the so-called 'Eurocommunist' parties and the CPSU.

Earlier, before 'the collapse of the Second International',[4] the international workers' movement successfully took its inspiration from Marxist theory in order to forge its unity, at a time when the blows were coming overtly from the bourgeoisie. Since the Sino–Soviet split, very serious[5] conflicts have come into the open in the socialist and Marxist camp itself, naturally calling into question *both* the interpretation of history offered by Marxism and the various Marxist movements, and the interpretation of Marxist theory itself.

The Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party[6] suddenly exposed a terrible reality that had, for more than twenty years, been concealed from rank-and-file Party activists, who had to struggle to lend cover to the justifications with which Stalin had legitimized his practices, particularly the monstrous trials staged in 1937–38 in the USSR and in 1949–52 in the 'People's Democracies'. Things had come to such a pass that even Khrushchev's revelations of the massacres, the mass deportations and the horrors of the camps were not enough to redress the situation, which, in the USSR and the Western parties, would for a long time continue to be dominated, and in large measure still is, by the very practices being denounced. This plainly showed that the crisis which was emerging into broad daylight *in this form* was even deeper than had been admitted. At stake was not the effects of what was branded the 'personality cult', nor mere 'violations of socialist legality',[7] but a whole theoretical and practical system capable of surviving the most shocking revelations.

What spawned all these horrors? A good deal of time has passed: twenty-eight years have gone by. True, China has broken with the USSR,[8] criticizing, among other things, Stalin's economistic politics and international practices; true, it has, under Mao, tried to rectify the worst failings of Stalinism with the Cultural Revolution, albeit largely unsuccessfully;[9] true, the Western parties have taken a considerable distance from the Soviet Union and are now denouncing the

oppressive regime still in place there, as well as the USSR's armed interventions beyond its borders. But no Communist party – neither the CPSU, nor even the Western parties – has had the elementary political courage to attempt to analyse the causes of a history some of whose effects these parties have denounced. Obviously, the truth about this past is not the sort of thing one is supposed to talk about. Indeed, it may well be intolerable, or impossible to face. The result is that the Marxists who call themselves Communists have proved incapable of accounting for their own history.

The political crisis of Marxism thus points to what must clearly be called its *theoretical* crisis, malaise or disarray. How could a history made in the name of Marxism – the theory of Marx and Lenin – remain obscure for Marxism itself? And if it is in fact obscure (consider, a few exceptions aside, the weakness of the studies that have been devoted to this problem, limited, when what is involved is not sheer political and theoretical inanity, to scholarly chronicles devoid of political or theoretical interest and a handful of still hazardous hypotheses), then we have to ask ourselves a broader question: why has the Communist movement been incapable of writing its own history in convincing fashion: not just Stalin's history, but also that of the Third International and everything that preceded it, from *The Communist Manifesto* on?

This question is not only political; it is theoretical as well. And it compels us to ask one last question. Is it not *in Marxist theory itself*, as conceived by its founder and interpreted by his successors in the most widely varying conjunctures, which ought to have served as theoretical experiments, that we must *also* seek the means with which to account, in part, for the facts that remain obscure for Marxist theory? I think that this, too, is clearly the case, and that, today, we must forthrightly talk in terms of the *crisis of Marxist theory*,[10] with the crucial reservation that this crisis has lasted for a very long time, yet took, in the 1930s, with 'Stalinism', a particular form, which blocked any possible resolution of the crisis itself and prevented it from being formulated in questions, something that would have made it possible to undertake the task of political and theoretical research, and, thus, rectification as well.

Today we are not only in a crisis that has lasted a long time, one for which we have paid the price (Stalin's favourite victims, as is well known, were Communists, from the highest leader to the humblest Party activist). We are also – thanks to the mass movement itself, which sharpens contradictions and ultimately drags them into the light, the broad light of day, and puts them on the agenda – in a novel situation. It allows us to declare that *the crisis has at last come to a head! It has at last become obvious to one and all! And it is at last possible to begin with the work of rectification and revision!*

Taking this as our starting point, we can get down to work, utilizing not just our experience, but also the carefully considered attempts of all those who, long isolated and excluded, were the first eyewitnesses to this crisis, and, often, victims of their determination to speak out. These are the people who interest us, not those who can be relied on to object, 'But why have you waited until today?' If their surprise is sincere, that is because they do not know or have forgotten what things were like in the PCF only ten years ago, and what they are still like today. As for the dyed-in-the-wool anti-Communists, for whom Marx's theory was a species of religion wrapped up in an economic metaphysics, and the currently fashionable anti-Marxists, who waltz down the pavements of the great capitals and through the Conferences where it is the fashion to sport Gulag buttons in one's lapel,[11] if they should by chance have anything serious to say (but if they did, we would have found out a long time ago), we will consider it; if not, they will just have to resign themselves to playing the role of media stars.

As for our comrades, who have not only had to endure this history, whether they managed to stay in the Party or were compelled to leave it (how many fall into the second category!), they should bear something in mind. Every revolutionary knows or feels that it can be a delicate or even dangerous business to utter the phrase 'crisis of Marxism', for the simple reason that words tend to take their own course, and that a crisis generally leads to a collapse [*faillite*] (Lenin spoke of 'the collapse' of the Second International), while a collapse generally leads to liquidation or death. But a crisis can also open out on to 'a crisis of liberation', even 'of growth'. Let these comrades

judge on the evidence, then; let them decide if the reflections that follow are more likely to bring about a collapse or a renaissance.

If they fear, as may be legitimate, that our adversaries will pounce on the word 'crisis' as if it were a 'confession', twisting it as is their wont in order to throw it back in our faces, they should bear something else in mind, something I must say with a certain solemnity. *We would be prolonging one of the effects of the crisis of Marxism, in one of its worst aspects, if we consented to close our eyes to reality* and continued to accept a blindness which, until only very recently, was obligatory for anyone who wished to be accepted as a Communist. *We would be prolonging one of the effects, one of the worst aspects, of the crisis of Marxism, if we deprived ourselves of the right to call the reality that has beset and bedevilled us for a very long time by its real name, right out loud,* on the pretext that the first bourgeois journalist or ideologue who comes along is going to turn the expression against us.

For a very long time now, from the end of the nineteenth century on, the ideologues of the bourgeoisie have been proclaiming, and always in the same terms, *the crisis, collapse and death of Marxism*, which they have publicly and sarcastically buried beneath their arguments. Philosophers from Weber through Croce to Aron and Popper have 'proved' that 'Marx's philosophy' was impossible or metaphysical, like the philosophies that Marx criticized. 'Scientific' economists have 'proved' that the theory of value was a fairy tale, and the theory of surplus-value worthless, because it was 'not operational', mathematically speaking. Monastics, moralists, sociologists and 'political scientists' have all 'proved' that the theory of the class struggle was an invention of Marx's and that the Marxists subjected the world to its laws, whereas the world could very well have done without it – indeed, had everything to gain from doing without it. All of them have long since pronounced Marx dead; worse, stillborn. And those who have tried to 'save Marx' have turned him into a revolutionary by moral indignation, humanism or religion; they too have buried him, but beneath their high praise and ideological exploitation.

If, today, we talk about the 'crisis of Marxism', we are not providing our adversaries with a single weapon that they themselves have not already used a hundred times over. Nor shall we talk about it as they do, in order to supply them

with fresh arguments, but, rather, in order to wrest from them arguments currently at their disposal as a result of our own political and theoretical weakness. Here, too, let our comrades judge on the evidence. It is not even a question of talking about the crisis of Marxism the way one might sound an alarm. Today, thanks to the strength of the labour movement and the popular movements in the world – *yes, thanks to their strength*, and despite their very serious contradictions – we are able to speak, positively and with sang-froid, of the crisis of Marxism, in order to free ourselves at last of its known causes; or, at least, in order to begin to know them in order to free ourselves of them. *The crisis of Marxism, for perhaps the first time in its history, can today become the beginning of its liberation, hence of its rebirth and transformation.*

There is no act of faith in these words, but a political act pointing to a real possibility, *already on its way to being realized* in our own world. Indeed, we have reached a point such that it depends on us, on our political and theoretical lucidity, whether the crisis in which Marxism has very nearly perished culminates not just in its survival, but in nothing less than its liberation and rebirth. If it is to do so, however, all our Communist comrades will have to become actively involved: whatever post they occupy in the class struggle, they can, with the exception of those who have given up or turned their coats, contribute to the rebirth of Marxism. It would appear that 'everyone counts for one';[12] well, then, let 'everyone count on his own strength',[13] and, all together, we can help the Party overcome the crisis of Marxism, which is also, today, across the globe, the crisis of the Communist parties: their internal crisis.

2. The Theoretical Crisis of Marxism

It is 1978. It was 130 years ago that there appeared a little pamphlet which went virtually unnoticed in the revolutions of 1848 in Europe: *The Communist Manifesto*, by Marx and Engels. It was 110 years ago that the first volume of Marx's *Capital* appeared; this text did attract some notice, but it was years before it had any effect, and it was interpreted in the spirit of the day, then dominated by the evolutionism of the German Social Democratic movement.

Since these grand, silent dates, any number of things have taken place in the Marxist universe, dominated only by *The Manifesto* (and the core chapters of *Anti-Dühring* as well as Lenin's great texts, etc.), and scarcely at all by *Capital* (except in Germany and the USSR). Marxism has weathered the worst ordeals; when it seemed moribund in Western Europe because of the *Union sacrée*, it was being revived in Russia, before moving on to China. The worst ordeals and, as well, the worst dramas and tragedies.

Here we propose to confine ourselves to the theoretical aspects of this history and its ordeals (without, of course, ignoring political events in the history of Marxism), because the theory is accessible to us, whereas the history is slumbering in the sealed archives of the USSR, and also because a Marxism squarely in the tradition of Marx, Lenin, Gramsci and Mao attaches great importance to the *quality of its theory*.

Is it possible, then, in 1978, to sketch a sort of balance sheet of the history of Marxist theory, particularly of some of its historically significant contradictions, while taking into account the fact that it has been, and still is, deeply engaged in the practical struggles – open or clandestine, clear or obscure – of the international workers' and mass movements, down to the splits that have punctuated its history? Yes, we can try to do this, for we have not only the advantage of historical, and therefore comparative, perspective, but also the long experience of history, of the victories, defeats and tragedies of Marxism. We can, no doubt, proceed with greater assurance because we have now begun to live under the law of the open crisis of Marxism (no Communist Party has promulgated it ... but we are used to these well-known, perpetual 'lags',[14] which make up an integral part of this crisis), a crisis so radical and profound that it seems capable, all on its own, of dispelling a number of carefully cultivated illusions, and forcing sincere Communists to face up, at last, to the pitiless, healthy test of reality. We can do so with still greater assurance because, as Mao rightly said, 'the main tendency is towards revolution',[15] and because the mass movement, down to its worst contradictions, demands and meets the test of reality.

I shall therefore ask the limit-question (the hardest question is always the best). What can we retain of Marx today as being truly

essential to his thought, even if it has perhaps not (indeed, has surely not) always been well understood?

To begin at the beginning, I would say: we can retain the following few facts, which I shall first set out and then comment on as best I can.

3. Was Marx a 'Marxist'?

We can begin by retaining the following simple fact, which does not seem to amount to anything at all, yet is of crucial importance.

Marx said, on at least one occasion, 'I am not a Marxist.'[16] The quip is well known. It has been taken for a *bon mot* from someone with a free, modest, caustic mind. But matters are not that simple. For elsewhere, in the Preface to *Capital*, Marx urges his reader to 'think for himself', fleshing out his demand as follows: 'I welcome every opinion based on scientific criticism. As to the prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now, as ever, my maxim is that of the great Florentine: "*segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti*".'[17]

The matter was becoming serious: to think for oneself, to think freely, to scoff at 'the prejudices of public opinion,' did not mean *to think just anything*, but, quite the contrary, *to speak the truth*, in the name of which every 'scientific' critique is said to be welcome.

The truth of the matter is that Marx was profoundly convinced – let us, rather, say absolutely convinced, without the least inner hesitation – that he had inaugurated a new form of knowledge, pitted, as the only true one, against all the others that had been advanced in this domain: *the knowledge of the conditions, forms and effects of the class struggle*, at least in the capitalist mode of production. It is not that the history of 'pre-capitalist forms' did not exist for Marx; in 1857–58, he devoted a rather short study to them (which went unpublished for a long time),[18] making frequent use of it in the text of *Capital* itself. But the centre of all his attention and certainty was the capitalist mode of production; elsewhere, when other modes of production were in question, things were less sure (we are beginning to realize this today). And, in his time and terminology (there is nothing shameful about registering this fact), Marx did not hesitate to say that he had been the

first to produce a work of 'science' [*Wissenschaft*] in the field that he was in the process of *discovering*. The word must be taken in the strong sense: *to discover* means, in Marx's case, to free or strip capitalist society of all the ideological constructions that had *covered it up* in order to mask, and thus ensure, the domination of the bourgeoisie. Understand by this that Marx was convinced that he was 'producing', bringing out, revealing and explaining, *for the first time*, clearly and systematically, objective knowledge, hence the kind of knowledge that could contribute to, and guide, a revolutionary movement, about which he simultaneously demonstrated that it really existed in the working masses, and that everything tended to endow it with the strength and means to abolish the class struggle and classes.

In this respect, *Marx was well and truly a 'Marxist'*; he believed in his work, which, from first to last, he unhesitatingly called 'scientific' – not ideological or 'philosophical'. This was, perhaps, a science unlike all the others, given that Marx called *Capital* 'the most terrible missile that has yet been hurled at the heads of the bourgeoisie',[19] and therefore an 'explosive', scandalous, 'revolutionary'[a] science – but it was a 'science' none the less.

However, in affirming that he was 'not a Marxist', Marx was protesting in advance against any interpretation of his work as a philosophical or ideological system or vision, and, in particular, as a reworking of the 'philosophies of History'. He was protesting, *above all*, against the idea that he had at last discovered the 'science' of the 'object' which, in the bourgeois culture of the time, bore the name Political Economy. Marx was thereby protesting in advance against the idea that his thought could lay claim not only to presenting but also to possessing a *total* or *totalizing* unity, constituting a body of thought that could then be labelled 'Marxism', and that this 'unified' *œuvre* could have been produced by 'an' author: by himself, Karl Marx, an intellectual of bourgeois origins – and, 'naturally', a Jew.

a A 'new' philosopher, that is, a rancid philosopher who has ideas only on condition that he can distort them to produce a sensation, has seen fit to indict this word on suspicion of mischief. We shall let him sort the matter out for himself.

Thus Marx warned us against this claim *by refusing to affirm that* Capital *was the 'science' of Political Economy*; he called it, instead, a '*critique of Political Economy*' (the subtitle of *Capital*). Here, too, 'critique' or 'criticism' must be taken in the strong sense which Marx gives it: as criticism of all the idealist philosophical presuppositions according to which Political Economy was an exhaustive, distinct [*propre*] theory of a supposed 'object' defined by distinct 'ideological'[b] categories, such as subject, need, labour, distribution, consumption, contract, and so on, all of them related, *as if to their origin, to the subject of need, labour and exchange*; according to which, again, it was possible to found a 'science' of the 'object' defined by these dubious but by no means innocent concepts.

Marx made no blanket rejection of the works of the Economists; he rejected *the ideal* of the kind of Political Economy that had been imposed on them by the dominant bourgeois ideology and established on the basis of the concepts of which I have just given a partial list. Marx thought that there were scientific elements in the works of the Physiocrats, Smith, Ricardo, Hodgskin,[c] and so on, elements of objective knowledge, but that, in order to perceive and make use of them, it was necessary to overturn the existing system of categories, shift to new ground, and therefore radically criticize *both* Political Economy *and* its supposed 'object' (the satisfaction of needs, or the production of the 'Wealth of Nations', and so on). Hence it was necessary radically to criticize its claim to be the 'science' of the object that it thought it was talking about. Political Economy spoke well, but about something else, namely, the political 'values' of bourgeois ideology; that is, among other things, about bourgeois (economic) policy disguised as 'Political Economy' for ideological and political reasons.

But Marx thereby modified (perhaps without clearly perceiving the fact) the traditional meaning of the expression 'critique of …', and, consequently, the meaning *of the concept of critique.*

b Obviously, a category taken by itself is not ideological, but becomes ideological by virtue of the system to which it is subordinated.

c See Jean-Pierre Osier's remarkable little book *Thomas Hodgskin: Une critique prolétarienne de l'économie politique*, Paris, 1976. It contains treasures on Smith and his heirs.

The old notion of criticism or critique, which a whole century, from Bayle to Kant, had invested with philosophical dignity, had been charged by the entire rationalist tradition with distinguishing the false from the true, with delivering the true from the false (from errors, 'prejudices' and illusions); or again, and more boldly still, with denouncing error (as Voltaire did at a number of famous trials) in the name of Truth, whenever Truth was ridiculed or assailed by error. In his early work, Marx was largely pursuing this rationalist tradition in order to denounce the 'irrationality' of Reason's conditions of existence (for example: the state is, in itself, Reason, yet exists in unreasonable or irrational forms; it is necessary to denounce this contradiction and the insult proffered to the State-Reason – by means of critique, with a view to re-establishing the truth and condemning error). At the level of *Capital*, however, Marx confers an altogether different meaning and function on the word 'critique'. As the intelligent Russian critic cited in the Postface to the second German edition of *Capital* was to write, critique is not, for Marx, the judgement which the (true) Idea pronounces on the defective or contradictory real; critique is critique of existing reality by existing reality (either by another reality, or by the contradiction internal to reality).[20] *For Marx, critique is the real criticizing itself*, casting off its own detritus itself, in order to liberate and laboriously realize its dominant tendency, which is active within it. It is in this materialist sense that Marx's critique could, as early as 1845, treat communism as the very opposite of the 'ideal', the deepest tendency of the 'real movement'.[21]

But Marx did not content himself with this still abstract notion of critique. For which 'reality' is in question here? Until one knows *which 'reality' is in question*, everything can be real or be called real – everything, which is to say anything at all. Marx tied critique to that which, in the real movement, grounded critique: for him, in the last instance, the class struggle of the exploited, which could objectively overcome the domination of the bourgeois class because and only because of the specific nature of the existing forms of their exploitation: the forms of capitalist exploitation. That is why, taking an astonishing short-cut that proves the acuity of his vision, Marx wrote, in the Postface to the second German edition of *Capital*:

> The peculiar historical development of German society therefore excluded any development of 'bourgeois' economics there, but did not exclude its critique. In so far as such a critique represents [*vertreten*] a class, it can only represent the class whose historical task [*Beruf*] is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes – the proletariat.[22]

If we carry this to its logical conclusion, it becomes clear that, by way of this conception of critique, Marx was rejecting (without explicitly saying so, to be sure, and therefore without drawing all the consequences) the idea, 'obvious' to everyone at the time, that he, the individual Marx, the intellectual Marx, could be *the* intellectual or even political author (as the absolute origin or creator) of such a critique. For it was the real – the workers' class struggle – which acted as the true author (the agent) of the real's critique of itself. In his own fashion and style, with all of his intellectual culture turned upside down by the experience he had acquired and was still acquiring, with his acute sense of the conflicts of his time, the individual named Marx 'wrote' on behalf of this 'author', infinitely greater than he was – on its behalf but, first of all, *by its agency and at its urging*.

4. Marxist Theory is Internal, Not External, to the Workers' Movement[23]

This, however, abruptly draws our attention to *another* fact.

It was because Marx played a direct and personal part, for several years, in the practices and struggles of the workers' movement that his thought was able to establish itself 'on new foundations' (the line from the 'Internationale' is on the mark), becoming 'critical and revolutionary' (*kritisch-revolutionär*).[24]

When I say the workers' movement, I mean the workers' movement of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Europe (1835–48). This movement was extremely variegated at the time. In some cases, as in England, it had come together under a radical workers' party (Chartism, both a political movement and also one that fought for better wages and working conditions); elsewhere it was dispersed, or

even, in France, divided up into utopian sects and 'socialist' movements of petty-bourgeois communitarian inspiration (Louis Blanc, Proudhon himself). (Marx and Engels, who knew Proudhon, Fourier, the Saint-Simonians, etc., showed and would always continue to show the greatest political respect for them, and their theory and activity in this period.)

Yet Marx and Engels joined, not these utopian sects, but the radical groups of worker-artisans, mainly of German origin, which brought together political *émigrés* in groups calling themselves 'communist' (Cabet[25] represented this current for France, Weitling[26] for Germany). After the historic defeat of Chartism in England, these very active, astonishingly lucid little groups represented the communist avant-garde of the European workers' movement. It was their life and their struggles that Marx and Engels shared. And it was their membership in these groups that led them to put their thought 'on new foundations', making a radical shift to new positions tied to the proletariat [*rattachées au prolétariat*] in both philosophy and the theory of class struggle.[27]

This thesis is not merely a matter of observable fact, a matter that is best left to 'the history of ideas' (an uncertain and superficial discipline, at least as far as most of its avowed pretensions go). In the history of the workers' movement, this thesis has been an object of intense political and ideological debate, from Marx's day on. For example, when Marx wrote, in a famous 1852 letter to Joseph Weydemeyer,

> as for myself, I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle between the classes, as had bourgeois economists their economic anatomy,

it was in order to add:

> my own contribution was 1. to show that the *existence of classes* is merely bound up with *certain historical phases in the development of production*; 2. that

> the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3. that this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*. Ignorant louts such as Heinzen, who deny not only the struggle but the very existence of classes, only demonstrate that, for all their bloodthirsty, mock-humanist yelping, they regard the social conditions in which the bourgeoisie is dominant as the final product, the *non plus ultra* of history.[28]

With this, *as early as 1852*, Marx declared that he had not been the first to talk about social classes and class struggles, since bourgeois historians and economists had already discussed both (he might also have mentioned the philosophers and politicians who had discussed the subject beginning in the earliest period of classical Antiquity: see Plato, Thucydides, Aristotle, Tacitus, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Locke and others). Yet Marx maintains that he treats this subject in an entirely different way – that is, puts it on an entirely different foundation, at once philosophical and theoretical. This different philosophical foundation is the materialism defended from the *Theses on Feuerbach* on, and then the dialectic, consciously taken over from Hegel, but said to be 'demystified', starting with the 1857–58 *Notebooks* (the *Grundrisse*) and, subsequently, the 1859 *Contribution*. I think I have rightly characterized this different theoretical foundation by showing that, at least with respect to the capitalist mode of production, it takes the form of the *primacy of* class *struggle* over *classes*.[d] Only an understanding of this primacy (or the primacy of contradiction over the opposed terms) makes it possible to understand *Capital* – both what it says and what it does not, or cannot, say.

What Marx merely suggests here, he says very clearly elsewhere: in the 1859 Preface, in which, discussing *The German Ideology*, he affirms that he and Engels felt the need, as a result of their own experience, to 'settle accounts with [their] former philosophical conscience'.[29] Marx's thought was thus established on new foundations under the impact of an experience of the struggles of the workers' movement in which, together with Engels, he had been personally involved.

d See 'RTJL' [*EI* 82].

This simple question was to become the stake of very intense ideological-political debates that have been pursued down to our own day. We will have a better sense of them if we recall that it was Kautsky who gave canonical form to the 'reformist' interpretation of this crucial question, which involved a great deal more than the personalities of Marx and Engels. In the triumphant period of German Social Democracy, whose inevitable electoral victory Engels himself had predicted a few years earlier, Kautsky wrote:

> In this connection socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science [*sic*][30] is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the *bourgeois intelligentsia* [Kautsky's emphasis]: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [*von außen Hineingetragenes*] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [*urwüchsig*].[31]

If this were not the case, Kautsky adds, it would be impossible to understand why England, the country in which 'capitalism is the most highly developed', is the country in which 'this socialist consciousness is the most remote'.

It is well known that, only a few months after this text appeared in *Die Neue Zeit* (the theoretical review of German Social Democracy), Lenin would, in *What Is To Be Done?*, cite Kautsky's very words in support of his struggle against economistic spontaneism (against those who believed in the omnipotence of the economic class struggle and spurned political struggle); he took them over without changing so much as a comma. Lenin, however, did not usually put the emphasis, as Kautsky did, on the idea that 'intellectuals were the sole guardians of science,' and that 'economic science' and (revolutionary) socialist consciousness were identical. He had other objectives in mind. They emerge clearly in *What Is To Be Done?*: the absolute necessity for revolutionary theory and a revolutionary political party – more precisely, a party of 'professional revolutionaries' capable of coping with the problems of clandestine action. He repeatedly explained his position on this question later, in reply to those who accused him of wanting to subordinate the workers' consciousness, hence socialist consciousness, to the 'science' of intellectuals who, by their very nature, were external to the proletariat. His adversaries accused him, consequently, of wanting to sanction the omnipotence of intellectual leaders over party activists and the masses themselves. This polemic took the form of a discussion of the conception of the party and the relations between the party and the trade unions. Lenin's reply to his critics is encapsulated in a few words that I have taken from his 1907 Preface to the Collection *Twelve Years*:

> *What Is To Be Done?* is a controversial correction of Economist [spontaneist] distortions and it would be *wrong to regard the pamphlet in any other light.* ... The basic mistake made by those who now [1907] criticise *What Is To Be Done?* [1902] is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of our Party.... To maintain today that *Iskra*[32] exaggerated (*in 1901 and 1902!*) the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries, is like reproaching the Japanese, *after* the Russo–Japanese War,[33] for having exaggerated the strength of Russia's armed forces.... To win victory the Japanese had to marshal all their forces against the probable maximum of Russian forces.

> *Unfortunately, many of those who judge our Party are outsiders, who do not know the subject,* who do not realise that *today* the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries has *already* scored a complete victory. That victory would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed to the *forefront* at the time, if we had not '*exaggerated*' so as to drive it home to people who were trying to prevent it from being realised.... Nor at the Second Congress *did I have any intention* of elevating my own formulations [on spontaneity and consciousness, on the party, etc.] as given in *What Is To Be Done?*, to the 'programmatic' level, constituting special principles. On the contrary, the expression I used – and it has since been frequently quoted – was that of 'bending the stick". *What Is To Be Done?*, I said, straightens out the stick bent by the Economists (cf. the minutes of the Second R.S.D.L.P. Congress in 1903, Geneva, 1904). I emphasised that precisely because we were so vigorously straightening out the stick, our line of action would always be the straightest.[e 34]

It would be extremely interesting to ask why, notwithstanding this unambiguous interpretation of *What Is To Be Done?*, the book continues to elicit ambiguous interpretations that are fiercely hostile to Lenin's own. No doubt it is the course of the class struggle that has decided the matter: the letter of Lenin's formulations, however, has undeniably encouraged this counter-interpretation. Lenin did in fact take over [Kautsky's][35] formulations. Written or rewritten by Lenin himself, they have been ascribed to Lenin, who has been berated for them right down to our own day: it would seem that one cannot [***] bend the stick in the other direction if, as a materialist, one wants to straighten it out, for this counter-bending also leaves traces which, thanks to the ideological struggle, are deeper than the one that was corrected by the counter-bending, and is no longer topical. The fact is that a formula produced by an author in a position of authority survives the objective meaning that his use of it had in a given conjuncture, in which it was not at all ambiguous; it can then be turned against the person who, earlier, made legitimate use of it. Circumstances come and go, but words remain, and can serve to

e My emphases, L. A.

support or even entrench an ambiguous or hostile interpretation or even tendency. Marxists – by which I mean politicians or others who, in their internal debates, appeal to the authority of Marx and Lenin – have unfortunately paid insufficient attention to this phenomenon of the survival and revival of formulas beyond the conjuncture that called them into existence: they prefer to tear each other to shreds rather than make the effort required to understand the auxiliary laws (for these laws are never fundamental, except perhaps in extreme cases of closely balanced conflicts) governing the relationship of their formulas to variations in the conjuncture.

The truth is, I might add, that Lenin, too, failed to consider the problem of the political repercussions of the letter of what he himself wrote or quoted. To my knowledge, he never posed the problem explicitly and theoretically (although, as a rule, he resolved it as if by 'instinct', taking into account, at the practical level, the 'echoes' which some of his formulas might have). Moreover, his 'explanation' in terms of the historical context, far from making up for the 'gaffe' he had inadvertently committed, simply made it worse. For, if we examine the matter closely, it appears that the 'then topical' problem with which Lenin was confronted in 1902 really had very little to do with Kautsky's problem, and could perfectly well have been resolved with formulas provided by Lenin himself, which would have been wholly adequate for his purposes at the time. Why, then, did Lenin take the liberty of including this lengthy quotation from Kautsky in his text, condemning himself – for all his 'explanations' are just denials that reinforce the effect they are supposed to counteract – to drag this heavy burden around with him? Doubtless he needed to appeal to an 'authority' (Kautsky's), but there is nothing innocent about this, unless we assume that, in spite of everything he said later, Lenin truly subscribed to Kautsky's theses, either temporarily (Kautsky's text had just appeared), because he was intimidated by them, or over a longer period (but this is very much open to question, especially if we recall what Lenin would later say about intellectuals ...). In any event, there is a blind spot here, of which the theory of the stick bent in the other direction serves as an index; but it is also the index of a shortcoming or slip, since Lenin uses a very different stick

when he 'throws Kautsky into the battle' in a text in which he really has no place.[36]

Let us generalize. When, in the case of phenomena of this kind (ambiguous quotations from, or ambiguous formulas by, an author considered 'authoritative'), one tendency repeats the very formulas of an older tendency as powerful as itself, then all intelligent scruples about the phenomenon (why this repetition? etc.) are banished by the self-evidence of the thing. In fact, leaving aside the passage cited by Lenin on the question of the production of Marxist theory by bourgeois intellectuals external to the workers' movement, and its introduction into the workers' movement from without, the idealist-mechanistic tendency was clearly already present in Kautsky; it was in perfect harmony with his conception of Marxism and his practice as a leader of the Second International. Moreover, it survived him, as did his adversaries, who, since they were sometimes – or above all – Lenin's adversaries as well, seized the occasion to direct their fire at him, too, imputing Kautsky's theses to him in order to condemn them in Lenin. It must be conceded that they were also able to find other real or subjective appearances in Lenin that tended in the same direction. But here, too, Lenin appealed, or would have appealed, to the 'conjuncture' ....

However that may be, beneath the general conception, under the Second International of the early twentieth century, of a theory – that of a '*science produced by bourgeois intellectuals*' and '*introduced from without into the workers' movement*' – there clearly appeared the outlines of an idealist, voluntarist representation of the relation between theory and practice, between the Party and the mass movement, hence between the Party and the masses, and, finally, between the Party leaders (who were intellectuals; whether they were of working-class background is immaterial) [and rank-and-file activists]. In the last instance, this representation could not but reproduce bourgeois forms of knowledge, that is, forms of the production and possession of this knowledge on the one hand, and, on the other, bourgeois forms of the possession and exercise of power, all these forms being dominated by a *separation* between knowledge and non-knowledge, between the informed and the ignorant, between the leaders, the guardians of knowledge, and

the led, reduced to receiving it from without and from on high because they were naturally ignorant of it.

Let us now turn back to Marx and Engels. There is no question that they were bourgeois 'intellectuals' with a traditional university education. One has to be born somewhere:[37] they were born, in the one case, a scion of the relatively modest *Bildungsbürgertum*, and of the industrial bourgeoisie in the other. But birth is not necessarily destiny. The real destiny that defined Marx and Engels in their historical role as new intellectuals, as 'organic' intellectuals of the working class (to borrow Gramsci's convenient, if hardly unequivocal, terminology), was played out in their *encounter* with – that is to say, their direct and practical, or, in a word, personal, experience of – the exploitation of the working class. Engels, immersed in the colossal struggles of the Chartist movement, acquired this experience in England (see *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, 1845); Marx acquired it in France, owing to his participation in the political class struggle of the socialist and communist organizations. As Auguste Cornu has clearly shown,[38] Marx became a communist in France, in 1843–44, whereas Engels, who followed the same trajectory, did so by studying, first-hand, the conditions of exploitation of the English working class and the methods of exploitation used by the industrial bourgeois class (he was well placed to do so: he had an important management position in an industrial firm controlled by his family, and lived with Mary, 'an Irish immigrant worker' employed in the same factory).

As Marx himself has noted, it was in Brussels, in 1845, that the two men realized that their personal trajectories and individual experiences, albeit different, had brought them to the same conclusion. It is well known that Marx, whom Engels would proclaim to be by far 'the more accomplished of the two of us', declared at the time that Engels's 'brilliant essay'[39] (on *Nationalökonomie* or Political Economy[40]) had put him on the path which led him to an understanding of the mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production. For those who want to find an author at all costs, here we have two, each giving credit to the other, and for good reason, since both had learnt what they discovered from the only 'author' there was in this domain: the class struggle of the exploited.

The first-hand experience of the bourgeois and workers' class struggle acquired by Marx and Engels leaves its traces in the astonishing stages of their 'Early Works', in the 'objects' treated in these works, in the 'problematics' they adopted in order to treat them, and in the contradictory results they produced – results which led to incessant displacements, substitutions of one object for another, modifications of the problematic, and so forth. And I maintain, *pace* all those who have a stake in making the 'tree' that disturbs them disappear in the universal forest of a continuist history, whether it be the forest of the here and now, uninterrupted genesis, a reassuring continuity, or the 'spatio-temporal' – *pace* all those who have produced an incredible literature in order to provide their bad conscience with reading matter capable of salving it: I maintain, I say, that we can track, text by text, from 1841 to 1845 (and beyond, of course), the different stages of this astonishing political-theoretical experience, in which it is political consciousness, the emergence of a political class-consciousness, that serves as the motor, and theoretical consciousness which follows, registers, develops, anticipates, compares premisses to conclusions, modifies the premisses, and so on.

Not only can we track the different stages of this experience, but we can even pinpoint (here we are again: at the point which I had the imprudence to call an epistemological 'break' or 'rupture'[41]) the 'moment' when there suddenly emerges, in the 'consciousness' of Marx and Engels, the need to question, not partially but totally and radically, the theoretical principles that they learnt at university, the need to think in an altogether different way, to 'shift ground' or change elements (to echo Themistocles addressing the Athenians: change elements – instead of fighting on land, fight at sea!). This moment 'blossoms' after the dramatic confrontation with the Feuerbachian philosophy of alienation, that 'unprecedented theoretical revolution', and with the concepts of bourgeois Political Economy, which had initially been taken up uncritically; it occurs after the *1844 Manuscripts*, which Marx never tried to publish (but which of our critics, who are ready to make the most of any text Marx ever wrote, even if it is one that he must have considered it unwise to publish, since he left it in his files – which of our critics respects this desire in

the least, or even takes it into account?), and which are theoretically untenable, because they set out to attain the real by marrying an idealist, Hegelianized–Feuerbachian philosophy of alienation[42] to the mythical ideology of a Political Economy adopted without a critique!

This moment, having become 'consciousness' (that, apparently, is how one must put it), comprises both the encounter in Brussels, the basic agreement acknowledged by these two explorers and fighters of the battles of the working class, and the declaration that the time has come to finish with 'our philosophical consciousness as we formerly [*ehemalige*] professed it', to 'settle accounts with' it or 'liquidate' it [*abrechnen*].

Not for nothing did Marx talk about his 'philosophical consciousness', and hence about philosophy, if it is true that philosophy sustains or props up, in the last instance, every theory and every problematic. Not for nothing did Marx talk about philosophy, if the philosophy he means is, in the final analysis, a kind of 'precipitate' of the theoretical principles of the dominant ideology, considered in its basic antagonism with the ideologies that are said to be dominated.

Marx was born a bourgeois and became a bourgeois intellectual. It was none of his doing, except in so far as he became aware that capitalist society obscured the class exploitation on which it lived, hiding this exploitation under the complex effects of the play of ideological elements that the state and its apparatuses strive to unify in a dominant ideology. It was none of his doing, except in so far as he understood, after an experience that he had been honest enough to go through with his eyes wide open, that the Truth uttered by the major prophets of the dominant Ideology – Locke, Smith, Kant, Hegel and others – was maintained only in order to occult the class exploitation on which capitalist society lived, under the watchful eye of its state, about which Hegel said that it should rely on the wisdom of its professors of philosophy so as not to go astray or founder. It was none of his doing, except in so far as he understood that this whole construct had to be swept away, and that philosophy had to be established on new foundations, so that one could at last understand *both* this world of exploitation and oppression, *and* the mechanisms that transformed the reality of this exploitation and of class struggle into the Philosophy of History, Political Economy, and so on. Marx made no mistake: one had to start

with philosophy, demand that it give an account of itself, and dismiss its impostures – not in order to abolish it, but in order to put it on new philosophical foundations. That it was, and has been, more difficult to make this fundamental philosophical change than Marx thought is shown by the texts of the 'break'. The 'Theses on Feuerbach' sketch out, very vaguely, something like a subjectivist historicism or even a Fichtean or pre-phenomenological historicism of 'praxis'. Six to ten months later, *The German Ideology* offers us a historicist positivism that tosses all philosophy on to the scrapheap, in order, as it turns out, briefly to relapse into a 'materialist' philosophy of history (a 'materialist' philosophy of the individual). But this relapse hardly matters. Something decisive has taken place, something that is irreversible.

Yes, there is plainly something like a 'rupture' or 'break', hence a 'moment' that does not resemble the preceding ones. Marx no doubt believed that he had reached his goal, so self-confident does he seem – if not in the 'Theses on Feuerbach' (yet another text that he did not publish), then at least in *The German Ideology*, which blithely announces the end of philosophy and a return to 'things themselves',[f] to factual, visible, tangible things, to individuals (but not to persons!), even while confecting a hallucinatory, albeit interesting, materialist philosophy of history. Marx thought that he had reached his goal; who can fail to understand him? Yet his labours were just beginning.

And, once again, labour, the silent work of theory upon itself, with philosophy attempting to formulate itself in the wake of the discoveries made in the Critique of that illusory Political Economy. These discoveries, for their part, were proceeding apace, beginning with *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), in which Proudhon is dismissed, although Marx had only recently treated him (in *The Holy Family*) as if he were the sole guardian of the 'science of the proletariat'(!).[43] Marx now puts in place the first concepts which make it possible to think that it is on condition that they are related to the class struggle that the 'categories' assembled under the imposture of Political Economy can, in conjunction with these new concepts, acquire their true meaning.

f *Zu den Sachen selbst* [back to things themselves]: long before Husserl, Feuerbach made this his watchword.

But this theoretical labour is inseparable from political struggles: *The Communist Manifesto*, written late in 1847, appears in 1848, just before the revolutions.

Marx had been commissioned to write the *Manifesto*, hurriedly, by the Communist League. They really were 'in a rush': the revolutions were knocking at the door. And Marx threw himself, with Engels, into the bitter revolutionary struggles of the Rhineland. He became a political journalist, a party leader, a leader in a political and a civil war, and then reflected at length, in the refuge provided by the silence and poverty of his London years, during this endless 'time in the wilderness', *both* on the reasons for the 1848 defeat, *and* on the capitalist mode of production – plagued by sickness and hunger, with Engels helping as best he could, but from afar, where he worked to put bread on the table for two. Unremitting study at the British Museum went hand in hand with political correspondence and political struggle: the aim was to rally the dispersed troops while waiting for better days. The years 1857 and 1858 were years of intense labour, when Marx wrote the manuscript (it went unpublished: and how well anyone who has read it both understands and regrets that Marx failed to publish it!) known as the *Grundrisse* (he himself did not choose this title for his notebooks, and for good reason). The year 1859 saw the publication of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Zur Kritik* .... Critique is the essence of the matter, already, always. A laborious text. Once again – but from the great distance Marx had taken since 1850, when he declared that he had 'to start again from the very beginning',[44] from scratch, after the dead-end of *The German Ideology* and the failure of the 1848 revolutions, he may well have believed that he had reached his goal; yet we know (thanks to the unfinished notes called the *Introduction*,[45] certain chapters of which are very strange indeed) that he doubted it after all: and he had good reason to, given the approximate character, bordering on caricature, of his mediocre Preface.

In the same period, Marx worked for newspapers in order to make some money: American, English and German papers. This work, done to scrape a living, transformed him into a chronicler and political analyst of all the events of contemporary world history. In analysing political and economic events in a number of countries

across the globe, alert to everything from stagnation in India to the cyclical English crises – the cotton crisis, and so on – Marx applied, verified and revised his conception of things. Increasingly, he tightened the link between class struggle and what he called its material and social conditions and 'economic' and ideological effects – and their often paradoxical 'dialectic'. Here, too, the *Kritik* of Political Economy was at work – in the light, naturally, of class struggle.

Then, in 1864, came the foundation of the International, in which Marx was soon playing the leading role that would be his down to the Commune and 1872, the date the International was dissolved. This was when his time in the wilderness at last came to an end: 1867 saw the publication of Volume One of *Capital*. The first section (the section containing the 'flirt' with Hegel) was rewritten a good dozen times, because Marx felt the need for a 'scientific' beginning, and had a 'certain' idea as to what such a beginning should look like. It was a rather unhappy idea, unhappily for us, unless we have the courage and also the means to say that this Idea of the beginning is untenable, and even prevents *Capital* from producing all the effects it might be expected to. Marx was overjoyed at seeing intelligent bourgeois and, especially, 'the most advanced circles of the working class'[46] take an interest in his book.

Volumes Two and Three – which remained unfinished, although they were written before Volume One – would be published by Engels, and, after Engels's death, by Kautsky. Strange. There is a whole history of *Capital* waiting to be written. This work, produced over the long term – only the first volume appeared in Marx's lifetime – has played a curious role, one hopelessly overshadowed by the *Manifesto* and even Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, and also, of course, by *Zur Kritik* (the famous Preface!). This book, which Engels, laying it on rather thick, called 'the Bible of the working class',[47] made significant headway only in Germany, and, later, in Russia. It has been making its way in France and Italy for ... all of twenty years!

There followed the great silence of the last years, when Marx was overwhelmed by his political duties and illness, before the sudden burst of energy represented by the 'Critique (yet another critique!) of the Gotha Programme'. Here Marx took up his pen from a position

outside the German Social Democratic Party (Engels: 'the only reason that Marx and I ever intervened in the Party was to rectify theoretical errors ...') in order to pulverize these stupid formulas, foreign to the spirit of communism – only to discover, without getting overly upset about it, (1) that the leadership of the 'Party'[g] refused to publish his pamphlet (Engels managed to do so fifteen years later,[48] but only at the price of trickery and blackmail); (2) that the public, bourgeois journalists, and even workers, had taken these platitudes, foreign to the spirit of communism, for ... communist declarations! It is unfortunate that Marx did not pursue his analysis of these two strange, apparently minor, but in fact immensely important events.

All this took place four years after the Commune, in a mind enlightened by the Commune. Surprised by the Parisians' revolt, Marx had, in his enthusiasm, promptly extended them his support and counsel, in the form of the brilliant addresses collected in *The Civil War in France* (1871).

It was necessary to recall these facts and dates, as well as the political background to these writings, in order to show how closely Marx's theoretical thinking is bound up with his political thinking, and his political thinking with his concrete activity and political struggle, conducted, from start to finish, in the interests of the international working class. We can, then, affirm that in his theoretical work, as well as in his political battles, *Marx never once, from his initial commitment of 1843 on, left the terrain of working-class struggle.* Thus it is not particularly difficult not only to reject Kautsky's formulas, unfortunately repeated verbatim by Lenin (whose defence based on 'the context' is not, when it comes down to it, tenable: he really had no need to quote Kautsky, but could have spoken in his own name, and differently), but also to propose a thesis that reflects the historical and political reality of the matter more closely than Lenin's does.

We may, then, say roughly the following: *Marx's thought was formed and developed not outside the workers' movement, but within the existing workers'*

g Lasalleans + Marxists, unified at Gotha = the Social Democratic Party. It was considered important 'not to undermine the unity of the Party'. Mireille Bertrand's phrase was used against Marx by the Party leadership in 1875! [Bertrand sat on the Political Bureau of the PCF when Althusser was writing 'Marx in his Limits'.]

movement, on the political basis provided by that movement and its rectified theoretical positions. That this basis and these positions were not laid down in advance – better, that they had to be constantly modified – is abundantly clear to anyone who has even a nodding acquaintance with the history of Marx's thought. This theory was by no means 'introduced into the workers' movement from without'. It expanded *from within the workers' movement,* from the first Marxist circles – at the price of great struggles and contradictions – to the big mass parties.

If this thesis is admissible, then all the literature about the 'bourgeois intellectuals who are the guardians of the science' that 'is introduced into the Workers' Movement from without' – this literature initiated by Kautsky and exploited by Marx's and Lenin's critics, a literature which delights the vicious little lapdogs everybody knows all too well – loses all relevance. To be sure, bourgeois intellectuals exist, and can even be found holding posts at all echelons in the Communist parties, where they ply their trade, in their capacity as leaders, in an organization that endures them, tolerates [them], flatters them, or makes them to measure. But Marx – who, thank God, was not alone – was not one of this breed. He loved arguing too much (as Brecht says, he loved 'nothing so much as a good argument') not to consign the bourgeois intellectual and his soul to perdition, once he had seen the reality of the working class and its struggle close up. As to whether he was an 'organic intellectual' of the working class, we will have to throw some light on what this rather-too-transparent phrase of Gramsci's means before making up our minds.

5. Is Marxism a River Fed by Three Sources?

Since we are talking about the legacies of ambiguities, let us note that we find the same 'fuzziness' (to leave it at that) in Engels's famous thesis on 'the three sources of Marxism'. It is systematized by Kautsky in a pamphlet to which it gives its title, and is evoked by Lenin, who is very 'classical' here too.[49] This is another way of thinking about the history of Marx's thought – this time with regard to its origins.

Of course, Marxist thought did not come from nothing; it has ancestors, and direct ancestors. (It is, be it said in passing, by no

means certain that the direct ancestors are the most important; but that is another matter, which would call into question certain certitudes of the ideology of the 'sources' of any body of thought.) Of course, as a result of their academic training and, in addition, the culture then dominant in Western Europe, Marx and Engels were intellectuals schooled in 'German philosophy', 'English political economy' and 'French socialism': for those are our 'three sources', which we can hardly help but rediscover, and they are the sources of a river at that. Let us note that 'French socialism' is rather vague, unless we detect in this term echoes of the class struggles of the French Revolution, which Marx studied with passionate interest, and of the radical revolutionary tendencies which grew out of Babeuf and came into their own with Blanqui. But that doesn't matter much. What does matter is the theoretical and historical pretension that consists in reducing Marx's thought to the vague confluence, at once necessary (to complete the 'picture') and imprecise, of these three currents, and thus 'accounting for' it. To do so is openly to affirm a reassuring principle that doubtless provides the requisite moral assurances about Marx's identity and claims to legitimacy (son of Hegel, and of Smith–Ricardo and Saint-Simon and Proudhon ... or of Babeuf and Blanqui?). By the same token, however, it is to lapse into the superficiality of the commonplaces inherited from the biblical genealogies (Abraham, son of Isaac, son of Jacob, etc. [*sic*], *ergo* Abraham himself, in person), or, at best, into a history of ideas. One accordingly finds oneself incapable of thinking the socio-politico-theoretical base which necessitated the encounter of the Big Three constituent currents that flowed from these Three Sources into a particular body of thought: that of Karl Marx and company. Above all, one finds oneself at a loss to transform this 'encounter' into a 'revolutionary critique' of its own constituent elements.

No one denies that Hegel (and, behind Hegel, German philosophy), Ricardo (and, behind Ricardo, Smith and the Physiocrats, who were themselves strikingly in advance of Smith and Ricardo, because they were theorists of reproduction) and Proudhon (and, behind Proudhon, Saint-Simon? but there are others who are much more interesting when it comes to understanding Marx) formed Marx's historical

horizon. They represented the culture he had to acquire, the culture from which every intellectual of his sort who was keen to understand his times had to begin, the raw material upon which he was obliged to work, and so on. However, *nothing in this reassuring list compelled Marx to go past the ideological façade and overturn its principles* in order to perceive what Hegel called (in discussing self-consciousness) its 'back', 'rear', 'or 'hidden backside'[50] – in a word, the occluded reality of the matter. Yet to go past the façade was precisely to 'shift ground' and adopt an entirely different position, a 'critical and revolutionary' position, the famous 'critique that ... represents the proletariat'.

To reduce the history of this revolution in Marx's thought to a mere geographico-fluvial confluence of 'Three Sources' was thus, ultimately, to treat Marx as an 'author' who succeeded (his 'genius'!) in skilfully combining the elements whose point of convergence he happened (but why? how?) to be.

Thus it was that – outside the communist tradition, to be sure, but sometimes in it as well – people repeatedly affirmed that Marx was nothing but 'Hegel applied to Ricardo', with the result that Political Economy was transformed into a 'metaphysics' (Croce, Aron, *et al.*). Thus it was that, in the Marxist tradition, beginning with Marx's own formulas, people chose to believe that the revolution to which Marx subjected the authors of his 'Three Sources' was a materialist 'inversion' of *each element*, a revolution which, it followed, put philosophy, political economy and utopian socialism 'back on their feet', while leaving the structures of each of these elements intact: in order to constitute, by this miracle, Political Economy as a *science*, *philosophy* as *dialectical materialism*, and the visions of *French socialism* as *a philosophy of history*, or – the practical version of its messianism – as 'scientific socialism'.[h]

It is common knowledge that the phrases just quoted are not to be found, in this definitive form, in Marx. But we find almost all of them in Engels, in texts produced while Marx was still alive and, according to Engels, under his supervision .... Moreover, they belong to the

h This phrase is the only thing in Marx that the Twenty-Third Congress of the PCF has retained, on the grounds, let us say, that it provides the best possible summary of his work. The phrase is, however, nowhere to be found in Marx.

history of Marxism, in which, from the Second International on, they have stood as the official definition of Marxism, set out in three moments: 'dialectical materialism', historical materialism, and scientific socialism. The 'finishing touches' were put on later, in the 1930s, under the direct political impetus of Stalin, who came up with the solution that consisted in declaring that 'historical materialism was an integral part of dialectical materialism'.[51] That way, the exits were well guarded!

6. Marx Still a Prisoner of Idealism

I know we can find things in Marx which justify some of these formulas and seem to justify others. We emphatically do find in Marx the one-hundred-per-cent Feuerbachian theme of 'inversion', which is a watchword rather than a true concept, for, if it is mistaken for a concept, it condemns every reader who 'thinks for himself' to theoretical contortions: for example, the 'inversion' of the Hegelian dialectic, which has to be inverted because it is idealist (Engels doubles the dose, affirming that idealism results from a first inversion, that of materialism, which is said to be, by rights, primary...[52]).

We also find in Marx – increasingly subject to criticism, yet always present just beneath the surface – the idea of a philosophy of history, of an Origin and an End: in short, of a Meaning [*Sens*, which also means direction] of history. It is embodied in the sequence of 'epochs marking progress' represented by determinate modes of production (see the Preface to the 1859 *Contribution*). This sequence culminates in the transparency of communism (see *The German Ideology*, 1845; the *Grundrisse*, 1857–58; and even the famous line in *Capital*, in 1867, about the supposed transition 'from necessity to freedom'), a transparency embodied in communism, the myth of a community of labouring men (who ultimately, amid abundance, hardly work at all but, rather, give themselves over body and soul to the 'development of their personality' – or, according to Lafargue's controversial satire, to laziness).[53]

Yes, we find in Marx a latent idea of the perfect transparency of social relations under communism, the idea that these social relations

are 'human relations', that is, crystal-clear relations between nothing but individuals (ultimately, all individuals) in the conquest and realization of the 'free development of their personality'. Yes, from *The German Ideology*, which expiates on this theme at length, down to *Capital*, the first volume of which describes states of social transparency, from Robinson and the family based on patriarchal production to the free association of communism, Marx never manages to relinquish this mythical idea of communism as a mode of production *without relations of production*; in communism, the free development of individuals takes the place of social relations in the mode of production. And this is very easy to understand, since productive relations will become, under communism, as superfluous as the state, commodity relations, money, politics, political parties, democracy, the division of labour among men, the split between manual and intellectual labour, between city and country, between the sexes, between parents and children, mothers-in-law and sons-in-law, and so on.

It is true that Marx discusses communism in less idealistic terms in 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' (1875); and especially in his final text, the lovely 'Notes on Wagner' (1882),[54] we can clearly sense that he has kept almost nothing, or even nothing at all, of this whole idealist myth, which came to him straight from the utopian socialists (compare Fourier: communism is the reign, organized as rationally as possible, of the development of the passions of individuals – meaning, first and foremost, the erotic passions). He adopted it in *The German Ideology* before all but abandoning it in *The Communist Manifesto*, only to rediscover it again later, more tenacious than ever, in the *Grundrisse*. It is still present, albeit in a limited way, in *Capital*.

The latent or manifest idealism of these themes haunts [***] the 'materialist' philosophy of history expounded in *The German Ideology* (this manuscript, too, went unpublished and was left 'to the gnawing criticism of the mice', although Marx and Engels meant to have it brought out in 1845; they were, however, taken unawares by the revolutions of 1848, and, in the end, the thing was done only much later, prompting Engels to remark that this text proved 'how incomplete' their 'knowledge of economic history still was at that time'[55]). But it also haunts the 1859 Preface. The modes of production are lined up

there in a continuous list and a mandatory order that is, moreover, 'progressive' – rather as the early-nineteenth-century Ideologues, in the wake of Rousseau and the Natural Law philosophers, affirmed that there had been first savages, then barbarians, then 'civilization'. Similarly, it was in the form of a 'progressive' series that Marx presented the ordered sequence 'primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, communism'. Apparently no society was capable of 'catching a moving train'; each had to go through the mandatory series of the prescribed modes of production. It is well known that Marx changed his mind about this in connection with the 'Asiatic mode of production', and – to cite no other examples – the paradoxical case of India, whose archaic structures scandalously resisted English colonial capitalism, although the latter was more 'progressive'.[i]

All too often, it was in the same revolutioneering, idealist spirit that Marx conceived of the problem of the 'transition', that is, the question as to the conditions under which the transition from one mode of production to another (to the *next in line* ...) could come about. It was in this context that Marx made the hallowed pronouncements that so delighted Gramsci, uttering those grand phrases which, supposed to say everything, ended up meaning nothing, except that they expressed very clearly Marx's 'desire' to see real history unfold as he liked or would have liked. For example: 'No social order [*formation*] is ever destroyed [!] before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed.' Now just what might that mean? For example: 'Mankind [!] thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve.'[56]

But the same idealism haunts *Capital* itself, in an infinitely more subtle form. For some of us were forced to recognize, at the price of a long, painstaking analysis carried out in the face of the ideas prevailing in this domain, that something about Marx's 'order of exposition' did not work. However impressive the unity of the mode of exposition in *Capital* might be, we came to see it for what it was: *fictitious*. But

i It is common knowledge that, once it struck out in this direction, the Second International adopted the thesis that imperialist colonialism was of course, from the standpoint of Universal History, a good thing, because it gave the natives capitalism, the obligatory access route to socialism....

what was the reason for this fictitious unity? It was that Marx *believed that he was duty-bound*, as a good 'semi-Hegelian' – that is to say, a Hegelian 'inverted' into the materialist he was – to broach, in a discipline of a scientific nature, the purely *philosophical* problem of the *beginning* of a philosophical work. A misconception of this sort is understandable.

It is no accident that Marx rewrote Book I, Section I, the beginning of *Capital*, a dozen times or more; that he was determined to begin with that which was 'simplest' and with the 'abstract', namely, the commodity, and therefore with value; that he therefore set himself the task of beginning with *the abstraction of value*, something that lent his demonstrations impressive force, but, at the same time, situated them in the 'framework' of a theoretical field that proved problematic as soon as it was a question of 'deducing' money, capitalist exploitation, and the rest. Not to mention that which is presupposed by the abstraction of value, 'abstract labour', namely, the existence of a homogeneous field ruled by – because it has *already* triumphed – the equivalence of socially necessary labour-times in any equation of value whatsoever (x commodity A = y commodity B). For this equivalence is in reality *merely tendential*, whereas, in order to reason in the rigorous form that he adopted, or had to adopt, Marx sets out from it as if it were a *given*: not the result of a terribly complicated historical process, but, as it were, the 'simplest' original state. Not to mention, finally, the fact that this 'order of exposition' necessarily leaves out something that Marx must of course discuss – but outside the order of exposition – in order to be able to propose a theory of exploitation, which is irreducible to the theory of surplus-value (regarded as a difference in values). For, paradoxically, in order to propose such a theory, he has to take into account what the *order of exposition* requires him *to bracket out*: the productivity of labour in all its forms; labour-power as something other than a simple commodity; and, quite simply, the history of the conditions under which capitalism arose, which necessitates, among other things, reference to primitive accumulation. Whence the very long chapters on the working day, the labour process, manufacture and big industry, and the extraordinary chapter on primitive accumulation.

These chapters[j] stand *outside* 'the order of exposition'. They have confronted commentators with a formidable problem: why this leap from theory to history, from abstraction to the concrete, without the least justification? And, ultimately: what is Marx's real object? 'The capitalist mode of production and exchange in its ideal average', as *Capital* incessantly repeats, or the concrete history of the conditions of class struggle that precipitated the Western bourgeoisie into capitalism? But if it is the latter, then we are at the very heart of 'the concrete', for primitive accumulation and the expropriation of (rural and urban) workers' means of production and conditions of reproduction, which produced the capitalist mode of production, have nothing to do with any abstraction or 'ideal average' whatsoever. How, then, are we to hold together the discordant elements of a body of thought which itself never ceases to proclaim its unity, and to impose this unity by way of *Capital*'s supposed order of exposition?

Better: what are we to think of a theory which sets itself the goal of demonstrating the production of the prices of production starting out from value, and succeeds only at the price of a mistake, by leaving something out of the calculation? Sraffa, Gramsci's old friend, who emigrated to England – Sraffa and his school must be given credit for closely checking Marx's demonstration of this point, and discovering, to their amazement, that the demonstration was erroneous. The error has deep roots: it is rooted, precisely, in the principle that it is necessary to begin with the simplest element, the first, namely, the commodity or value, whereas this simple form is in fact neither simple nor the simplest. The mistake is *also* rooted in the principle that it is necessary to begin *in an 'analytical' mode*, the mission of analysis being to discover, in the simple form, its essence and the effects of this essence, effects such that we ultimately again find, by synthetic deduction, the concrete itself. Yet Marx himself ignores this exigency not only in the concrete chapters that he injects into the order of exposition of *Capital, but also through the*

j Marx himself advised Kugelmann's wife to read *only* these chapters; she did not have to read the others to understand the essence of the matter, which 'even a child could grasp'. [Marx, Letter of 30 November 1867 to Ludwig Kugelmann, trans. Christopher Upward, *MECW* 42: 489. Althusser's translation is inaccurate. Compare Marx's letter of 11 July 1868 to Kugelmann.]

injection of the abstract concepts that he is continually injecting into the theoretical field of the abstract order of exposition *in order to broaden it.* He thereby shows that he is – thank God – as un-Hegelian as can be.

We must therefore ask why the question of the beginning represented the exigency and the 'sticking-point' that it did for Marx: 'beginnings are always difficult in all sciences', he writes in the opening pages of *Capital.*[57] Why did Marx *think that he had to begin with the ultimate abstraction of value*? No doubt we have, at some point – if we have understood Marx properly – to proceed by way of something that has to do with 'value'. Nothing, however, requires that we start out from it, unless the aim is to overcharge this concept with meanings that are difficult to keep under control. Actually, it seems clear that all these requirements, and the problems they entailed, were imposed on Marx by a *certain Idea of science* [*Wissenschaft*] (nobody ever avoids this in any period, although the idea involved varies): of, that is, the immutable formal conditions with which every Thought-Process [*Denkprozess*] must comply *in order to be 'True'.*

The text in which we can see the contents of this Idea at work very clearly is the one devoted [to the subject] in the Introduction to the 1858 *Contribution* (another text that Marx did not publish!): 'The Method of Political Economy'.[58] Here Marx develops, first and foremost, the idea that true – that is, materialist – Thought-Processes necessarily begin *with abstraction*, contrary to the reigning prejudice. True thought, science, proceeds not from the concrete to the abstract, but from the abstract to the concrete: it must therefore begin with abstraction, that is, the simplest or the simple (the most general, etc.). Why this exigency? Marx states this principle, of which his work (*Capital*) is to provide the proof, since method does not exist outside its realization, that is, outside the knowledge produced when it is put to use.[k] However, because *Capital* (as we have just noted) does not really provide this proof, but provides proof of its own confusion instead, it is incumbent on us to ask: *why did Marx have this Idea of the Process of True Thought, and subject that process to these precise requirements*?

k Here we are brought back to the remark found in the [Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*]: expounding the method before demonstrating the results can be 'confusing'.

Marx most assuredly had his eyes trained on the natural sciences; he generally [took] his examples from analytical chemistry, but also appealed to physics and even mathematics (where analysis consists in presupposing that a problem has been solved and 'analysing' the conditions, which can then be discovered, for solving it). Behind these purely scientific references, however, there can be no doubt that Marx was guided, right down to his way of interpreting them for the purposes of his demonstrations, by an Idea of Truth inherited from Hegel and much earlier thinkers. In fact Hegel's *Logic*, and the whole 'dialectical' deduction of Nature and Spirit, plainly suggest that it is necessary to 'begin' – but *in philosophy, not in the 'sciences'* – with pure abstraction, which in Hegel is at the same time not determinate abstraction (as Della Volpe clearly saw),[59] but *indeterminate abstraction.* This crucial difference aside, we can affirm that, in Hegel as well, the Idea of Science [*Wissenschaft*] requires that one begin with abstraction, and that the thought-process proceed from the abstract to the concrete, from the more abstract to the more concrete. We can also affirm that this Idea requires that one analyse each content (Being, Nothingness, becoming, etc.) in order to discover the emergence of the next.

Yet, in his actual practice in *Capital*, in the chapters which stand outside the order of exposition, and especially when he was injecting concepts into the theoretical space conquered by analysis, Marx in fact broke with the Hegelian idea of Science, hence of method, hence of dialectic. At the same time, however, he remained sufficiently attached to this Idea to consider himself obliged to begin with value, to regard the 'inverted' Hegelian dialectic as his own, and to think what he had discovered within the impressive but *fictitious unity* of the (in principle) one and only order of exposition in *Capital.*

That Hegel – whom Marx had known in his youth, later forgot or combated, and then rediscovered in 1858 thanks to a chance encounter with a book (the 'Greater Logic') bequeathed him by Bakunin[60] – is present in Marx's thought, *Capital* included, and that Feuerbach's philosophy of alienation is also active there once Hegel has been injected into this philosophy, is something that we can now confidently and also serenely affirm, because these questions have

played a not insignificant part in animating the debates of the 'Marxologists' over the past twenty years (the same phenomenon appeared throughout Europe from 1920 to 1930). But we should go on to draw from this the kind of conclusions that permit a better understanding of *Capital* and Marx's political intentions. Yes, Marx – how could it have been otherwise? – was subject to the limits that the dominant ideas of his own time imposed on him, despite his determination to break with them. The surprising thing is not that he was subject to them, but that, despite their weight and despite these limits, he opened up for us the knowledge of a reality that no one else – or almost no one else – had glimpsed before him.

On this condition, we may turn back to *Capital.* We will readily see the effects that the still-idealist philosophical conception of the Process of True Thought had on Marx's thinking: for example, what appears to be the purely arithmetical presentation [*Darstellung*] of surplus-value[1] (but this is only a matter of appearances: it is not a question of prices, but of values) as the difference between the value of labour-power and the value created by labour. *Imposed in this form* by the order of exposition and its conceptual deduction, this presentation can lead to an 'economistic' interpretation of exploitation. For, in reality – Marx is very clear on this point – exploitation cannot be reduced to the extraction of a surplus of value; it can be understood only if the whole set of its concrete forms and conditions is treated as determinant. The whole set of these concrete forms does indeed include the extraction of value, but it also includes the implacable constraints of the labour process embedded in the process of production and, therefore, exploitation: the socio-technical division and organization of labour; the length of the 'working-day', a notion peculiar to the capitalist system, and therefore nowhere to be found before it; speed-up; compartmentalization; the material conditions of the centralization of labour (the factory, the workshop); work-related accidents and illnesses; the practice of forcing people to take jobs below or above their level of competence; and so on. And the process of production must

1 Jean-Pierre Lefebvre and Étienne Balibar have recently proposed, rightly, to translate *Mehrwert* as *sur-valeur.* See Lefebvre and Balibar, 'Plus-value ou survaleur?', *La Pensée*, no. 197, 1978, pp. 32–42.

in turn (lest one remain abstract) be conceived as a decisive moment in the process of reproduction: the reproduction of the means of production, but also the reproduction of labour-power (family, housing, children, child-rearing, schooling, health, problems faced by the couple, by young people, etc.) – to say nothing of the other moment of the process of reproduction of labour-power, which brings the state and its apparatuses (repressive, ideological, etc.) into play.

Marx discusses these questions – which the simple equation for surplus-value must obviously *bracket out* in order to show that exploitation consists in the retention of value – in the famous 'concrete' chapters of *Capital*; they are at odds with the book's abstract order of exposition. The result is that the theory of exploitation is indeed to be found in *Capital*, but 'expounded' in several places: not only in the theory of surplus-value, in an apparently purely arithmetical form, but also as explained in the chapters on the working day (absolute surplus-value) and the capitalist transformation of the labour process (relative surplus-value), to say nothing of the chapter on primitive accumulation. This division of a key question into its abstract 'exposition' and concrete explanations is not without theoretical consequences, which begin to come into view in the shortcomings of the theory of labour-power or even wages, as well as in various other questions: for example, today, the question of the transformation of the working class by the 'technical' forms of the imperialist class struggle on a global scale (immigrant labour, the reorganization of tasks, the new competition facing labour-power due to the investment 'policy' ['*politique*'] of the multinationals, and so on).

It would be possible to cite many other examples of difficulties and contradictions in which Marx gets caught up because he feels he is *under an obligation* to begin with the abstraction of value. For example, the thorny question of the 'transference' of the value (which value, precisely?) of the means of production through 'utilization' by labour-power, and the famous limit-case that Marx introduces to test his reasoning, by setting C, constant capital minus means of production, to zero.[61] For example, the transformation of value into prices of production, where Marx has been caught pursuing a flawed line of reasoning, and so on.

Thus the obvious need to 'shift ground' or adopt a position 'representing the proletariat', however keenly Marx was aware of it (there is an interval of thirty-two years between the two formulas!), clearly did not suffice, in and of itself and from the outset, 'to settle accounts0' with Marx's former philosophical consciousness. The materialism that he professed applies to him as well: his consciousness could not exhaust his practice, his consciousness could not even exhaust his thought in its real forms, and his thought, which was still subject to the most subtle of the dominant philosophical and ideological forms, could not take charge of, and resolve, the contradictions in which it became entangled as a result. A materialist will conclude from this that there was more in Marx's practice, thought, and the contradictions of his problematic than in his consciousness. *He will also conclude that the limits of Marx's thought were not without effect on his acts or those of others.*

We might note, as a sign of this unavoidable disparity, the fact that apart from the brief, enigmatic declarations of the 'Theses on Feuerbach', Marx would never clarify his new positions – that is to say, ultimately, his philosophy, the one he must have espoused after breaking with his former philosophical consciousness. Marx vaguely promised Engels twenty pages on the dialectic, if he could 'find the time'. He never wrote them. Was it because he did not have the time? And he dropped the 1857 Introduction – the most fully elaborated statement of his position from a philosophical point of view (especially the chapter on the method of Political Economy, which has fascinated countless Marxists, yet is, in the final analysis, both gripping and highly dubious). 'It seems to me confusing', he said, 'to anticipate results which still have to be substantiated.'[62] True enough; but how are we to explain Marx's silence *thereafter*?

This is not to say that Marx did not wrestle, endlessly, with philosophy, with the task of giving shape and substance to the new philosophy that informed his thinking from the 'moment' he clearly saw that he had to break with the old one, which was too deeply committed to 'glorify[ing] what exists',[63] too closely tied to the ideological and political interests of the dominant class. The fact is that this whole process of self-criticism and rectification took place within Marx's work itself –

in his political and theoretical practice, and at the price of what difficulties! – so that he could arrive at a somewhat clearer vision of things. It took place in his scientific work, as is more than obvious, but also, and above all, in his struggle to reconstruct the workers' movement in the terrible years that stretched from the defeat of the 1848 revolutions [through] the foundation of the First International to the Commune. An interminable struggle, amid contradictions, amid contradiction, to insure the new positions against the return and revenge of the old – a battle whose outcome was always in doubt, even when it seemed won: a battle to find words and concepts that did not yet exist in order to think what had, until then, been occluded by all-powerful words and concepts. For – as goes without saying – the battle is also a battle over concepts and even words, whenever they sum up the stakes of great conflicts, great uncertainties, or silent, obscure contradictions. Witness the most profound hesitations in *Capital*, in which the word, theme, notion, or even concept of alienation continues to haunt not only the theory (which is one-hundred-per-cent Feuerbachian) of fetishism, but also the theatrical opposition between dead and living labour, the domination of working conditions over the worker, and the figure of communism, that free association of 'individuals' who have no social relations other than their freedom – alienation, an old word, an old idealist concept that can be put to any use you like (including that of making felt what is still inadequately thought) and is manifestly there to think something else: something which is unthought, and has remained so.

Why has it remained so? We must seek the answer both in the history of the workers' class struggle, in its 'limits', and in Marx's philosophical conception of the order of exposition that one had to follow to think the true.

7. The 'Omnipotence of Ideas'?

Here is another example of how history, being a good materialist, surprised and overtook Marx's thinking.

Marx is distinguished from all idealist political philosophy (in this, he is in agreement with only one thinker, Machiavelli) by the fact that

he never entertained any illusions about the 'omnipotence of ideas', including his own. It was Lenin who, in the heat and the pitiless give-and-take of polemic, unwisely wrote that 'Marx's ideas are omnipotent because they are true'.[64] Of course they are true, but they are not 'omnipotent', for no idea is 'omnipotent' simply by virtue of the fact that it is a true idea. From the *Manifesto* onwards, Marx's position is clear and was never to change: not communist ideas, but the general movement of the proletariat's class struggle against the capitalists is paving the way, and will continue to pave the way, for communism, which is a 'real movement'. The influence of ideas makes itself felt only under ideological and political conditions that express a given balance of class forces: it is this balance of forces, and its political and ideological effects, which determine the efficacy of 'ideas' 'in the last instance'.

The extraordinary thing is that Marx, consistent with his own theses, takes his own theory into account by politically *posing* and *exposing his own ideas* – that is to say, by situating them within the scheme [*dispositif*] of society! This is clear in the *Manifesto* as well as in the 1859 Preface. Here the presentation of the major theoretical principles takes the form of a 'topography', a figure laid out in a space in which places (*topoi*) and their relations are defined in order to 'make visible' relations of relative externality, determination, and so on, and thus of efficacy between 'instances': the infrastructure (production/exploitation, hence 'economic' class struggle) and the elements (Law, the State, ideologies) of the 'superstructure'. This means – here is the crucial point – that Marx adopts a *topographical* arrangement in order to present his own theoretical ideas twice, and in two different forms or 'places' in the same space.

Marx first presents his theoretical ideas as principles of analysis of *the whole of his object*, whether this object is a pre-revolutionary political conjuncture considered against the backdrop of class struggle between capitalists and those they exploit (the *Manifesto*) or the structure of a social formation in general (the 1859 Preface). Thus, Marx's theoretical ideas are present everywhere; they occupy the whole space (and therefore the place) of this object as well, because the aim is to mobilize them to provide an understanding of this object as a whole.

Simultaneously, however, Marx arranges for the same theoretical ideas to appear *a second time*, but by situating them in a determinate, extremely limited 'place' within the space occupied by the same global reality. Let us say – to repeat the formula of the 1859 Preface – that Marx now situates his own theoretical ideas among the 'ideological forms in which men become conscious of [class] conflict and fight it out'.[65] In thus situating his ideas a second time, in a place defined simultaneously by class relations and their ideological effects (in the 'superstructure', alongside the state), Marx treats and presents his theoretical ideas not as principles of explanation of the given whole, but solely in terms of their possible effect in the ideological, and therefore political, class struggle commanding this 'whole': such-and-such a social formation, such-and-such a conjuncture, and so forth. In fact, when they change their place (and function), the theoretical ideas change their form: they shift from the 'theoretical form' to the 'ideological form'.

The measure of Marx's materialism, which Lenin called 'consistent', lies not only in the dissipation of all illusions before the objectivity of actually existing reality and the knowledge of this reality, but also, and simultaneously, in the acute, practical consciousness of the conditions, forms and limits within which his own ideas *can become* active. Hence their double inscription in the topography. Hence the distance (which is considerable at first) between the 'truth' of the ideas that cover the whole of their object, and *the efficacy* of these ideas, which are situated in a small part of the 'space' of their 'object'. Hence the essential thesis that ideas, even if they are true and have been formally and materially proven, can never be historically active in person, as pure theoretical ideas, but can become active only in and through *ideological forms – mass ideological forms*, it must be added, for that is fundamental – caught up in the class struggle and its development.

Yet, by a stupefying historical irony, which has been, for working-class activists, an experience – and what an experience! – etched into their very flesh, Marx was not in a position to conceive, or was unable to foresee, the possibility that his own thought might be perverted into playing the role of the all-too-real, albeit only alleged, 'omnipotence

of ideas', and, in the guise of his 'doctrine', pressed into the service of the politics of those who would one day cloak themselves in the prestige of his name in order to falsify his ideas. The whole history of the deviations (beginning with the Second International) and splits in the international Marxist movement, followed by the history of its 'evolution' in the post-revolutionary countries, can be summoned to bear witness at this proceeding. There is a great deal to answer for. There can, of course, be no question of arraigning Marx here, and 'judging' him on the basis of something other than his own political and theoretical history; first, we owe it to him to arrive at an understanding of the import and limits of that history. There can, of course, be no question of attributing to Marx insights that were not his, or of criticizing him for lacking insight into experiments he never saw. Due allowance made, that would be like criticizing Newton for not being Einstein.

Unless we wish to scapegoat the past for our problems or our demonstrations, the only real targets of our criticism, those who truly have to answer for what they have or have not made of Marx's thought, are those to whom these questions *have posed themselves* or upon whom they *have ultimately imposed themselves*, those who can and want to (or neither can nor want to) confront them: above all, the Communist parties. But these parties maintain a stubborn, stupid silence on these questions, or reluctantly drop a few niggardly, sententious remarks that are not even self-critical (other people are always to blame!), and are always made 'belatedly' – inevitably so, because the Communist parties *deliberately spend their time ducking these questions, which are too embarrassing for them.* The necessary answers will therefore have to be provided, in the Parties' stead, by rank-and-file revolutionary activists, whether they are members of these parties or not.

It must, however, be acknowledged that Marx's theoretical shortcomings have occasionally, quite as much as his merits, been accompanied by strange silences. I shall mention only two by way of illustration.

The astonishing collection that Marx published under the title *The Civil War in France* (the Commune) provides an ongoing analysis of the political history of the Commune, a history internal to the movement

of the Commune itself, and, simultaneously, a theorization of the popular political inventions that we owe to the Commune, in which Marx immediately recognized the active force of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is a matter of common knowledge that he initially opposed the revolt, yet unstintingly offered enthusiastic, lucid help once the movement had begun. Yet there is something in his analysis of the Commune that leaves us unsatisfied: his virtual silence when it comes to analysing the balance of class forces in France, and, especially, the forms and conditions *of the bourgeois class struggle*, hence the class conditions surrounding the Communards' defeat.

Let us make this more precise. It can be argued that Marx had already settled this question in *The Class Struggles in France*, even if the France of 1871 was no longer the France of 1850; in twenty years, the country had undergone extensive economic development and seen the triumph of the industrial and financial bourgeoisie over the big landowners, as well as the growth of the proletariat. Let that pass. The question nevertheless remains as to why Marx was unable to exploit this experience, which was extraordinary as such experiences go, to provide a better analysis of the functioning of *the bourgeois state* and *bourgeois ideology*, and to mine it for ideas richer than the inadequate notions he had already put forward in 1852. And how is it that Marx also made no attempt to understand what was happening *on the ideological plane in the Communards' case*, and on the plane of *politics*, which was transformed by their innovations? *The Civil War in France* offers a prodigious, dramatic, detailed chronicle of events, and a theorization, which was to prove its pertinence, of the political forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Yet it contributes nothing to our knowledge of the bourgeois state, ideology (that of the bourgeoisie and the Communards), or the conflicting politics of the two sides. On these subjects – the state, ideology, politics – it is quite as if Marx felt no need to take a closer look: either because these were, so to speak, obvious matters for him, or because he saw no particular mystery in them.

I would like to come back to the episode surrounding the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', that strange affair. Let me point out, first of all, that Marx was not really an active party militant at the time; and, secondly, that he drew no conclusions from his misadventure.

The Gotha Congress that unified the Marxist and Lasallean parties was convened, and it approved a programme. Stupefied, Marx ruthlessly criticized its main theses: they have nothing to do with communism, and he proved it, brilliantly.

Apprised of his reaction, the leadership of the new, unified party, the Marxist leaders among them, ordered Marx not to publish his critique! Marx waited for a while, and then discovered, to his stupefaction, that 'the jackasses on the bourgeois papers', and even 'the workers', had 'read into' the Gotha Programme things that were not there. Whereas they had been served up reformist theses, they 'believed' that they were being given communism! Marx and Engels leave us in no doubt on this matter: *Marx chose not to defy* the (unified) Social Democratic Party and *not to publish his critique* 'solely because ... the jackasses on the bourgeois papers' and even 'the workers', found things in the Gotha programme that were not actually there.[66] The upshot was that Marx held his tongue. Although he had often written that 'the interests of the future of the workers' movement must not be sacrificed to its immediate interests', and that to do so was opportunism, he gave no thought to the future; he did not ask himself whether, in a few months or years, the formulas of the Congress would have had their effects, and the irreparable damage have been done. Seventeen years later, by blackmailing the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party, Engels finally saw to it that the 'Critique' saw the light. Why so late? And to what end? Did Marx's critique merit publication after all? Marx had since died; but he had done nothing to make his critique known while he was still alive.

An odd sentence of Engels's comes to mind here: '[Marx and I] have hardly ever interfered in internal party affairs, and then only in an attempt to make good ... *theoretical* blunders.'[67] Perhaps. But it is by no means easy to respect this distinction. And it would appear that the 'Critique' banned by the leadership of the Party, which Marx left unpublished 'solely because of the circumstance that ...', *did* have something to do with the theoretical 'blunders' of the Gotha Programme, after all.

A Party and its leadership, with Marx's closest friends at the head of it; a radical critique of a Programme, muzzled 'so as not to undermine

the unity of the Party' (Party leaders keep making the same argument, from 1875 to 1978); Marx's stupefaction over the emergence of a fantastic misunderstanding of the text of the Programme, one that united 'the jackasses on the bourgeois papers', and even 'the workers', in the (mistaken) conviction that this Programme contained communist theses; the fact that Marx was consoled by this misunderstanding, and therefore said nothing – all this is, after all, food for thought, as are the closing words of the 'Critique': '*dixi et salvavi animam meam*'.[68] In fact, for perhaps the first time in his life, Marx found himself confronting a Party which he belonged to but did not lead; thus he was in a rather neutral position, that of a rank-and-file Party activist or semi-activist. And we know what this Party did. And Marx contented himself with the very meagre consolation that 'the jackasses on the bourgeois papers', and even 'the workers', discerned, in the Programme, things that were not there. What an experiment this was – involving the Party, its way of conducting itself in the political and theoretical domain, and the ideological illusion produced by a reformist text. Marx held his tongue. To be sure, he was ill. It was as if he had been disarmed and helpless, and had seized the next best excuse to bow to the Party leadership's diktat, asking himself no questions about the nature of the Party, the strange nature of these Theses that had bred such misunderstandings, his own willingness to withdraw his critique in exchange for an illusion, or his own debate with himself, trapped as he was in a situation whose stakes were, all at once, the Party and its strivings for unity, and so for compromise (but on condition that Marx hold his tongue), the reformist ideology that triumphed in the Programme, and the ideology in the heads of 'the jackasses on the bourgeois papers' and 'the workers', which led them to take the moon for green cheese. Marx accepted all this without the least thought for the future. For he washed his hands of the matter like a Beautiful Soul: '*dixi et salvavi animam meam*'....

That Marx held his tongue is one thing. Because he was who he was, he could speak out, and could therefore also hold his tongue.[68] Other activists doubtless criticized the Gotha Programme inside the Party. However, as they did not wield Marx's authority, they had to fall back into line, and their protests disappeared into the Party

leadership's files. That in all this – as, indeed, in all other circumstances – Marx gave no thought *to the fact of his own persona*, is, after all, rather surprising. He washed his hands of the matter with a show of modesty ('I am not a Marxist', etc.), which was also a way of 'saving his soul'; he pretended, to himself, that he was not what he objectively was, whatever his scruples – a very prestigious personage, and, still more important, a *theoretical* personage whose every word counted, whose formulas and phrases were taken for gospel, and taken seriously, with all the ambiguity which assimilates – or very nearly so – political seriousness to religious or religiose submission. But the 'theoretical-personage effect' is, beyond any doubt, an important political and ideological effect – not only in the history of the bourgeoisie, but also in that of the workers' movement, the Marxist workers' movement included. Marx, who found Bakunin's or Lassalle's 'persona' unbearable, although he had no choice but to take it into account, was keenly aware of this. Yet it seems that, in his own case, he did not care to know anything about it. And because he was not alone in this business, in which the leading personalities of the Party (Liebknecht, Bebel, etc.) were also involved, as were both the Party and the leaders who ordered him not to publish his critique, as was all the ideology contained in the Gotha Programme (and, behind it, that of the two parties), plus the ideology of the 'journalists ... and even the workers', the only possible conclusion would seem to be that the whole thing was just too complicated, or that Marx believed that the Party, after these episodes, would recover its 'essence', or that, in any case, it was a matter of no particular importance, so that it was enough for him to write to 'save his soul' ... buried in the files ....[70]

Here, too, we are reduced to making negative hypotheses, but only after duly noting that Marx felt helpless in the face of realities like the *Party*, with its structure, mechanism, effects and decisions, and that he may have felt even more helpless in the face of certain *ideological misunderstanding-effects* – above all, in the face of the *ideological status of his own theoretical persona*, and so on.

The state, ideology, politics, the Party, the theoretical and political persona in the workers' movement: these are all among Marx's

'absolute limits', which we have to assess if we are to think seriously about them.

8. An Absolute Limit: The Superstructure

We must, then, draw up an inventory, with the perspective we have gained thanks to careful reflection and the passage of time. We need to evaluate, as precisely as possible, what Marx has bequeathed us by way of 'theoretical' indications about the nature of 'the superstructure and the ideologies'. On this point, after carefully weighing everything up, it must be said that while the indications Marx has left us are from a political standpoint, important, even crucial, *they are, from a theoretical standpoint, unsatisfactory.*

Let us return to the 1859 Preface, which has served generations of communists as a reference, and which Lenin and Gramsci took as the basis for their thinking. What does Marx say there? Looking back at his own history, he declares:

> A general introduction, which I had drafted, is omitted, since on further consideration it seems to me confusing to anticipate results which still have to be substantiated. A few brief remarks regarding the course of my study of political economy may, however, be appropriate here.
>
> Although I studied jurisprudence, I pursued it as a subject subordinated to philosophy and history. In the year 1842–43, as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, I first found myself in the embarrassing position of having to discuss what is known as material interests. The deliberations of the Rhenish Landtag on forest thefts and the division of landed property; the official polemic started by Herr von Schaper, then Oberpräsident of the Rhine Province, against the *Rheinische Zeitung* about the condition of the Moselle peasantry, and finally the debates on free trade and protective tariffs caused me in the first instance to turn my attention to economic questions. On the other hand, at that time when good intentions 'to push forward' often took the place of factual knowledge, an echo of French socialism and communism, slightly tinged by philosophy, was noticeable in the *Rheinische Zeitung*.

> I objected to this dilettantism, but at the same time frankly admitted in a controversy with the *Allgemeine Augsburger Zeitung* that my previous studies did not allow me to express any opinion on the content of the French theories. When the publishers of the *Rheinische Zeitung* conceived the illusion that by a more compliant policy on the part of the paper it might be possible to secure the abrogation of the death sentence passed upon it, I eagerly grasped the opportunity to withdraw from the public stage to my study.
>
> The first work which I undertook to dispel the doubts assailing me was a critical re-examination of the Hegelian philosophy of law; the introduction to this work being published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* issued in Paris in 1844. My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations [*Rechtsverhältnisse*] nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves [*aus sich selbst zu begreifen sind*] or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate [*würzeln*] in the material conditions of life [*Lebensverhältnisse*], the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society' [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*]; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. The study [*Erfahrung*][71] of this, which I began in Paris, I continued in Brussels, where I moved owing to an expulsion order issued by M. Guizot. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows.
>
> In the social production of their existence, men [*die Menschen*] inevitably enter into definite relations [*Verhältnisse*], which are independent of their will, namely relations of production [*Produktionsverhältnisse*] appropriate to [*entsprechen*] a given stage in the development of their material forces of production [*Produktionskräfte*]. The totality [*Gesamtheit*] of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure [*Struktur*] of society, the real foundation [*Basis*], on which arises [*erhebt*] a legal and political superstructure [*Überbau*] and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness [*gesellschaftliche Bewußtseinsformen*]. The mode of production [*Produktionsweise*] of material life conditions [*bedingt*] the general process of social, political and

intellectual [*geistig*] life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict [*Widerspruch*] with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations [*Eigentumsverhältnisse*] within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation [*Grundlage*] lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense [*ungeheure*] superstructure. In studying such transformations [*Umwälzungen*] it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms [*ideologische Formen*] in which [*worin*] men become conscious of this conflict [*Konflikt*] and fight it out [*ausfechten*]. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict [*Konflikt*] existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order [*Gesellschaftsformation*] is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior [*höhere*] 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 [*Aufgabe*] itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution [*Lösung*] are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress [*progressive Epochen*] in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.[72]

From this famous text – which I have tried to translate as closely as possible,[73] more faithfully than the available translations – it can be seen that, in general, Marx conceives a 'social formation' as intelligible on the basis of its mode of production, a concept that essentially turns on the distinction between relations of production and productive forces. I shall go no further into the analysis of the elements included in the forces of production and the relations of production. Marx explained the matter at length in *Capital* with regard to the capitalist mode of production, and about this 'domain', that is, the 'domain' which he terms *Struktur* or *Basis*, a term translated as *infrastructure*, *base*, or again, if more rarely, *structure* – about this domain, which is that, not of 'civil society', but of production and exploitation, we have at our disposal, besides the substantial analyses in *Capital*, all the reflections to be found in the *Grundrisse* and *Theories of Surplus-Value* (which was to comprise the fourth volume of *Capital*).

But it can also be seen from the text I have just translated that the relations obtaining between the relations of production and the forces of production (relations that are internal to the 'infrastructure') can take two extreme forms: that of *correspondence* [*entsprechend*] or *antagonism*. It can also be seen that the driving element [*l'élément moteur*] behind the variation of these and all intermediate forms are the productive forces. In the 'dialectic' productive forces/relations of production, it is the productive forces which are determinant: when they exceed the 'capacities' of the relations of production, the relations of production are shattered, leading to social revolution, an *Umwälzung* that rocks the whole edifice: not only the infrastructure, but also the whole 'immense superstructure', which eventually gives way – 'more or less rapidly'.

Several remarks suggest themselves here.

Let us first note that, in the extremely general presentation of the Preface – which sketches the 'progressive process' of universal

history, since it seems to list *all* the modes of production that have existed in history – the dialectic of correspondence or antagonism is presented as if it were *universal*, that is, valid for *all* modes of production. Yet Marx really devoted his efforts only to the capitalist mode of production.

Let us also note that, in any case, *it is the productive forces which are the motor of the upheaval*: they need only develop until they have not only 'filled' the capacities of the relations of production, but exceeded them, causing the carapace to split open and new relations of production, ready and waiting in the old society, to take their place.

Finally, let us note that, given all the connotations just pointed out, the 'historical dialectic' presented here unfolds without a hitch, because humanity (= human history) sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve [*lösen*]; that the fact that a task proposes and imposes itself is a sign that the solution has already ripened or is ripening in the old society; and, finally, that the productive forces are always stronger than the relations of production, since they always have sufficient capacity to 'fill' and exceed them, thus inducing the transformation known as a social revolution.

Here there is no question of a difference between the capitalist mode of production, with reproduction on an extended scale, and other modes of production, with simple reproduction or, possibly, an increasingly limited reproduction that eventually induces their disappearance. Hence there is no question *of the death of modes of production*, by which I mean their death pure and simple, not only in consequence of an invasion by conquerors who are more powerful and better armed, but in consequence (let us stick to Marx's terms) of the tendential weakness or decrepitude of the productive forces, or contradictions between the relations of production and the productive forces *with no available alternative solution.*

Granted, this is a very general text which in fact only indicates *a direction for research* into the capitalist mode of production. But, after all, the rhetoric is lofty, and somewhat too categorical not to have elicited a goodly quantity of inanities from the commentators, who have come a bit too readily to the conclusion that they were in the presence of a 'global', exhaustive text, or a sacred text, and so drawn

from it the well-known mechanistic and economistic conclusions about the primacy of the productive forces, and, within the productive forces, about the primacy of the means of production over labour-power. (I say nothing of the purely idealist inanities of those who ecstatically repeat the lines about 'mankind inevitably setting itself only such tasks as it is able to solve ...' and then go prospecting in them for the foundations of a historicist philosophy that they imprudently attribute to Marx.)

The fact of the matter is that, except in these passages and a few others, Marx never upheld the primacy of the productive forces over the relations of production, any more than he upheld the primacy of the labour process over the process of production. He simply upheld the thesis of the primacy, 'in the last instance', of the infrastructure (the base) over the superstructure. As for the infrastructure, he in fact upheld, as far as the capitalist mode of production is concerned, in addition to the idea of the unity of the relations of production and the productive forces, that of the primacy of the relations of production (which are, at the same time, relations of exploitation) over the productive forces. Moreover, he showed that labour-power is one of the 'elements' making up the productive forces, and that the primacy of the relations of production means only one thing: it invites the conclusion that exploitation is class struggle, and that, in the capitalist mode of production, technical and technological questions are questions which form an integral part of, yet are subordinate to, class struggle.

But I shall say no more on this point, which, by now, is rather widely acknowledged. It should nevertheless be noted that it was not always acknowledged. Not only Stalin, but, before him, the 'Marxism' of the Second International bowed down before the productive forces, in the sense of the means of production, hence technique and technology. Moreover, there prevails, in our own day, the holy, blessed religion of the 'scientific and technological revolution', which is charged with miraculously resolving the 'minor' problems of the class struggle neglected by our leaders.

I turn now to the superstructure. In the topographical metaphor of the edifice (base and superstructure), the superstructure occupies the

upper storey; it arises [*erhebt sich*] on the base. Furthermore, Marx speaks of a 'legal and political superstructure', which thus includes both law [*le droit*] and the state. Note that Marx, who makes constant use of the term correspondence, *by no means says that the superstructure corresponds to* [*entspricht*] *the base.* He reserves the term 'correspondence' for two and only two cases: the correspondence between the relations of production and the productive forces, and the correspondence between the superstructure (law and the state) and the 'forms of ideological consciousness that correspond to them'. This is a sign of prudence.

It is a sign of prudence, but also embarrassment, and is therefore, to some extent, of confession. Doubtless Marx, and Lenin after him, were to stress the fact that all class societies are exploitative societies, and that the dominant classes express their political and historical complicity through the transmission of the means of domination – law and, above all, the state, which one dominant class accommodatingly bequeaths to the next, in a historical heritage that survives these classes' own disappearance or historical assimilation. Thus the bourgeoisie inherited Roman law and a venerable state machinery that had been 'perfected' in the course of millennia of class struggle; it has gone on to 'perfect' it still further, the better to subjugate those it exploits. Thus there emerges a transhistorical International of the solidarity of the exploiting classes; it takes recognizable form in the law and, especially, the state. Yet, as a rule, the appeal to history is often merely a way of eluding the theoretical problem.

Hence the malaise subsists. *Why* (and neither *Capital* nor Lenin abandons this strange cautiousness) *this theoretical lacuna concerning the nature of the relation between the base on the one hand and the superstructure on the other?* The concepts by means of which Marx expresses the relations between the relations of Production and the Productive Forces (at the extremes, correspondence and antagonism), as well as those between Law and the State on the one hand and ideological forms on the other (correspondence again: here, apparently, there is no mention of antagonism), vanish when it is a question of thinking the relations between infrastructure and superstructure. All that Marx says about this is that *the superstructure arises* [*erhebt sich*] *on the base*.... Quite an

advance: this is, as it were, Hegel 'inverted', with the small semantic difference that Marx, as a good materialist, talks about *Erhebung* rather than *Aufhebung*; the erection or, as one would say today, the abduction [*l'élèvement ou, comme on dirait aujourd'hui, l'enlèvement*] of Law and the State. Law and the State are a concrete construction; and they arise concretely on the base. They therefore constitute a world utterly different from the base – not the base 'conserved–superseded' in its 'supersession'. This is important; conceptually, however, it is not much at all.

9. In What Sense is the State an Instrument, and 'Separate'?

As everyone knows, Marx did not leave it at that, but drew very powerful political conclusions from the concrete distinction between the state and the base. Theoretically, however, he never got very far. What is said in the Preface has to do with a basic theme of Marxist thinking about the state: the state is not only distinct from the base, but *separate* [*séparé*].[74] This time, the break is clear and explicit.

This theme of the 'separation' of the state has a long history both in Marx and before him; it is inseparable from the question of Law. The whole problematic opened up by the philosophy of Natural Law, from Grotius through Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau to Kant, was based on an incredible imposture, or, if you like, an obligatory 'self-evident truth' (obligatory owing to the dominant ideology that then ruled supreme, or sought to: bourgeois ideology). This imposture consisted in the idea that one had to *resolve questions of public* (or political) *law in terms of private law.*

Hegel, after Spinoza, had understood this rather well, [as he showed] when he criticized the philosophers of natural law for their 'atomistic' conception of the subject. It was easy for him to prove to them that they had struck out on the wrong path, since it is never, quite simply never, possible to derive political law – for example, the state – from private law, which mobilizes atomized subjects of law. How are you going to reconstitute the whole, if you set out from the atomistic element, the individual human subject? What contract –

which, however shrewdly formulated, is necessarily concluded between individuals – will ever allow you to reconstitute the primary, inaccessible Reality known as the state? Thus Hegel gave Hobbes his due for being intelligent enough[75] to conceive of a subordinate contract between everyman and everyman ('a covenant from one with another'[76]) pledging 'to agree not to offer resistance' to the Sovereign, an absurd contract between the contracting individuals and the Sovereign, since the Sovereign was not bound by any contract [*était hors contrat*]; they conceded everything to him without getting anything in return!

A brief review of the history of this conception suffices to show that the Natural Law philosophers did nothing other than to try to solve [the same problem]: apologetically, and each in his own way, in accordance with the shifting balance of power and what could and could not be said (in their day, political writings were nothing to sneeze at). They tried to find, *in mercantile law* (the reality behind what the jurists call private law), the means with which to think both public law (the state) *and* the establishment of mercantile law itself under the protection of the state. Prisoners of the self-evident truths of mercantile practice, which got along quite well with mercantile law *alone*, and wishing to create a state that would guarantee this mercantile law while respecting it in its own political practice, the Natural Law philosophers imagined that it was possible to found the state on mercantile law, and spent all their energy trying to accomplish this absurd task, whose political benefits were by no means negligible. Obviously, they did not envision the separation of the state. Quite the contrary: they wanted, at all costs, a state that was not separate, but founded on mercantile law itself, on the law of the proprietor who is the proprietor of his goods: who can, that is, consume them, sell them, or use them to buy labour-power and thus acquire more goods, and so on – but on condition that his proprietary rights be guaranteed. Guaranteed by whom? What a question: by the state, of course!

The proprietor, in order to obtain from the state the guarantee that it would not behave arbitrarily – would not only not deprive him of the benefits of mercantile law, but would guarantee them for him – had, in the seventeenth century, Grotius [***] and then Locke, men whose

work as ideologues consisted in publicly (their writings circulated furiously, which means that they were read) founding the state on private law, mercantile law, and the freedom of the human subject. What a scandal it was when Rousseau, with his radical way of posing problems and attacking problematics and other flags of convenience from behind, undertook to demonstrate, in the *Social Contract*, that the state was not only everything, but a totality [*non seulement tout, mais le tout*]. It was the totality of the sum of particular wills expressing, by means of an astonishing system, a general will that never went wrong; it was one and indivisible, one and coercive ('we shall compel him to be free').

Kant wriggled out of the problem by evoking the distant horizon of morality and the reconciliation of human history, Nature and Freedom in the Idea. In the meantime, he stuck to a rather materialist conception of the law as 'constraint'. Hegel replied with a theory of the state as the supreme ethical reality; all the anticipations, mired in their finitude, of abstract law and morality, and also of the family and 'civil society' (the system of needs = political economy), aspired to this ethical state. Thus the state was elevated above everything – above morality (the Kantian solution) and the subjectivist atomism of Natural Law philosophy. It was the End and Meaning of all the rest. But it was not 'separate', for what is separate smacks of the understanding in Hegel, and the understanding is 'that's just how it is' and 'no good'. Hegel proceeded as ecumenically as one could wish. Thus he resolved the problem of Natural Law itself by showing that it was enough to 'invert' things, and to refuse to set out from the free subject to think the state in order to set out from the state to think the free subject, abstract (mercantile) law, and so on. For Hegel, the End holds the meaning of the beginning and all the stages in between.

Marx on the state sets out from Hegel. The state is Reason; nothing that exists is as rational as the state or superior to the state. In the state, we have the reign of the universal. The proof is the citizen, a member of the state: he is free, equal to all the others (the Sovereign included), and decides freely in all that concerns both himself and the constitution and delegation of the general will. As a citizen, he ceases to be the pitiful shoemaker reduced to his shop and his shabby shoes, his problems with his wife, and his worries about his children: he dwells

in the universal, which (at least in theory) he decrees, or, rather, concretizes [*décrète ou plutôt concrète*].

Taking this powerful assurance as his starting point, Marx very soon had occasion to discover, under Friedrich-Wilhelm IV – in private, a very liberal Prussian prince who turned out to be a tyrant in the public sphere – that the state, which was Reason in itself, led a sadly unreasonable existence – even, factually speaking, an irrational one. He extricated himself from the problem, temporarily, with the ingenuous notion that 'there is always Reason, but not always in its rational form'. In sum, it was enough to wait.

He was still waiting when Feuerbach made his entry on to the German philosophical scene. This man, who stunned all his contemporaries with a veritable revelation, had had the simple idea to wonder: 'but, if so, why does Reason *necessarily exist in irrational forms*?' It was the recognition of this *necessity* which changed everything. Earlier, the state had been irrational by accident. The subtitle of *The Essence of Christianity* (since, in the Germany of Feuerbach's day, everything turned on the displaced question of religion) was *Critique of Pure Unreason.*[77] Held up against Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, this was a real provocation.

Feuerbach's main thesis is well known (all the others depend on it). It is owing to the alienation of Reason that Reason necessarily exists in the form of pure Unreason (or impure Unreason: but, ultimately, there is no impurity in Feuerbach; everything is pure, transparent: opacity and the night do not exist). Alienation of what? Alienation of Man's Essence, which is the alpha and omega not of all existence (a dragonfly and a star are not the alienation of Man's Essence) but of all *signification*, including that of the dragonfly (man's extreme freedom) and the star (the light of contemplation). However, of all existing significations, some are exclusively cultural-historical, produced in their entirety (unlike the dragonfly and the star) by labour, struggle, desire and all the human passions. These are the significations which fill the annals of human history: individual significations (Feuerbach wrote extraordinary philosophical love letters to his porcelain-ware fiancée[78]), but, above all, collective cultural and social significations – in short, generic significations, the ones in which the human genus[79]

(of which every individual representative is 'abstract') recognizes itself, because it is expressed there. These grand generic human significations are, first and foremost, religion and then philosophy, followed by the state. The list ends with trade as well as craft and industrial production.

Religion offers the purest instance of the alienation of the human Essence. In God, men worship, love and fear their own infinite generic essence, which is omnipotent, omniscient, infinitely good and has the power to save (for Feuerbach, all these attributes are the attributes not of an imaginary human genus, but of flesh-and-blood humanity: he 'proves' it). The human genus contemplates itself, sees itself (physically), touches itself, smells itself, and loves itself, its own power and its infinite knowledge, in God. That is because it has projected and alienated its own essence in God; it has made this Double, which it worships and to which it prays, out of its own flesh and soul, without realizing that He is the human genus. Thus a gigantic illusion has created God, who is not the image, but the essence of man. And the distance between the little individual that I am and the human Genus whose infinite limits I do not know is so great that it is no wonder I am crushed by the omnipotence of the Genus (= God), its infinite knowledge, infinite love, and boundless goodness and mercy. The abyss is so great that the little individual will never realize that he – not as a limited individual 'with a snub nose' [*sic*],[80] but as a member of the human Genus – is himself the God he worships.

How were things arranged at the outset? How did alienation make its entrance on to the historical scene? It did so owing to a first abyss, which lay between little men and omnipotent, terrifying nature (which is, at the same time, generous enough to ensure their survival). Men identified their nature with the nature of Nature; then, with the emergence of history, they transformed their God in line with the historical modifications of their history (contrary to what we read in Marx,[81] who needed this mistake, *history is terribly real for Feuerbach* – a history of a very Feuerbachian kind, of course). There was the God of the Jews, that 'practical' people ('practical' = selfish: see the Fifth Thesis on Feuerbach[82]); there was the God of the New Testament; there were other Gods as well. All reflected its own speculary Essence back upon

the historically determined (and limited) human Genus. Then came philosophy, a by-product of theology, which was itself a by-product of religion (with one exception: the Greeks, who were materialists – they worshipped their own Essence in the beauty of the cosmos, the body of the star-spangled universe, and the body of their beloved – and also philosophers, who made philosophy their religion). Then came the state, a substantial form of alienation, since the state is the secular, terrestrial God. Then came the great scientific discoveries and the great technological, scientific revolution of modern times (already!), the French Revolution, during which the human Genus recognized itself in Reason, worshipped as such and within easy reach. The long birth pangs of history, industry, the steam engine, the great crisis of the Restoration after the French Revolution, the religious crisis – everything indicates that we now have a way out, that the time is ripe, that religion has been challenged and shaken, that it is in crisis and on the verge of yielding up its secret, and that the moment has come in which a man will at last be able to utter the Truth. The Truth bears a name: 'Man'. The man who utters the truth bears a name: 'Man' is a handsome, bearded, forty-year-old philosopher who lives in the countryside in a small porcelain manufactory, whose daughter he has married. Engels – once the great Feuerbachian passion had passed, once it had been discovered that the great man didn't lift a finger in 1848 – was to write: look what happens to a great mind when he lives in the country!

Marx took one thing from Feuerbach: the idea that 'the root of man is Man', and that the unreason of the state is the effect of man's alienation. He added (in 1843) that the reasons for alienation had to be sought elsewhere than in the difference between the individual and the species – in the alienated conditions of life in society; then in the alienated conditions of the workers; and finally – before he dropped this frenzied exploitation of the theme of alienation (which he never completely abandoned, at least not in *Capital*) – in 'alienated labour' (the *1844 Manuscripts*).

Marx applied the schema of alienation to the state exactly as Feuerbach had applied it to God. It was here that the notion of *separation* first came into play. Like religious man in Feuerbach, man leads a

double life. He contemplates his generic, universal life in the state, which is Reason and the Good. He leads his private, personal life in his practical activities. As a citizen, he has a right to live the life of the species, the life of Reason. As a private individual, he has a right to wealth or poverty – to nothing resembling his other life. Man is *separated* into two parts, and that is why the state is *separated* from men. This gives us the celebrated passages in *On the Jewish Question* and the (manuscript) *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*[83] on 'the rights of man', the contradiction between formal rights ('the state is the heaven of political life') and the real 'rights' that are nonexistent or altogether different, without relation to these formal rights (the Earth of private life, where egoism and the competitive struggle reign supreme). Conclusion: alienation and alienated labour must be abolished here below, on the Earth of need and competition, so that, once man has at last recovered the heaven of his essence, the *separation* between men and the state, between men and politics, will disappear, along with, at the same stroke, the separation between men and nature (which in Feuerbach, let us not forget, is the origin of everything). After that, fully developed '*naturalism*' will be nothing other than fully developed '*humanism*', and vice versa. These are Marx's very words in 1844.

They were meant to be strong words (Marx chose not to publish the *1844 Manuscripts* that contains them, and, once again, we can understand him), but they prove their own theoretical weakness in the confusion of their conclusion. Marx was to drop the conclusion, but he retained the idea that the *separation* (alienation) of the state stems from the alienation of men, of the men at the centre of production: the workers. To arrive at this conclusion, however, he needed something other than the path, blazed in 1844, which led to 'alienated labour'. Alienation is merely a word, quite incapable of explaining itself. What Marx needed was a long detour through the critique of Political Economy and, before that, the accumulated experience of the 1848 revolutions.

Read *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: it contains not a trace of the themes of 1844. The state is plainly still 'separate', but now it has become a 'machine' or an 'apparatus', and there is no longer any question of accounting for it in terms of alienation. Thus the 'separation' of the

state no longer means that the state is identical to the political life, nor, *a fortiori*, that it is the generic life of the human species. The 'separate' state now acquires a different theoretical status, mechanistic-materialist enough to shake to their roots *both* all the humanism of Feuerbach and his epigones (the 'German socialists' or other moralizing sects) *and* all the 'Hegelian' dialectics that Marx had profoundly compromised in the *1844 Manuscripts* by 'injecting' Hegel into Feuerbach. The best of the 'Eurocommunist' intelligentsia is still shaking. What, then, is the theoretical status of the separation of the state? The state is separate because it is, in Marx's words, an 'instrument' (Lenin was even to call it 'a bludgeon') that the dominant class uses to perpetuate its class domination.

It is on this basis, not another – on this sole basis, but, alas for us, solely on this basis – that what is imprudently called 'the Marxist theory of the state' (when one should, rather, say elements[84] of a theory of the state) has been erected. I repeat something I said earlier: although these were nothing more than the elements of a theory, they at least had *a crucial political signification.*

Let us sum up. The state is separate. The political is not reducible to the state – far from it (thank God). The state is a 'machine', an 'apparatus' destined (?) to be used in the class struggle of the dominant class, and to perpetuate it. Lenin would later say: the state has not always existed. This is only to be expected: if the state is an instrument of class domination, there can be a state only in class society, not before. The state perpetuates itself. Why? In the Western world, the instrument took its initial form in Early Antiquity, and the dominant classes that foundered and disappeared handed it down to their successors, who 'perfected' it. A disarmingly simple explanation: the state perpetuates itself because ... there is a need for it. There we have all that is certain; and there we have all that is ever said. Of course, Engels would later attempt, in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, to sketch a theory of the emergence of the state, but his book is a work of compilation that is not very persuasive. Matters would be left at that.

The *political* import and consequences of these simple theses are nevertheless crucial. The stake of the class struggle (economic, 'political' and 'ideological') is the state: the dominant classes struggle to conserve and strengthen the state, which has become a gigantic 'instrument'; the revolutionary classes struggle to win state power. (Why 'power'? – because we need to distinguish the machine from the power needed to run the machine: if one seizes control of the machine without being able to make it run, one has struck a blow for nothing.) The working class will have to take state power, not because the state is the universal in action, or the whole, nor because it is 'determinant in the last instance', but because it is the instrument, 'machine' or 'apparatus' on which everything depends whenever it is a question of changing the economico-social bases of society, that is, the relations of production. Once the bourgeois state has been conquered, it will be necessary to 'destroy' it (Marx, Lenin) and build 'a state which is a non-state', an altogether different revolutionary state, different in structure from the present 'machine', and so designed that it tends not to grow stronger, but to wither away. This is the moment of entry into the phase of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', about which Marx said, in 1852, that it was a discovery for which he deserved the credit, and the main thesis he had developed.

All this terminology – I say terminology – calls for explanation. For we are so used to the words by now that we *no longer know*, or, worse, *no longer care to know*, what they mean or might still mean – by virtue of which it would appear that the 'Eurocommunist' parties have – either in solemn Congress, or on the quick, or both – 'abandoned' the dictatorship of the proletariat, by virtue of which we are in the process of contenting ourselves with 'democratizing' the state so as not to have to 'destroy' it (France), or of 'recomposing' it by might and main so as no longer to have to put up with its 'decomposition', 'separation', and so on (Italy).[85]

Let us first say a word about the term 'instrument'. Yes, the state is an 'instrument' in the hands, and at the service, of the dominant class. The term is not well thought of in our day (read the glosses by our authors, who hold it at a distance that would move mountains). But to say '*instrument*' is to say '*separate*'. Every instrument, such as the musician's instrument and the policeman's 'bludgeon', is manifestly separate from its agent. Separate from what? That is the whole

question. 'Separate from society'? That is a truism, a platitude, even if it was Engels who uttered it; what is more, it rehabilitates the old opposition between the state and 'civil society', which Marx excluded from the text of the Preface, a profoundly theoretical text (even if it contains dubious phrases). Thus the state would be 'separate' from what is not the state, from the *remainder*, or civil society (production, etc.). And when Gramsci, in order to restore (not without certain intentions, which are not without consequences) the symmetrical balance between the terms, declares that civil society is separate from 'political society', he doesn't change much of anything (except that he has his own peculiar definition of 'civil society' up his sleeve). Are we to assume that the state is separate from the dominant class? That is unthinkable. I shall [ignore] the intermediate solutions, and go straight to the main point.

I think we must say that if the state is 'separate' for Marx and Lenin, it is in the narrow sense of '*separate from class struggle*'. Now there is something that will give the shivers to all our theoreticians of the full 'traversal' [*traversée*] of the state by the class struggle; all those who, because they have taken up arms against the idea of the 'separation' of the state, and are aware that the class struggle is, in a certain way which is difficult to conceive, at stake here, quite as ardently reject the idea that the state is an 'instrument'. Pooh! You will not find *us* among those vulgar Marxists who accept this crude 'mechanism'.... This time (and at certain other times, as we shall see) we must give due credit, not to vulgar Marxism (which one should seek where it is to be found), but to Marx, Lenin and Mao, who, in a situation of theoretical penury, at least kept a firm grip on this decisive 'end of the chain'. Of course *the state is separate from class struggle, since that is what it is made for*; that is why it is an instrument. Can you imagine an instrument used by the dominant class that would not be 'separate' from class struggle? It would be in danger of exploding in the hands of this class at the first opportunity! And I am not only talking about the 'traversal' of the state by the class struggle *of the masses* (I imagine that that is what is meant by our *non-vulgar* Marxists, who are so fond of cruises), a mass struggle that has doubtless 'traversed' the state in history only to culminate in bourgeois politics (as in 1968). I am

talking, above all, about the bourgeois class struggle itself. If the big state apparatuses were at the mercy of the 'traversal' of the state by the bourgeois class struggle, the upshot might well be the end of bourgeois domination.... It almost came to that during the Dreyfus affair and the war in Algeria, to cite no other examples.

If I affirm that the state is separate from the class struggle (which unfolds in the realm of production–exploitation, in the political apparatuses and the ideological apparatuses) because that is *what it is made for*, made *to be separate from the class struggle*, that is because the state needs this 'separation' in order to be able to intervene in the class struggle 'on all fronts' – not just to [***] intervene in the struggle of the working class in order to maintain the system of exploitation and general oppression of the exploited classes by the bourgeois class, but also to intervene, should the need arise, in the class struggle within the dominant class, with a view to overcoming its divisions, which can seriously jeopardize this class if the struggle of the working class and the masses is powerful.

I would like to take an extreme example to illustrate this: the situation of the French bourgeoisie under Pétain in 1940, after the defeat. The Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War had so frightened the French bourgeoisie that it silently made its choice even before the World War began: 'better Hitler than the Popular Front'. This choice inspired France's military policy, the 'phoney war'. As for the defeat, it was welcomed by the 'possessing classes' as a 'divine surprise', to cite Maurras's quip. The consequence was Pétain and the politics of collaboration. But the consequence was also, under terribly difficult conditions, the refusal to accept defeat and the rejection of German Nazism and Pétain's Fascist corporatism by the people of our country, under the leadership of those who were politically the best educated [*formé*]. For several months, the leadership of the French Communist Party tried to convince the occupying forces to 'legalize' the organization; it sacrificed the best Party militants to this attempt, calling on them to resume their public activities as a way of backing up its request. These militants ended up dying before Nazi firing squads, beginning with [Jean-Pierre] Timbaud and [Charles] Michels at Châteaubriant, and how many others elsewhere.[86] But many other

Communists who were cut off from the leadership spontaneously took up the struggle (see the eyewitness account by Charles Tillon, leader of the FTP[87]). At the same time, an army general, a patriot of aristocratic extraction, De Gaulle, called on the French to join him in London. In this extreme situation, it became possible to see just what the state was.

For the fact is that the French bourgeoisie was divided. In its immense majority, whether because it was 'apolitical' or by implacable political design, it supported Pétain. A small minority of the bourgeoisie and, especially, the petty bourgeoisie followed De Gaulle. His first appeal[88] played on people's refusal to accept humiliation and defeat, and on their patriotism as well. He further demanded that all patriotic officers and soldiers 'do their duty', and join him in London in order to form the backbone of a military force. A general, and a great bourgeois politician to boot, De Gaulle proclaimed that he embodied the resistance of the nation and provided the nation with its legitimate state, Pétain's being nothing but an instrument under German control.

De Gaulle's politics, during the war and afterwards, the subsequent 'Algerian business' included (yet another war that divided the bourgeoisie), consisted in imposing on a divided bourgeoisie which, in its majority, had compromised itself with Pétain, an alternative (and more 'intelligent') bourgeois politics, come hell or high water. De Gaulle had the (bourgeois) intelligence to understand that the bourgeoisie as a class risked not being able to resist the movement of popular resistance (which could not fail to grow) unless it was itself represented in the Résistance and could endow itself, in the interim, with a state capable of taking over from Pétain's fascist puppet state. We have to start out from the conscious class position adopted by De Gaulle in order to understand the tumultuous history of his relations with the forces of the domestic resistance, which obviously did not wait for orders from him to go into action. We have to set out from the class position adopted by De Gaulle, who represented the class interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole – even if only small sections of the armed forces and volunteers from the ranks of the bourgeoisie followed his lead – in order to understand his attitude towards both

Pétain and the officers and immense majority of the bourgeoisie who had rallied to Pétain's cause. De Gaulle's aim was to restore the unity of the bourgeois class after its division during the War. In this undertaking, he was able to reap the maximum benefit from the legitimacy of the state in whose name he spoke and with which he identified.

After serious conflicts and a long period in which his fortunes waxed and waned, De Gaulle succeeded in obtaining Allied recognition of his 'government'. On this basis, he authorized the Free French Forces to undertake armed actions. He had managed to rally these forces, drawn from the ranks of the existing French military, by appealing to the patriotism of officers and men and calling on their sense of 'duty'. In London, and, later, Algiers, he built up, not without difficulty, a whole state apparatus geared to controlling the domestic resistance movements. In the conflicts that grew out of this 'encounter' imposed by military and political events, the policies advocated by the popular movement clashed with those animating De Gaulle's embryonic state. Whereas the whole history of the Résistance resounded with powerful historical echoes of the class struggle, whereas political plans for change and sometimes even social revolution took shape in the struggle itself, De Gaulle always acted in the name of principles which called for sharply subordinating patriotism to the 'national interest', 'considerations of state' [*le sens de l'État*], 'duty', discipline and obedience to the orders issued by the head of state, who represented the 'general interests' of the nation. Having taken a forthright political stand, De Gaulle could hardly order others not to 'engage in political activity' within the resistance organizations. Yet there was a great deal less political activity in the Free French Forces, where it was possible to cultivate the sentiment that one was acting not only to 'liberate the fatherland', but also out of a sense of duty or discipline. Moreover, in the rear of the theatre of battles over which he had little or no control, and by means of these battles, De Gaulle established the elements of a state apparatus that was supposed to take over, at the right moment, from the state apparatus that had remained in France. More precisely, it was supposed to supervise this apparatus, redeeming it, its most prominent leaders aside, for the purpose of serving the interests of the bourgeoisie as a class.

As everyone knows, De Gaulle's plans worked out very much as he had wished. He was able to conduct negotiations with the political parties; the Communists were tractable, hobbled as they were by the Thorez affair (the 'desertion' of a man who had not wanted to leave France, but gave in to Stalin, who all but sequestered him, as if he were a hostage).[89] He rammed through a policy of sending political commissars to France, and, after the Normandy landing – thanks to the political weakness of the resistance movements, the power of the agents of the state apparatus who had remained in France, and, ultimately, the overt political support of the Allies – eliminated the political problems posed by the organizations and military units of the domestic resistance. He decreed the amalgamation [of the different resistance groups], brought the domestic resistance to 'turn in its arms', and threw the resistance fighters into the regular army's struggle against Germany.

It is more than obvious that the state, the state apparatus – not merely the embryonic state apparatus created in London and then in Algiers, but also the state apparatus that had stayed behind in France and carried out collaborationist policies – played a crucial part in De Gaulle's political scheme for saving the bourgeois class as a class. It is more than clear that the mechanisms of these apparatuses, which were identical in London and Vichy, facilitated matters. That De Gaulle succeeded in realizing his plan only by playing on the traditional 'values' of the state apparatus, that is to say (besides, and over and above, patriotism, which inevitably sowed division), duty, discipline, obedience to the state and its representatives, hierarchy, 'service to the nation' and 'public service' – in other words, by *separating*, as far as possible, the state apparatus from the most pressing problems of the class struggle; and that De Gaulle successfully brought off this separation by relying not only on the 'structural effects' [*effets de structure*] of the state apparatus, but also on the ideology of the state with which he inculcated his agents in London, an ideology skilfully combined with patriotic demands – I do not think there can be any denying this. One can no more deny it than one can deny that the restoration of the unity of the bourgeois class, perilously divided and vulnerable to the struggle of the popular forces, was achieved thanks both to an 'intelligent' politics capable of looking far into the future and declaring that losing a battle did not mean losing the war, and also to adroit manipulation of a state apparatus which, for several years, had a peculiar feature: some of its agents were in London, while others were in France.

I would doubtless have to go into greater detail to make a more convincing argument. However, I believe that, in the light of this historic episode, which is a limit-case, we may affirm that the state apparatus, if it is to perform its function as an instrument in the service of the dominant class, must, even in the direst circumstances, *be separate from the class struggle* as fully as possible, must be as far removed from it as it can be, so that it can intervene against not just threats of popular class struggle, but also threats embodied in the forms that class struggle can take within the dominant class itself (and against a combination of both).

What makes the state the state – this is just how it is – is the fact that the state is made in order to be, as far as possible, separate from the class struggle, and in order to serve as an instrument in the hands of those who hold state power. The fact that the state 'is made for this purpose' is inscribed *in its structure*, in the state hierarchy, and in the obedience (as well as the mandatory reserve) required of all civil servants, whatever their post. This explains the exceptional situation imposed on state personnel in the military, police forces and civil service administration. Members of the army or those who exercise leading political functions have no unions and do not have the right to strike; they face draconian punishment if they do. There now exist, and have existed for some time, unions in the police and, as of recently, the judiciary; and, as of very recently, there are unions in the CRS[90] as well. But there are no unions in the 'hard core' of the state, the armed forces, the gendarmery, the anti-riot police, and so on – the repressive forces *par excellence*. And if the police have the right to strike (in exceptional circumstances), there have never been strikes in the army, the CRS, or the gendarmery. At most, there has been 'unrest', as in the days of the Résistance, in 1968, or in a few other cases in which the forces responsible for maintaining public order concluded that they had been unwisely sent into dubious battle or into conflicts too costly for them (in exceptional, extremely rare cases, the 'unrest'

was a protest against orders to carry out violent actions contrary to their conception of 'keeping the peace'). Of course, since the 1946 Constitution, civil servants have enjoyed the right to strike. However, this right does not extend to those civil servants who [in the words of the Constitution] 'exercise authority', and includes neither the army nor the forces responsible for maintaining public order (the CRS, anti-riot police and gendarmery, which, incidentally, is part of the army). Moreover, when a magistrates' union takes a progressive initiative, it is very rudely rebuffed not only by the responsible minister, but also by the high-ranking civil servants of the judiciary, who impose disciplinary measures on the 'offenders' for not respecting the 'reserve' that is mandatory for all civil servants. In difficult conjunctures, this makes it possible to apply virtually any sanction that is deemed desirable.

We have trouble imagining the 'exceptional situation' imposed on the state and its agents. For we tend to cast a veil over the 'duties' of soldiers, the CRS, the gendarmes, magistrates and high-ranking civil servants said to 'exercise authority' – that is, the 'hard core' of the state, the kernel that possesses and contains [*détient et contient*] the physical force that the state can mobilize in its interventions, as well as its 'political' force – in order to consider only secondary phenomena, those that come into play in the strikes and demonstrations of civil servants employed in the 'public service' sector, from teachers to postmen, railway workers and others with 'civil service' jobs. Moreover, we tend to take the demonstrations staged by certain magistrates, teachers, and so on as open forms of class struggle, when we should, at the very least, question the tendency and effects of some of these demonstrations.

I am thinking here of what Marx says about the factory inspectors, who were much more 'advanced' than our modern labour inspectors (I have in mind modern labour inspectors in general, not the remarkable individual cases), and of their denunciations of the length of the working day, which was inhuman at the time. Their efforts were crowned with success when the bourgeois English state established the ten-hour day in 1850. This measure, a result of the workers' class struggle, met with fierce resistance from a section of the English industrial bourgeoisie, and was imposed by the bourgeois English

state. Yet Marx showed that it actually served the interests of the English capitalist bourgeoisie by protecting its workforce – that is, the health and reproduction of its labour-power. And, after the passage of this measure, regarded as scandalous by most capitalists, there appeared bourgeois studies (quoted by Marx) which proved that, in ten hours of work, workers employed full-time *produced more* than they had in twelve or fifteen hours, since fatigue had diminished their total output to a level lower than that attained in a ten-hour day.[91]

That is what the state is: an apparatus capable of taking measures against the will of a part or even a majority of the bourgeoisie in order to defend the bourgeoisie's 'general interests' as the dominant class. And that is why the state must be separate. It was by mobilizing the nature of the state, its separation, and the values that underwrote this separation (above all, 'public service' and refraining from political activity) that the English bourgeois state was able to impose the law on the ten-hour day, or that De Gaulle was able to rally – in the name of State, Nation and Fatherland – a state military force strong enough to gain him Allied recognition as President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic (= of the French Republican State), and that he was able to milk his legitimacy for all it was worth, in every field and on every question.[92]

But this confronts us with a strange paradox. How are we to think the fact that the state is an instrument, hence 'separate', yet is simultaneously the instrument which the dominant class uses to ensure and perpetuate its domination? To ensure it: the state must be powerful. To perpetuate it: the state must endure so that the conditions of exploitation will endure as well.

There is no contradiction here – or, rather, there would be no contradiction if the state were purely and simply an instrument completely isolated from the class struggle. But if it is 'separate' from the class struggle, that is precisely because this 'separation' does not go without saying and is not brought about without effort, the proof being the whole set of measures that the state has to take with regard to the various categories of its agents – politicians, members of the armed forces, police, magistrates and others – in order to guarantee this 'separation'. These include all the measures of compartmentalization

of tasks, and all the measures of hierarchization – which, moreover, vary from apparatus to apparatus, but always have one thing in common, a strict definition of responsibility – as well as all the measures pertaining to duties, service, mandatory reserve, and so on.

It is by no means certain, as I have just shown, that all these measures are intended merely to 'separate' the state from the effects or contagion of the struggle of the working class and the masses (it should never be forgotten that the great majority of civil servants, including those in the 'forces responsible for keeping the peace', are of peasant, working-class, or popular origin, as Gramsci very clearly pointed out). These measures may also be intended to 'separate' the state from the forms of division that can arise within the dominant class, from the intrigues of certain groups, or even from practices completely foreign to 'the spirit of public service' that is supposed to hold sway among the agents of the state, and usually does, notwithstanding a few scandals (which are rare in France and more frequent elsewhere; consider the Lockheed scandals[93] that have occurred throughout the Western world).

If, however, we take all these facts into account, it is clear that the 'state instrument', 'state apparatus', or state *tout court* is not neutral, but terribly biased in favour of the ruling class. Officially, to be sure, it 'does not engage in politics', as the bourgeois ideology of the state proclaims. The state does not engage in politics, for, we are told, it is not partisan; it stands 'above the classes' and merely attends to the nation's business, everyone's business, objectively and fairly. Or, if you like, it has a politics, but it is the politics of 'public service'. It is precisely this ideology with which the state inculcates its agents, whatever post they hold.

Marx was the first to expose this mystification: *the state is indeed 'separate', but so that it can be a class state* that best serves the interests of the dominant class. In fact, all its higher-ranking agents are avowed, tried-and-tested champions of the interests of the dominant class. The head of state maintains the unity of the state and steers state policy [*politique*]. He is part of the political apparatus of the state, with the government and his ministries, which like to shelter behind the technical nature of the issues and their own technical competence in

order to mask the politics that they implement, and serve the higher interests of the dominant class. The vast majority of higher-ranking civil servants, whether politicians, military men, or police officials, belong to the big bourgeoisie by background or career. Moreover, even if hierarchy and responsibility, state secret and state reserve are the principles of the functioning of the state, it is so complex today that by the time we arrive at a counter at the post office, national railway or national health service, we have long since lost sight of *the class politics* that govern all our administrative apparatuses from afar, yet imperiously. We may well have the impression that we are dealing with 'formalities', which are, it is true, complicated, but which could be simplified, and are 'natural'.

What could be more natural than buying a book of bus tickets or a monthly Underground pass? A protest movement has sprung up, precisely, around the Underground pass; it contests the reasons given for raising its price. Moreover, because money is at stake, one does not have any impression at all that one is dealing with a 'natural formality' when one finds oneself at the tax office, any more than when one has to bear the brunt of the terrible indirect taxes that tap the surplus-value in the wallets of the lower classes (the rate is 17.5 per cent in France!), with the result that the heaviest tax burden falls on the most disadvantaged. They do not, after being exploited at work, find it 'natural' to have to pay, in addition to their income taxes (on which a minister can pretend to make a few concessions in favour of the old and the poor), a draconian tax on bread and milk, to say nothing of clothes and popular consumer goods.

The state is a class state by virtue of its policies [*politique*], as anyone can understand. But it is tied to the dominant class by way of its high-ranking and middle-ranking civil servants – directly tied to it, for these agents of the state are either big bourgeois or are bourgeois by conviction. And since these high-ranking civil servants have the others in their grip, thanks to the hierarchical state system, the whole system of responsibility and reserve, the whole system of exceptions that supposedly put matters 'above class struggle' – constitutionally, at least, and in actual fact in decisive instances (the army, the police, the CRS, the gendarmery, the Secret Services, the prisons, etc.) – we may

legitimately affirm that the state is 'separate from the class struggle' in order the better to intervene in it.

There are contradictions in the state apparatus. The army does not work the way the police do: in some countries, it has political opinions and can translate them into acts; in others, it is the police, official or unofficial, who control everything. In still others – France, for example – the Finance Ministry occupies an exorbitant position and exercises exorbitant control. All this is 'in the order of things'. A state is complex. As everyone knows, its contradictions can serve as a springboard for the intentions or ambitions of certain fractions of the bourgeoisie; there have even been studies of this. Finally, it is more than obvious that these contradictions can be exacerbated by the class struggle in general – even, and above all (this is what interests us here), the class struggle of the workers and the broad masses, and by its contagiousness, which can help to touch off strikes in certain civil service administrations, and, of course, in industries or companies in the public sector. But no one has ever seriously claimed that the structure and unity of the state apparatus – even if this apparatus has, in certain sectors, wobbled, as it were (especially during the psychodramatic absence of De Gaulle, when he went to see Massu, who 'didn't engage in politics') – were ever, even in 1968, seriously undermined. The police, CRS, anti-riot police and gendarmery held firm, very firm indeed, as those who demonstrated on the barricades can testify; they did not fire a single shot (see the Memoirs of Police Chief Grimaud).[94] As for the army, it left its tanks parked under the trees of Rambouillet Forest, not making a show of force the better to quell the rioting.

To leap from this to the conclusion that the state 'is by definition traversed by class struggle' is to engage in wishful thinking. It is to take certain effects – profound effects, to be sure – or certain traces of the class struggle (bourgeois and proletarian) for the class struggle itself. But I maintain, precisely, that the state, the core of the state – which comprises its physical, political, police and administrative forces of intervention – is, so far as possible, constructed in such a way as not to be affected, or even 'traversed', by the class struggle. That it manages not to be, and manages very well indeed, not only

in France, but also in Italy – where, since Gramsci, people have been happily developing a theory of the weakness or non-existence of the state, which seems to me to be a mistake[95] – is all too obvious. That this costs it an effort is sometimes perceptible. The fact is, however, that it succeeds, as much in the Western countries [*chez nous*] as in the USSR, and by employing, in both cases, much the same means.[96] From time to time, some (not all) agents of the state apparatus strike; but it is never those at the physical core of the state, and we can almost treat these manifestations of discontent as safety-valves or a warning system enabling a self-regulating adjustment that culminates in slogans such as 'public servants should be paid higher salaries', or 'administrative services must be upgraded so as to improve relations with the public, and administrative formalities must be simplified'. [Valéry] Giscard [d'Estaing] himself, the head of state, excels at producing these soothing phrases, which, whatever one may say, have their effect.

All this is a way of repeating that *Marx's and Lenin's formula to the effect that the state is an 'instrument', and is therefore separate from the class struggle the better to serve the interests of the dominant class, is a powerful formula.* There can be no question of abandoning it.

The same goes – since we are still dealing with terminology – for the expression 'apparatus' or 'machine'.

10. But Why is the State a Machine?

In his Sverdlov University lecture on the state,[97] Lenin employs, with extraordinary insistence, just two terms. He does not say 'institution', 'organization' or 'body'; he says *apparatus* and *machine.* And he insists even more stubbornly on the fact that this 'machine' is 'special' and that this 'apparatus' is 'special', without, however, spelling out in what sense they are 'special'. We shall therefore have to try to interpret these terms, which must have a precise meaning, because Lenin, who does not succeed in stating it (any more than Marx before him), clings to them as if they were the last possible word on the subject of the state.

We would not be betraying Lenin if we said that if the state is a '*special*' apparatus and a '*special*' machine, then they are unique

entities, and therefore *unlike the others*: that is, unlike what we find in the rest of 'society' or of 'civil society'. Thus they are not simple institutions, like the Council of State [*Conseil d'État*];[98] they are not associations, like the Parent–Teacher Association; they are not Leagues, like the League for Human Rights; they are not organizations, like the political parties or the churches; nor are they bodies [*organismes*], a term which is still more vague. The state is a special machine in the sense that it is made of a different metal. That is to say (since all thinking about the modern state is also haunted by the metal of tanks, machine guns and submachine guns), the state has a different structure, is made of different 'stuff', has an altogether different texture. We are thus led back to what we said a moment ago in order to show that the state is indeed 'separate' and an 'instrument'.

There remain the terms 'apparatus' and 'machine'.

If I dwell on the terminology, it is because Marx and Engels did too, with incredible obstinacy, as if certain words which they used for the state, and only for the state, were *indices of a concept* that they were unable to formulate in any other way, but wanted at all costs to point out. 'Apparatus' and 'machine' are essentially (to the best of my knowledge of Marx's terminology, at any rate) reserved for the state, something that is itself surprising: thus Marx never – absolutely never – talks about the 'machine of production' or the productive apparatus, terms that today are in general use (and, what is more, rather neutral). What is significant, over and above this exception, is, in view of this exception, the pair of terms *apparatus–machine*. What does it, if not mean, then at least indicate?

'Apparatus' [*appareil*], which gestures in the direction of 'pomp' [*apparat*] (the outward display of a thing, with all its trappings), means, according to the dictionary, 'an ensemble of elements which work together to the same end, forming a whole'. The state apparatus may well display a diversity of apparatuses (repressive, political and ideological); what defines them as state apparatuses is the fact that they all work together to 'the same end'. This holds for the state whenever it is defined as an instrument. An instrument (which can comprise different elements) exists by virtue of an end: in the present case, maintaining the power of the dominant class. But the dictionary

definition also says that, in the 'ensemble of elements', none is *superfluous*. On the contrary, all are perfectly well adapted to their end, in so far as all are parts of the articulated whole designated as the 'apparatus': here, the state. This therefore presupposes a sort of mechanism in which all the parts, all the wheels and cogs, work together to the same end, which is obviously external to the apparatus; if it were not, the apparatus would not be 'separate'. This externality seems pronounced when we think of expressions such as 'apparatus of torture,' or even 'artificial limb' [*appareil de prothèse*].

Does the idea of *mechanism* [*mécanique*], which is suggested by the fact that all the parts work to achieve a single (external) end, not simply evoke the idea of a machine – or, to cite another of Marx's terms, of machinery? (Here it should be noted that the German *Maschinerie* does not have exactly the same sense as the French word.) I do not think so, and would like to advance a hypothesis.

Let us first note that Marx and Lenin carefully avoid two words. Not only do they never discuss the state in terms of a *body*; they also never discuss it in terms of a *mechanism*. 'Machine', then, wins out over 'mechanism'. Did Marx and Lenin mean by this that the state is an enormous machine, but one so complicated that, although we can see the political effect produced by it, we are unable to grasp its intricate mechanisms? Perhaps. Did Marx and Lenin mean to say, when they described the state as a 'machine', that it works all by itself, as some machines do (for example, the steam engine)? But as anyone who lived in the age of the steam engine and Fourier's or Carnot's laws knew, no machine works all by itself. Anyone who said so was using a metaphor to insist on the 'autonomous' or 'automotive' nature of the state. We know enough about the state, however, to be able to say that the separation of the state has nothing to do with autonomy. Marx and Lenin never talk about the autonomy of the state.

In the seventeenth century – in, for example, Bossuet – we also find the expression 'great machine of the state', although this language is obviously marked by the state of the knowledge of Bossuet's time: pomp and splendour are associated here with the idea of mechanical movement, akin to that of the 'mechanical' machines of the period. Again, ballistic and other types of 'war machines' have existed since

Antiquity. Machine: '*a system of component parts* [*corps*] *that transform one form of work into another*', whether manpower or gravity. In the seventeenth century, a machine transformed a particular form of motion into another; one was always in the realm of motion, the motive force being that of a man or an animal, or else of gravity. But what of the nineteenth century, during which, beginning in 1824 (when Marx was twelve),[99] Carnot studied 'caloric-engines' [*machines à feu*] and made some surprising discoveries about the 'steam-engines, that is, caloric-engines' on which all English capitalism was based?

Marx discusses the steam engine, the machine *tout court*, and the machine tool in the chapter on relative surplus-value in Volume One of *Capital*. He had closely read Babbage, a competent technician who, however, did not have a theoretical turn of mind. Babbage wrote, in 1832: 'the union of all these simple instruments, set in motion by a single motor, constitutes a machine'.[100] Marx repeatedly affirms that it is not the steam engine but the machine tool that revolutionized production: the machine which sets a whole series of tools in rapid motion, whereas the human hand can manipulate only one, and slowly at that.

Marx is so thoroughly haunted by the relation '*motor–transmission* and *working machine*' that he gives short shrift to motors: 'The motor mechanism acts as the driving force of the mechanism as a whole. *It either generates its own motive power*, like the steam-engine, the caloric-engine, the electro-magnetic machine, etc., or it receives its impulse from some already existing natural force ... the transmitting mechanism ... regulates the motion, changes its form where necessary, as for instance from linear to circular, and distributes it among the working machines'.[101]

Since, thereafter, it is simply a question of transmitting and transforming this motion, everything depends on the motor of the new 'machine' known as the caloric- (or heat-) engine. The dictionary says, implacably: 'machine: a usually complex manufactured object designed to transform energy and to utilize this transformation ("machine" is, in principle, distinguished from "apparatus" and "tool", which only utilize energy)'.

If this is indeed the pertinent distinction, 'machine' adds something essential to 'apparatus': to the idea of the simple utilization of a given

amount of energy, it adds that of the *transformation of energy* (of one type of energy into another: for example, of caloric into kinetic energy). In the case of an apparatus, one kind of energy is sufficient; *in the case of a machine, we have to do with at least two types of energy, and, above all, the transformation of one into the other.*

Unless the state is more than just a 'bludgeon', and cannot be appropriately defined as an 'instrument', either – a term that is not false, but too general – I do not see why, for a whole century, Marx and Lenin would have gone to such lengths to talk not just about an apparatus, but also about a 'machine'. Something of the basic meaning of the term must be at stake in their truly ferocious insistence on it (which they left unexplained). When one seizes, in this fashion, on one or two words, both of which, in the case to hand, tend in the same direction, the second enriching the first by adding a crucial stipulation – when one clings to them without being able to say why, this is because one has touched on a point that is both vital and obscure.

To my knowledge, there is only one other instance of this kind of ferocious, and, at the same time, partially blind terminological insistence in Marx and Lenin: the word 'dictatorship' in the expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. In the latter case, however, it is easier to find the explanation in Marx and Lenin, albeit often between the lines, so that we have to put the text to work upon itself to bring out its meaning.

11. Why the Dictatorship of the Proletariat?

I think that it must forthrightly be said – now that, provisionally, the guns seem to have fallen silent on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat,[102] [***] its solemn 'abandonment' by the PCF and the PCE, [and] its surreptitious abandonment by the PCI, and so on – that Marx and Lenin are not always clear on this point, and that the ambiguities which they have bequeathed to us have had an extremely important role to play, in view of the prestige of their authors and the religious devotion of their successors (when what was in question was not simply their sordid, unspoken material interests). We therefore need to discuss this ambiguity.

Marx manifestly inherited the expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the corresponding idea (I do not say concept, because the matter is not clear) from Blanqui. He borrowed it after the failure of the European revolutions of 1848, after the June massacres in France. We have already seen a trace of it in the 1852 letter in which he affirmed that his basic accomplishment was to have conceived of the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat (not the discovery of the classes and their struggle). A borrowing is just a borrowing: incorporated into a new context, it should normally shed the connotations conferred on it by the old one, and take on a fixed, unambiguous meaning. Unfortunately for us, this was not quite how things happened.

Marx, and then, in particular, Lenin (but Lenin had the excuse of having to lead a day-to-day struggle under appalling conditions) knew what they were after when they used the word 'dictatorship': they wanted to catch people's attention with a provocative term that was on a par with their discoveries and their thought. To say 'dictatorship', as Lenin often repeated, is to evoke a state of affairs that is beyond all legality, irreducible to the laws, and, in a certain sense, even more powerful than the laws. (Let us take 'laws' to mean, in the most natural sense, the existing civil and political right [*droit*]: the constitution, and, if it is parliamentary, the parliamentary constitution in a given country.) The fact is that the vocabulary of the day contained no word that captures, in all its force, what Marx and Lenin were trying to express.

Now the whole question and the whole ambiguity can be summed up as follows: what is this 'beyond the laws' that is irreducible to the laws and, at the same time, more powerful than the laws, which it encompasses? Is it a *political* form, a form of government over men of the kind that has been seen in history, such as the 'Roman dictatorship' (a provisional dictatorship, the eventuality of which had been provided for), the dictatorship of the Convention (legally provided for as a state of emergency), or the many political dictatorships familiar to us, born of the violence, peaceful or bloody, of a successful *coup d'état*? In many cases, it must be admitted, *Lenin himself identified the dictatorship of the proletariat with violent government* by the representatives of

the proletariat, or, quite simply, the leaders of the Party and the Party itself, implementing political measures that violated or suspended the established laws.

I do not say this in order to criticize the statesman Lenin for dissolving the Constituent Assembly without due process of law, for outlawing and prosecuting the Social Revolutionaries, or for banning all political parties except the Bolshevik Party, and so on. Lenin suspended the constitution and governed by decree rather than by voted laws, but he had serious reasons for doing so in a period in which the power of the soviets was under attack from foreign powers that were, inside the borders of the USSR itself, aiding and abetting the forces of the far Right, who had cast all restraint to the winds and were perpetrating unspeakable barbarities. In this case, anyone who fails to opt for the extreme course of suspending the political laws in order to save the revolutionary state, and of taking all the radical measures that the situation calls for, himself falls victim to barbarity and chooses defeat: not only his own, but also that of the revolutionary masses as a whole. For, as far as I know, there was nothing 'legal' about the 'Allied' interventions on Soviet soil and the military operations of the counterrevolutionaries. Lenin simply responded to the illegal horror of the invaders with the only weapons he had: not just by suspending the laws, but also by mobilizing the people to save the state of the soviets.

My question lies elsewhere. *The question has to do with Lenin's definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat* when he discussed it, and he discussed it often, very often: for he thought – and he was right – that this business was at the heart of the drama of the Russian Revolution. But Lenin – like Marx before him, although this is infinitely clearer in Lenin – plainly wavered between two conceptions: a first conception, which seems to me to be correct and should be recognized as such; and a second conception, towards which he usually, and, under the pressure of events, increasingly inclined. The second conception seems to me to be wrong.

In a word, the incorrect definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat consists in taking the word 'dictatorship' in the *political* sense – to be very precise, in the sense of a *political regime*, that is, a political

government over men that operates 'outside the limits of the law' and thus puts itself 'above the law', imposing a violent and arbitrary will. Contempt for the law and the exercise of arbitrary violence against individuals (even if it is in the interests of a class or party): that is what the dictatorship of the proletariat would come down to. Following the violence of the revolution (which is also above the law), the violence of a dictatorial political government, exercised in the name of the proletariat, thus seems to be on a continuum with violent revolution, and, therefore, to be natural. Since revolution can be carried out only in violation of the established laws (which serve the bourgeois class), and, consequently, can be achieved only by violence, the government that issues from the revolution, which sets out to destroy the bourgeois state and install a revolutionary state, is, naturally, the direct heir to this violence, and must be, if it is to smash the order of the bourgeois state and found the revolutionary state. Such is the 'logic' of the propositions that follow one from the next in this conception. But they stand up on only one condition: *that we construe the word 'dictatorship' to mean a regime of violent political government*, governing by decrees and by coercion, outside the limits of any established law.

Lenin gave in to this 'logic' in many different passages of his writings and speeches. The fact that the situation required him to fall back, in actual practice, on a regime of 'political' dictatorship, to suspend the laws, to govern by decree and resort to the use of force, certainly did inflect his thinking – or, at all events, his terminology – in a direction that was, at the time, clear to everyone: dictatorship = political government by coercion, with the suspension, if not of all law, then, at least, of many laws. Let us imagine that Lenin had had the time, a few years later, to review the harsh texts of this terrible period: he would doubtless have said: 'but it is impossible to take them out of context! but, at the time, I had to *exaggerate*, to bend the stick in the other direction in order to straighten it out…'. He would once again have held, as he in fact often did in the actual practice of these texts, that one word (a very weak one: an appeal to the political context) could explain and excuse another; and he would have paid no attention to the weight carried by words uttered by someone with his authority. As everyone knows, Lenin suffered from that type of

blindness. The fact is – and there is no excuse when it comes to theory, or, in any case, no excuse of this sort – that he pushed the ambiguity we have evoked in the direction of the wrong meaning.

Yet the means required to conceive of another interpretation of dictatorship were to be found in Marx and Engels, and even in Lenin himself: for what is in question here is *the dictatorship, not of a government or regime, but of a class*. In Marx's thought, the dictatorship of a class has nothing to do with political dictatorship or a dictatorial form of government. There is another word in our authors – not hegemony, which has been contaminated by Gramsci and his authority, but class *domination* – that is a thousand times better than 'dictatorship'. It occurs in the *Manifesto*, which says that the proletariat should 'raise itself to the position of the dominant class'. Domination, dominant class, dominant instrument: 'domination' is an excellent term. Why did Marx drop it and replace it with class dictatorship? Was it under Blanqui's influence after the major defeats of 1848? That is a rather thin explanation. Was it that he wanted to set himself apart from the crowd by using as strong an expression as he could? That is more likely. Marx had a taste for extremes, even for provocation. The fact is [that] '*class domination*' *was replaced by* '*class dictatorship*'. This did not hold across the board, incidentally, but it did hold for the proletariat.

If we agree to use the term 'class domination', we find ourselves on firmer ground. In a class society such as capitalist society, there exist dominant classes (the big landowners and the bourgeoisie) and dominated classes. What is class domination? It is not restricted to political government over men, which can take different forms: monarchy by divine right, Cæsarism, constitutional monarchy, the parliamentary republic, or, later, fascist dictatorship. Class domination encompasses the whole set of economic, political and ideological forms of domination – that is to say, of class exploitation and oppression. Within this set, the political forms represent a subset of variable size which is, however, always subordinate to the whole set of forms. The state then becomes the apparatus or machine that serves as an instrument for class domination and its perpetuation.

The expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' or 'class domination of the proletariat' now acquires its full meaning. If we say that every

class society presupposes class domination in the sense just stated, then the revolution that is the tendency of capitalist society will modify the relationship of class domination in the sense of an inversion (although matters will be more complicated in actual fact): the domination of the bourgeois class will necessarily give way to that of the working class and its allies. But, here again, proletarian class domination cannot be reduced to the exercise of dictatorial political power by, say, a party representing the new class or a coalition representing the working class and its allies. *The class domination of the proletariat can only designate the whole set of economic, political and ideological forms by means of which the proletariat has to impose its politics on the old dominant, exploiting class.* It is perfectly possible that this will come about non-violently, if the exploiting classes consent to what amounts, ultimately, to a restructuring of social relations. Moreover, if the former exploiters overstep the new laws or circumvent them, they can be compelled to respect these new laws not by force, but by law. Obviously, if they succeed in precipitating a foreign intervention in order to put themselves back in the saddle, or in exploiting discontent to tendentious ends in a difficult period, going so far as to provoke acts of armed violence, the revolutionary authorities will clearly be obliged to resist by employing force, as a last resort, after exhausting all other arguments; but, in any event, this by no means settles the question of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', or of the class domination of the proletariat. If it is to exist, this domination must exist *in the forms of production* (nationalizations combined with a more or less extensive market sector, self-management, workers' control over production, and so on), *in political forms* (councils, represented in a National Council by their delegates) and *in ideological forms* (what Lenin called cultural revolution).

In all this, the question of violence – if the word is taken to mean physical violence, the intervention of the armed forces to settle political and economic problems, and so on – occupies a subordinate and always transitory place. This is so clearly the case that Marx and Engels, and even Lenin, always allowed for the possibility of a 'peaceful' and 'legal' transition to socialism by electoral means. It is common knowledge that Engels expected the German Social Democracy to realize this

possibility. It is all a matter of the balance of power, and therefore of the conjuncture. This has never happened to date: so what? New conjunctures can suddenly emerge. Moreover, even if the revolution should be accomplished, in an extremely tense situation, with a degree of violence or, quite simply, by violent means, this does not predetermine the sequel, unless violent revolution is taken to entail a definite commitment to violence.

The working class and its allies must [*doivent*] become the dominant class, and, in order to do so, must become the dominant class across the whole set of economic, political and ideological forms. This is not a moral 'duty' [*devoir*], but a tendency inscribed in class relations.[103] If the revolutionary coalition fails to become master of these forms of domination, it will find itself in a very precarious position; it will be at the mercy of a revolt, or else compelled to take arbitrary measures that will send it hurtling headlong towards social forms that may be new and unprecedented, but have very little in common with socialist perspectives. Lenin understood this very well: he contrasted the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, as the dictatorship of the few, with the dictatorship of the proletariat, that of the immense majority of the people, arguing *that the political form which corresponded to this dictatorship (or domination) was mass democracy* (by no means dictatorship). In the repetitive weave of the words imposed by the tradition and constantly revived by its greatest representatives, so that these words are taken at face value by almost everybody, one always surprises one's interlocutors when one says that, for Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat is democracy in the broadest sense, that is, mass democracy 'taken to the limit'. They do not understand. And it must be granted that they are not altogether in the wrong.

For *one cannot say, without further ado, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is the broadest possible democracy.* This expression is incorrect, because the sequence of words in it (dictatorship ... is democracy) sows confusion; so abrupt a short cut is unacceptable. It is as if one were to say: Continental Europe is the most radiant Greece! In the formula 'the dictatorship of the proletariat is the broadest possible democracy', critically important words are omitted; their absence drives meaning and acts (yes, acts) down a catastrophic short cut, or into a dangerous

cul-de-sac. One must say, rather: 'the dictatorship of the proletariat includes among its forms of domination – and thus takes as its objective – the broadest possible democracy'. Or: 'the political form of the dictatorship of the proletariat must be the broadest possible democracy'. The second of these two formulations assigns the political form its proper place; it does not reduce all forms of domination (what takes place in production is, let us recall, determinant in the last instance) to the political form alone. What is more, it by no means decrees in advance that the form of political domination must be the naked force of dictatorship.

It will be objected that in formulas such as: 'the dictatorship of the proletariat *must* take, as its political form, the broadest possible mass democracy', class dictatorship or class domination is defined in terms of a 'must' [*devoir*, which also means 'duty'] that in no sense judges the facts in advance, and can even be a way of excusing them on the plea that 'the circumstances' prevented the realization of this 'must'. For example – and we have never been loath to use such arguments – the 'backwardness of the USSR', the excessive 'power' of the Soviet state and 'gelatinous' nature of Soviet civil society (Gramsci), the absence of a 'democratic tradition' in Russia, and so on. But it is playing on words to believe that the matter comes down to establishing what the class domination of the proletariat 'must' be, as if what were at stake were a moral obligation. In fact, the word 'must' designates what Marx and Lenin always considered to be *the form of existence of a dominant tendency*. Like any tendency in Marx, it is internally 'countered' by causes that tend to thwart its realization and call for the presence, inscribed in its very conditions of existence, of a force capable of fostering its realization: the organization of the political class struggle of the working class, the Party. (We are putting all this in the singular for the sake of convenience, although we should in fact speak of organizations in the plural, and mention the popular allies of the working class.)

Clearly, for Marx, Lenin and Mao, what is known as 'subjective' (that is, both theoretical and organizational) capacity, the quality of the organization, of its theory and line, *is therefore determinant* when it comes to judiciously combating the 'causes that counter' the dominant tendency of the process of class struggle, and facilitating the realization of

this 'tendency'. It follows that no fatality presides over the term of the process. Quite the opposite is true. Whether the tendency is realized, or, on the contrary, whether some 'monstrous' result results from a struggle conducted without regard for 'the causes that counter' the development of the tendency, depends on the theoretical, organizational and political capacities *of the Party*, even in its most insignificant practices. These causes lie first and foremost with the bourgeois class struggle, but they can also lie with the Party – with its poor organization, absence of theoretical vision, failure to produce a concrete analysis of the concrete situation, unsatisfactory political practices, inability to seize the 'decisive link' (whether 'the weakest' or 'the strongest'), and so on.

When the 'causes that counter the objective tendency' prevail, and they can prevail as a result of the weaknesses of the Party itself, then all is lost – not, perhaps, for ever, but for a very long time, during which there can reign unprecedented, virtually unclassifiable societal forms which, while continuing to invoke 'socialism' because that has become routine, or in order to deceive the popular masses, are simply bastard or monstrous forms. Aristotle, whom Marx held in such high esteem, wrote, among other things, a treatise on monsters – biological monsters, of course. Marx himself suggests, in the closing lines of the 1859 Preface, that history can give birth to monstrous historical forms, and that 'chance' plays a role here. All this is consonant with the logic of a body of thought that has nothing to do – the famous lines in the same Preface notwithstanding – with a 'must' [*devoir*] which, if it is plainly not a moral duty, is none the less defined in function of an End, a model of the mode of production that is to be attained, and 'normally' must or should be attained, in the 'progressive' succession of modes of production that are complacently and rather too facilely listed by Marx.

We have to come to see, once and for all, that Marx's thought contains, on the question of historical necessity, extremely original suggestions that have nothing to do with the mechanism of inevitability, or with the inevitability of destiny or the hierarchical order of the modes of production. We made a first approach to this idea in our discussion of the way Marx exposes his ideas twice, in a 'topographical' spatial arrangement, in order to indicate both the extremely broad

range of their theoretical validity and the extremely narrow conditions of their politico-historical efficacy. This idea is reinforced when we observe the way he thinks, with respect to the definition of the class domination of the proletariat and its allies, the 'necessity' of the seizure of power and its future: *in terms of a dialectic of the tendency*, necessarily entangled 'with countervailing causes' (spawned, first and foremost, by the tendency itself), in which it is both possible and necessary to intervene politically in order to make possible the realization of this tendency. *Without this 'intervention', the tendency will never be automatically realized.* If this 'intervention' is inept, the worst is to be feared: the mediocrity of a 'historical compromise' whose variants can be infinite, and which can culminate in horrors. All that is required is that the situation of imperialism lend a helping hand.

Let us sum up. If we untangle all the theoretical, political, semantic and other difficulties in the texts of Marx and, especially, Lenin – difficulties that all too often encumber these texts and turn them against the 'general line' of a body of thought which has to be given its coherence if we are to *think* what it *designates* – we discover, precisely, a coherent body of thought.

The famous expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' helped Marx, overwhelmed by the bloody defeat of the 1848 revolutions throughout Europe, to think an undeniable reality: that of the *class dictatorship* which is inevitable in any class society. It helped him to think another reality as well: that any working-class and mass revolution, however convincing, will end in disaster if the proletariat and its allies are incapable of ensuring the absolute condition for its survival: class domination over the old classes by the new classes grouped around the proletariat. This domination, in order to be precisely *this domination*, must be a domination exercised in the forms of production, politics and ideology taken together. *The political forms* of this domination cannot – barring exceptional cases, and even then only provisionally – have anything at all in common with the forms of a government which is 'above the law' and 'knows no law', and is therefore violent and dictatorial. The forms are 'normally' the forms of the broadest possible mass democracy, in which democracy 'is taken to the limit'. All this constitutes a coherent whole, and is, moreover,

clear. But then why were matters not always as clearly stated? It was not easy to state them this clearly from the outset. Gripping, lapidary formulas were required to gain a hearing and ensure understanding. And – let us not hesitate to add – neither Marx nor Lenin had a well-controlled conception of the semantic effects of the expressions he used, expressions uttered by individuals who held positions of authority over the movement and the organization.

12. Back to the Machine of the State

Be that as it may, we shall soon be convinced that this long detour through the dictatorship of the proletariat was absolutely necessary in order to clarify the key terms in Marx's and Lenin's definition of the state, especially the term 'machine'.

A long sentence of Marx's, tucked away at the end of Volume Three of *Capital* ['The Genesis of Capitalist Ground-Rent'], will put us on the right path, and show us his *absolute limit.*

Marx is investigating the presuppositions for capitalist ground rent. He pauses over an examination of the conditions under which 'the self-sustaining labourer' can earn a surplus over his necessary means of subsistence; can, in other words, produce what will become 'profit' in the capitalist mode of production. This 'self-sustaining labourer' is, as often in Marx, a purely hypothetical entity that can take a number of different forms: here, that of the serf and then the peasant community. What is decisive, however, is the fact that Marx, from the outset, mobilizes the category of 'reproduction', which Volume One usually brackets out in order to focus on the theory of value and surplus-value. Here Marx reveals the core of his thinking:

> That the serf's product must be sufficient in this case to replace his conditions of labour as well as his subsistence is a condition that remains the same in all modes of production, since it is not the result of this specific form but a natural condition of all continuing and reproductive labour in general, of any continuing production, which is always also reproduction, i.e. also reproduction of its own conditions of operation.[104]

Reproduction is thus the condition for all 'continuing' production, hence for the persistence through time of any mode of production. Marx remarks:

> It is clear, *too*, that in all forms where the actual worker himself remains the 'possessor' of the means of production and the conditions of labour needed for the production of his own means of subsistence, the property relationship must *appear* at the same time [Althusser's translation reads *doit fatalement se manifester*] as a direct relationship of domination and servitude,[105]

which is the 'embryo' of a political relationship. It is curious that Marx says 'too', which would ultimately not matter much if it were not that he says nothing more *about reproduction* in this sentence (which immediately follows the one quoted a moment ago). The political relation then appears – both in principle and in its embryonic form – as a more or less direct manifestation of the property relation, which is assimilated to the productive relation. This is not, to be sure, false, but it is striking that, in this definition, Marx makes nothing of what he has just said about *reproduction*. And he maintains his silence throughout the famous passage that occurs a page later:

> The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relationship of domination and servitude, as this grows directly out of production itself and reacts back on it in turn, as a determinant element. On this is based the entire configuration of the *economic community arising* from the actual relations of production, and hence also its *specific political form*. It is in each case the *direct relationship* of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers – a relation whose particular form *always corresponds* [Althusser's translation reads *correspond naturellement*] *to a certain level of development of the type and manner of labour*, and hence *to its social productive power* – in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the *entire* social edifice, and hence also *the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence*, in short, the *specific form of state* in each case. This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same in its main conditions – from displaying endless variations and gradations in its appearance as the result of innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural conditions, racial relations, historical influences acting from outside, etc., and these can be understood by analysing these empirically given circumstances.[106]

Thus Marx defends the fundamental thesis that the secret of the state, 'the *hidden* basis of the *entire* social edifice', is to be sought in the '*direct relationship* of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers', hence in the relation of production or exploitation. He insists: the state is the political form taken by every form of dependence and domination, and is itself merely a *manifestation* of the relation of production. He insists: this 'secret' is hidden beneath and in society.

Let us leave two questions aside: that of the 'correspondence' between such-and-such a form of dependence, hence such-and-such a political form, and the 'level of social productive power', a formula that may seem to echo those of the 1859 Preface; and that of the variations which concern not, as one might expect, the *forms of the state* (passed over in silence), but the *forms of the base*, that is, the mode of production, whose 'variations' are subject to countless natural and social influences. Let us note, to begin with, that Marx says the '*specific* form of state', giving us to understand that each mode of production has its own peculiar state; in other words, that the state as such is a specific reality – a 'special' reality, as Lenin will say, frequently repeating the word.

In any event, what we have here is an outline of a theory of the state that puts the state in virtually 'direct' relation (the adjective is Marx's) with the property *relation*, hence (here too, we have an equation) with the *productive* relation characteristic of a given mode of production: and Marx means not just the existence of the state, but its form as well. The existence of the state is, indeed, merely a *manifestation* of the relation between lord and serf, which is itself the manifestation of the relation of production via the (immediate!) mediation of the 'property relation'. *This implies that the state issues directly from the relation of production, as its manifestation.* Marx adds that the same

relation *also* defines the political form of the state. Let us leave aside the intermediate level, the lord/serf relationship, which is a manifestation of the relation of production, and is accordingly that of which the state is the 'political form'. Here Marx gets into trouble, in view of what he says about its direct nature, on the one hand, and, on the other, the 'mediation' of a property relation that has no effect whatsoever on the immediacy of the relation between the Relation of Production and the State. But Marx left this text in the form of a draft, after all; it was Engels who published it. In any event, this passage presents a very simple theory of the state: *the state is the 'direct' manifestation of the relation of production*, which is its 'secret'. This theory is very simple but very important, since Marx here shows that the state is rooted in the relation of exploitation, thereby demonstrating its class character. At the same time, however, this very simple and very important suggestion leaves us unsatisfied, for two reasons.

The first is that Marx says nothing here (which does not rule out his saying something elsewhere) about either the specific 'forms' of this manifestation or the 'element' in which the productive relation is manifested in the political form of the state. Thus what we have here is a theoretical deduction or theoretical genealogy in the guise of an instantaneous short cut which assumes that we know not only what the relation of production is (most of *Capital* is devoted to that question), but also what the state is. Now we have a rather good idea of[106] what the state is if we have read, say, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* – but then it becomes very hard to see how the complexity of the state and its powerful role can be reduced to this 'direct' deduction from the productive relation. The deduction of the state that Marx gives us in these few lines is rather reminiscent of the foreshortened, schematic 'deduction' of the modes of production in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, where he imprudently affirms that with the windmill you have the [***] and with the water-mill the [***].[108]

The second reason is more troubling. Marx, who has just discussed, very clearly and consciously, the crucial category of reproduction, begins speaking a new language, *regressing to a level anterior to reproduction in order to discuss the state.* I believe that this may be called one of the '*absolute limits*' which the 'Marxist theory of the state' comes up

against, before coming to a dead stop. *Neither in Marx nor in Lenin do we find*, to my knowledge – at least not in their explicit discussions of the state – *any mention of the state's function in reproduction.* Marx does discuss the role of the state in primitive accumulation and the emission of money; he also discusses the intervention of the English state in the law limiting the working day to ten hours: but *he does not envisage the state from the standpoint of the reproduction of the social (and even material) conditions of production*, hence in its relation to the continuity or perpetuation, the 'eternal nature' or 'reproduction' of the relations of production. It is easy to understand, if we do not go beyond this disappointing conception, why the theory of the State-as-Instrument should have irritated Gramsci and his modern commentators as a theory that is, taken literally, unacceptable. But the paradox is that Gramsci criticizes this theory of the state with respect to its *effects* (economism), without contributing anything at all noteworthy to it, for he, too, remains at a level anterior to reproduction. In Marx's formulas, the dimension of reproduction and the functions of the state are reduced, in derisory fashion, to those of intervention, and, ultimately, brute force.

Yet it is by taking the path of reproduction, it seems, that we can pull Marx's and Lenin's thought out of the rut in which it has been stuck for so long, and so move it beyond its 'absolute limits'. It was in following this path that I put forward certain propositions in a 1969 essay entitled 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'.[108] We shall see whether they need to be rectified and whether they can be extended. In any case, it is from this standpoint that I would like to present my hypothesis as to why Marx and Lenin held so firmly to the terms *apparatus* and, especially, *machine* in their discussions of the state.

13. Why is the State a 'Special' Machine?

Let us review the conclusions reached thus far. The state is a 'special apparatus', a 'special machine', which constitutes an 'instrument' for the dominant class in the class struggle. This 'instrument' must necessarily be 'separate' not only 'from society', not only 'from civil society', but from the class struggle, *so that* it can intervene, as fully as possible, as an 'instrument': that is, so that it can best serve, without rebelling,

the class interests of the dominant class taken as a whole, while being protected, as far as possible, from the vicissitudes of the class struggle, that of the dominant class no less than that of the dominated classes. The state is thus a class state, brought to bear in the class struggle by the dominant class, in order to dominate those it exploits and perpetuate its domination, the conditions of exploitation and oppression. If all this is true, then the question so far left in abeyance, the question that now arises, *the* question, is the question of the adjective '*special*', which Lenin repeats at least ten times in his famous 1919 lecture at Sverdlov University.[110] The state is a 'special' apparatus, a 'special machine'. What does this prodigiously insistent adjective, repeated so often that it is impossible to miss, indicate (not think, but indicate)?

To begin with, it indicates that the state is made of *a completely different metal* from all the other institutions, organizations or bodies in society – from the rest of society, in short – and that it alone has been forged out of this 'special' metal. It indicates, further, that it has a completely different function from the other social institutions or organizations.

The state does not 'produce' anything (except when there are royal manufactories or a public sector, but it is not this productive function which defines the state in that case), and has no hand in the circulation of goods (with the exception of trading societies in the public sector), although it mints the money without which there would be no circulation of goods. Yet the state, although it produces nothing, nevertheless levies taxes, with which it pays soldiers, policemen and civil servants, covers its 'public' expenditures, finances the aid that it gives the trusts, and so on; it produces nothing, but spends an enormous amount of money for which the productive masses and others are tapped through direct and, especially, indirect taxes. Furthermore, the state dispenses 'justice': it has its gendarmes, police, magistrates and prisons. It 'administers' and manages foreign policy. Thus it most definitely has a very 'special' function, a function unlike all the others. This can be demonstrated: for those who are fond of organization charts, or for the more serious, it can be demonstrated that *the state does not function like a private enterprise,* or *a Church,* or *a Party,* although a party, for its part, can 'function' like a 'state' or like 'the state', and so forth.

It must therefore be granted that, between the 'special metal' out of which the 'body of the state'[111] is made, and the very 'special', but *very precise* [way] in which this state functions, there exists a very 'special', but also *very precise* relation.

The 'body' of the state is made up of a number of apparatuses which, it will readily be agreed, do not all take the same form. To simplify, let us distinguish:

1. the apparatus of public force[112] [*l'appareil de force publique*] (or repressive apparatus), comprising the 'hard core' of the state, its forces for internal or (and) external armed intervention: the army, the various police forces, the gendarmery, the CRS and the anti-riot police, to which we may add the agents of the judiciary, the prisons with their agents, and a long list of disciplinary or paradisciplinary institutions, on the frontiers of psychiatry, medicine, psychology, teaching, and so on.
2. Next, *the political apparatus*, comprising the head of state, the governmental corps, the prefectural corps, and all the big civil service administrations, which, although they claim to provide 'public service', are merely agents for the execution of state policy [*politique*], hence a class politics [*politique*].
3. Finally, what I have proposed to call *Ideological State Apparatuses,* to which I shall return.

A list of this sort, even if it distinguishes three typical forms within the state as Apparatuses or Machines, does not make it clear why such apparatuses are 'special'. We need to examine the matter more closely, in 'areas' that Marx and Lenin left unexplored.

The first reason to be noted – already quite clearly perceived by certain sociologists and, long ago, Max Weber – is that the 'special' nature of the 'body of the state' turns on relations of a very particular kind imposed from on high by the system that obtains between hierarchical superiors and their subordinates. The principle governing these relations is that of a hierarchical centralization taken to the furthest possible extreme. Everything comes down from above; no civil servant can take an initiative unless he knows that he will be

'covered' by his superior. It will perhaps be objected that the same principle prevails in a productive enterprise, but this is inaccurate: the latitude for initiative is infinitely greater there, and, what is more, initiative can be punished by dismissal or internal sanctions. It has even been argued that the tenure system for civil servants, which seemed to liberate them, actually helped to reinforce the forms of hierarchy and, accordingly, administrative submission. High-ranking civil servants, who take their orders directly from ministers or prefects, see themselves as expert technicians charged with applying a policy that they usually approve of, but in any case apply, under cover of an ideology of 'public service' or 'technique'. Orders come down hierarchically, with all the slowness characteristic of the 'administration', and the inevitable complications due to interferences arising from the association of several ministries or *grands corps*[113] charged with handling the same item of business. Many of these worlds are in fact nearly self-contained, and are sworn to secrecy: the army, the police force or forces, the gendarmery, the CRS and the anti-riot police, but also the judiciary, attorneys, teachers,[114] and so on. Moreover, each corps tends to work in its prescribed domain, in order to avoid all conflict with the others, in line with an ideology that thoroughly deserves the name 'esprit de corps'. There is an 'esprit de corps' almost everywhere – even among teachers, who are themselves divided, and in the 'judiciary'. An incredibly strict division of labour prevails there (some people may be surprised to learn that attorneys who practise private law are completely cut off from their colleagues in public and administrative law). Thus we are dealing with *a very 'special' corps* indeed, made up of 'special', self-contained corps divided by discipline and a desire to uphold their honour that is part of the 'esprit de corps'. Indeed, the state is not clearly separate from the class struggle unless it is separated or divided by internal separations, those of its corps and their 'esprit de corps'.

But that is not the essential reason [for the special nature of the state]. To discover the essential reason, we need to consider the state's 'armed forces', its physical might, which is only partly visible. If the state is a 'special apparatus', that is because, unlike any other social organization, it *'runs on public force'*. To be sure, a big capitalist firm

may have its private militia, and a trade union or political organization may have its 'security forces', but the comparison cannot be seriously sustained: these forces are 'private', weak, and not always 'legal'. The state, in contrast, maintains hundreds of thousands of armed men who either train while waiting for the moment to intervene, or intervene daily in social life, both public and private. The immense majority of them receive physical combat training, and if, in 'normal times', they use their weapons as little as possible, the fact remains that they are there, in large numbers, disciplined and *armed*. Let us recall Lenin's symptomatic insistence on the fact that 'the state consists of groups of armed men'. Usually, a part of these forces remains out of sight: the army. But all the others may be seen daily, and intervene constantly. The police intervene every day, as do gendarmes, prison guards, nurses in certain psychiatric wards, and so on; the CRS and anti-riot police, however, intervene only when demonstrations threaten. And if we think of the immense network of control, sanctions and surveillance spread over the whole country and all its activities, we may well conclude that we have underestimated the role played by the physical force of the state.

That, in the final analysis, is no doubt what makes for the very 'special' character of the apparatus known as the state: everything that operates in it and in its name, whether the political apparatus or the ideological apparatuses, *is silently buttressed by the existence and presence of this public, armed physical force.* That it is not fully visible or actively employed, that it very often intervenes only intermittently, or remains hidden and invisible – all this is simply one further form of its existence and action. Lyautey[115] liked to repeat that one had to make a show of one's force so as not to have to make use of it; he meant that his experience showed that it sufficed to deploy one's (military) force to achieve, by intimidation, results that would normally have been achieved by sending it into action. We may go further, and say that *one can also not make a show of one's force so as not to have to make use of it.* When threats of brute force, or the force of law, subject the actors in a given situation to obvious pressure, there is no longer any need to make a show of this force; there may be more to be gained from hiding it. The army tanks that were stationed under the trees of Rambouillet

Forest in May 1968 are an example. They played, *by virtue of their absence*, a decisive role in quelling the 1968 riots in Paris. Read Police Chief Grimaud;[116] he says this in so many words. For to send in the tanks would have been risky for the bourgeoisie: the rebellion of some of those called up to serve in Algeria had not been forgotten.

Thus if what leads Lenin to say that the state is a 'special apparatus' or 'special machine' is *both* the mechanism of the hierarchical relations governing civil servants or state employees *and* the inevitable presence of a public, armed physical force which has its place at the heart of the state and makes itself felt in all state activities, this explanation perhaps settles the question of the *special* nature of the state-machine. It does not, however, explain why Marx and Lenin make such insistent use of the terms *apparatus* and, especially, *machine*.[m]

I propose – and I do not think that I am forcing the language of my texts, even if I am obviously making them say things that they authorize but do not overtly affirm – the following *hypothesis*, which I state

m It should be noted that the English historian Perry Anderson has very clearly understood and illustrated this point of theory and politics. In a brilliant essay on what he calls Gramsci's antinomies ['The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100, November–December 1976, esp. p. 43], Anderson likens the presence-absence – a presence rendered effective by its very absence – of the state's armed forces to the monetary gold reserves of the Central Banks. These stocks of gold can fluctuate somewhat, but, overall, the total stock in the world remains constant. Occasionally, national monetary policy (that adopted by one or another state) or international monetary policy (that of the dominant form of imperialism) does employ gold in its transactions, either by selling off some of its reserves or by buying gold to build them up. However, general circulation in all its forms (which are practically infinite) takes place independently of the presence of the gold stocks on the market. *Yet such circulation would be impossible if these reserves did not exist* (the decision to abandon the gold standard has by no means eliminated them). As the phrase goes, they 'impinge on the market' simply because they make *this* market (this market and no other) possible, in exactly the same way as the invisible (should I say 'repressed'? – that is indeed the right term as far as most people are concerned, since they 'do not care to know' that these reserves exist and play a determinant role) presence of the police or armed forces impinges on a situation, simply because they make that situation or order (that *particular* order, not, obviously, another) possible for, obviously, the dominant class; and, therefore, because they make that order necessary for the dominated classes. All this, because it is done 'gently', produces the admirable effects of consensus attributable to an armed force which impinges so heavily on the established order that, ultimately, it need (almost) not intervene in it – that is, can leave this task to the unarmed forces of the state.... Among these forces – sometimes the first among them – are the ideological convictions of the 'citizens', who consider it preferable, all things considered, to stay at home and peacefully cultivate their gardens.

directly in positive terms, as if it had already been verified, although it obviously has not been. *The state is a machine in the full, precise sense of that term*, as established in the nineteenth century [***] after the discovery of the steam engine, the electro-magnetic machine, and so on: that is to say, in the sense of a *man-made device* [*dispositif*] comprising a *motor* driven by an energy 1, plus a *transmission* system, the purpose of the whole being to transform a specific kind of energy (A) into another specific kind of energy (B).

A machine of this sort constitutes, first of all, an artificial *body* [*corps*] comprising the *motor*, the *transmission* system, and the organs of *execution* or application of the energy that is transformed by the machine. In the case of machine tools (or machine instruments), *this body is material*, consisting of different parts, made of a 'special' metal, which ensure that energy A will be transformed into energy B and applied by the tools (of which there are usually a great number) to the raw material worked on by those tools.

It is easy to generalize this into the statement that *any machine*, which is a site and a means of the transformation of energy, *comprises a special material 'body'* made of a special 'metal', and that *the body of the machine*, albeit the condition for the transformation of this energy, is, *as a body, 'separate'* from the function of energetic transformation that it accomplishes. In actual fact – in, say, the steam engine – the metallic 'body' of the machine is perfectly distinct, hence 'separate', from the coal, which transforms water into steam and steam into first horizontal and then circular motion; it is also 'separate' from the tools and the 'work' they perform on the raw material (cotton, etc.). The '*separation*' of the *material body of the machine* from the fuel it consumes in order to transform it is the absolute precondition for the existence of the machine and its functioning. Of course, energy is also required to produce the body of the machine (the different parts, made of different metals), but the machine exists only if this preliminary energy has already done its work and been crystallized in the body of the machine. This earlier energy no longer intervenes as energy *in* the operation of the machine, for it has disappeared in its product: in heat, the pistons, the transmission belts, shafts and wheels by means of which the transformation of energy comes about.

We may now turn back to the machine of the state, in order to understand better why Marx talks about a machine, why this machine *has a body, and, above all, what kind of energy the machine transforms into what other kind of energy.*

We have already seen that the state has a material 'body'. This was brought out in our discussion of the idea that the state is an apparatus, and that this apparatus is 'separate'. This confers a new meaning upon the 'separation' of the state. The state is 'separate' because it necessarily has a body, so constructed as to produce a transformation of energy. We can, furthermore, understand why this material body should be '*special*', that is, *not just any body*, but either a body 'which is not like the others', made out of a 'special metal', about which we were able to form an idea by examining the 'special' nature of the body made up of the agents of the state: members of the armed forces, the forces responsible for maintaining public order, the police, as well as the other civil servants employed by the various administrations. But we are still faced with the key question of the transformation of energy, and the nature of the energy B resulting from the transformation of energy A by the state-machine.

As I see it, the state can, from this standpoint, be defined in one of two ways. First, we might say that it is a power machine [*une machine à pouvoir*], in the sense in which we talk about a drilling machine or a rotative machine.[117] In this case, the machine is defined *by the type or form of energy (B) that it produces as a result of the transformation of the initial energy (A).*

In this case, we would put the emphasis on the result of the energetic transformation, and we would clearly say that the state is a *machine for producing power.* In principle, it produces *legal power* – not for reasons involving the moral privilege of legality, but because, even when the state is despotic, and 'dictatorial' to boot, it always has an interest, practically speaking, in basing itself on laws; if necessary, laws of exception, even, if necessary, in order then to violate or 'arbitrarily' suspend them. This is safer from the state's point of view, for laws are also a means of controlling its own repressive apparatus. As we all know, to our consternation, the most tyrannical and fanatical, the most horrible states *gave themselves laws*, endowed their

regimes of terror and extermination with laws: Hitler promulgated laws concerning the Jews and the extermination of the Jews. We also know that no state on earth is more punctilious about its own laws than the USSR, where there rages a form of repression that is legally selective and thus protected, since it is required by law. *The state*, in this respect, *is a machine for producing legal power.* In fact, the whole political apparatus, like the whole state administration, spends its time producing legal power, hence laws, as well as decrees and ordinances that are said to be, at the limit, decrees and ordinances 'of application', whenever the power produced by the state-machine comes into direct relation with concrete reality. I said a moment ago that the state produces nothing: as far as the production of material goods is concerned, this is correct. But *the greater part of the state's activity consists in producing legal power, that is, laws, decrees and ordinances. The rest of it consists in monitoring their application* by the agents of the state themselves, subject in their turn to the monitoring of inspectorates beginning with the Court of Auditors [*Court des comptes*]; and, of course, by[118] the citizens subject to the laws.

It is not sufficient, however, to define the state as a power machine, for energy B (power) tells us nothing about the energy that is transformed (A) so that power may be produced as its result. What, then, is this energy A that is transformed into (legal) power by the state-machine? It is hard to find a name for it, because matters are very complex here, and, what is more, very complicated at the empirical level. To give some sense of what this energy is, I shall again resort to a comparison: the state is, from this second standpoint, that is, with respect to the energy transformed by it (the energy that 'functions' in its motor and makes it run in order to ensure its transformation into energy B), a force machine or violence machine, in the sense in which we talk about a steam engine or petrol engine.

A word about the steam engine. Carnot's use of the term caloric-engine or, rather, engines [*machine à feu*, literally, 'fire machine'] instead of steam engine was insightful. For energy A, the energy constituting the 'motor' of the subsequent transformations, is 'fire', heat, or 'caloric' energy, not steam. It is heat which, by transforming water into steam and harnessing the steam's kinetic energy, sets the piston in

motion and 'makes the machine go'. From the kinetic energy of the gases to the 'motion' of the piston, we do not have, properly speaking, a shift from one order to another. One and the same kind of energy, *kinetic energy*, simply changes form. The leap, and the energetic transformation, intervenes between the coal in the stable state and the burning coal.

Recall the passage in which Marx discusses machines, quoted above.[119] In this passage, Marx's interest is focused almost exclusively on the machine tool, that is, on the *final* stages of the energetic transformation. To be more precise, he is interested only in the *transformations of motion, of kinetic energy*, which are observable at the end of the process, when the motion is transmitted to the tools, multiplying human hands in the guise of the machine tool. The fact is that Marx *is not interested in the motor as such*; he says that 'it generates its own motive power' (!), noting that it is a matter of indifference whether the energy of the motor is 'external' to the machine or 'internal' to it. A human being, exactly like a waterfall, merely drives the machine tool from without. When the motor is 'internal', as in the steam engine, there is no change of register for Marx. He does not wonder what goes on in this motor, serenely remarking – and not without reason – that, from the standpoint of productive technology, it was not the steam engine but the machine tool which revolutionized production. The real question, however, lies elsewhere.

For what failed to interest Marx in the case of the machine tool did perhaps (?) interest him in the case of the state-machine, although he was probably not alert to a comparison that he was practising for good reasons of which he was unaware.

In the case of the state-machine, if the state-machine is a power machine, that is because it transforms one form of already existing energy, that of Force or Violence, into another, the energy of Power. What, then, is this energy A, which we are here calling Force or Violence? It is, quite simply, the force or Violence of class struggle, the Force or Violence that has 'not yet' been transformed into Power, that has not been transformed into laws and right [*droit*].

Let us note straight away, to avoid all temptation to invoke metaphysical Powers here (the 'Will' dear to Schopenhauer, or the 'Will to

power' that has, in Nietzsche, a meaning very different from the one that interests us, etc.), that Force and Violence are relative, not absolute concepts; that Force designates *the Force of the one who has the greater force*, and Violence, the *Violence of the one who is the more violent*; and that Force and Violence consequently designate a *conflictual difference*,[120] where, amid difference and conflict, it is the one who possesses the greater force who represents Force, and is therefore Force, and the one who is the more violent who represents Violence, and is therefore Violence. Some people would like to see, in the trick theatre that they have themselves rigged up, Force, pure and alone, and Violence, pure and alone, produce the effects of fascination that suit their purposes. But what we mean here is something else entirely: class struggle, where one class is powerful and violent only because it is the dominant class, in other words, exercises its force and violence upon another class (which is also a force) that it must, in a never-ending struggle, hold in check if it is to maintain the upper hand over it. The relatively stable resultant (reproduced in its stability by the state) of this *confrontation* of forces (*balance* of forces is an accountant's notion, because it is static) is that *what counts is the dynamic excess of force* maintained by the dominant class in the class struggle. It is *this excess of conflictual force, real or potential, which constitutes energy A*, which is subsequently transformed into power by the state-machine: *transformed into right, laws and norms.*

Just as Marx said that 'the tailor disappears in the costume' (the tailor and all the energy that he expended cutting and sewing), so the whole hinterworld of the confrontation of forces and violence, *the worst forms of violence of class struggle, disappear in their one and only resultant: the Force of the dominant class, which does not even appear as what it is – the excess of its own force over the force of the dominated classes – but as Force tout court.* And it is *this* Force or Violence which is subsequently transformed into power by the state-machine.

This shows us the new sense in which the state [can be called] a '*separate*' machine. For class domination does indeed find itself sanctioned in and by the state, in that *only the Force of the dominant class enters into it and is recognized there.* What is more, this Force is the sole 'motor' of the state, the only energy to be transformed into power, right, laws

and norms in the state. Emphatically, only the Force of the dominant class enters into the state and is recognized there, through the violent 'separation' that is responsible for the fact that this entry into the state is simultaneously a radical rejection and negation of the class struggle from which this separation has nevertheless issued: as its resultant but also, let us clearly say, as its condition. That the whole state is constituted in order to act as a support for this absolute, violent rejection, that its own body [*corps*] is 'made for that purpose', is something we have already said, but descriptively. Only now can we see the theoretical reasons for the effects that unsettled us and yet commanded our attention.

Furthermore, it is not only *the body* of the state that is *made for the purpose* of rejecting that 'hinterworld' of class struggle from which alone the Force of the dominant class emerges, in order to repress, necessarily, all the rest. *The ideology which the state professes* is *also made for that purpose* – an ideology which, in a thousand guises, denies the existence of class struggle and the class functioning of the state, in order to stammer, out of the convinced mouths of its agents (or the political parties that have vested interests here, or are complicit in this illusion), the litany of the virtues of 'public service', of the public-service state, on the pretext that it maintains the post office, railways and hospitals, as well as the shops that sell stamps and cigarettes! What we have here is a *prodigious operation of annulment, amnesia and political repression.* It is this operation which seals and guarantees *the* 'separation' of the state, *the one which* the dominant class needs the most, not only in its ideology, but in its very practice, in order to guarantee the perpetuation of its hegemony. The reasons for which *only* Force (= the excess of force) or Violence (= excess of violence) is represented in the state and transformed into power by it, in short, the reason that the dominant class alone has access to the state for the purpose of transforming its own force into power – *these reasons, which are class reasons* concealed by the (alas, effective) inanity of the ideology of 'public service' – are so deeply ingrained in the very nature of the body of the state that they manage, despite their obviousness, to remain 'secret', as Marx says, 'hidden' beneath the whole social edifice. This is a 'fetishism' which – hardly by accident – Marx failed to detect!

14. On the Body of the State

I shall again be discussing the *body* of the state. This is necessary. For, unlike the caloric-engine, in which the energy source (say, the coal or wood) bears *no relation* to the *metal* of which the boiler, pistons, and so on are made, in the case of the state, however 'separate' it may be – and this is yet another reason to strive for its 'separation', which is so hard to realize – *the body of the state is, naturally, not unrelated to the energy that it has to transform.*

What is the body of the state, considered from this angle? It is men, weapons, techniques and practices, buildings and land as well, and all the instruments required to ensure their functioning. But, *first and foremost, it is men,* the majority of whom come from the classes exploited by the class that dominates the exploited classes and holds state power.

A paradox! The personnel of the body of the state, in its overwhelming majority, is made up of the children of peasants and workers, together with the children of white-collar workers (in the army, CRS, gendarmery, police and civil service administration). As Gramsci repeatedly stressed, not only do army soldiers come from the popular classes (we do not have a professional army in our countries, but one that is subject to renewal thanks to a steady influx of recruits, who are supervised by a large number of career officers); so do policemen and other members of the forces responsible for maintaining public order, priests, and other state or Church intellectuals. Doubtless the mere fact of being a state agent represents 'social advancement' for the vast majority of these men from the popular classes, but the state takes many precautions besides mere social advancement to 'separate' them from their brothers of the same background and class, and it succeeds in effecting the 'separation' which is crucial to imposing the 'discipline' of their function on them. It is these men who make up the great majority of the state apparatuses charged with the maintenance of public order. Most other civil servants are of the same background. Of course, they are directed, trained, and subjected to extraordinarily restrictive rules and regulations, as we have seen. There is nevertheless a strong temptation to think that, all in all, the state differs from the 'caloric-engine' in that

its 'body' is not passive, like a boiler's, or made of quite different stuff than fuel and fire, but consists, rather, of men like those it rules – and, moreover, of men from the social classes that the dominant class holds in check with the force of a state essentially represented *by* these men.

This enters into both the perceived and the ideal conditions for ensuring that the revolution takes place. If the armed core of the state were to revert to its origins, if the army and police were to go over to the side of the people, then, barring foreign intervention, the people could take state power. 'Brave soldiers of the 17th regiment' – you who refused to 'fire upon your brothers' during the revolt of southern French winegrowers facing famine because of the mildew – you live on in the popular memory which sings of your fame.[121] Yet this noble deed did not produce the revolution. At the very least, the question must be political, and national in scope.

It is true that, in 1917, the Tsar's army, weakened by defeat and demoralization, and utterly disorganized by the war itself, heeded the appeal of the Bolshevik militants: to these hunger-stricken peasants in rags, treated like animals by their officers, the Bolsheviks promised peace and, later, land as well. They were listened to; but so were the Social Revolutionaries, who had closer ties to the peasantry. And the revolution took place. Yet, elsewhere, how many sons of peasants and workers in arms, despite the Party militants and their propaganda, 'did their duty', firing on their fellow workers – from the Germany of 1919–21 through countless other examples to, finally, Chile, which, it appears, frightened Berlinguer and inspired his project for the 'historic compromise'.[122] If we consider only the social origins of the 'personnel' of the public forces (and the state administrations), we see that exceptional circumstances (which should not be ruled out a priori) are required to bring the body of the public armed forces to break with the 'separation' imposed on them by the state.

This truth allows us to judge the highly dubious value of a whole series of contemporary speculations on the supposed 'crisis of the state'. They reflect a subjective wish rather than a reality, in so far as the expectation is that the crisis will be sparked by movements that have affected certain state employees; thus the state is reputed to be

'traversed by the class struggle'.[n] I think that this is a utopian notion based on an unwarranted extrapolation. That there are stirrings of discontent in the judiciary and the police forces (the uniformed police forces, at any rate), that this discontent is fuelled by the mood of our day, in which demands are expressed through strikes, and that strikes are, to some extent, forms of class struggle – none of this is wrong; yet the reasoning is sloppy. For it must also be borne in mind that not all strikes are forms of the workers' class struggle. Some are forms of petty-bourgeois or corporatist class struggle. They can also be forms of conservative or even reactionary class struggle; and, in any case, it is not just movement that allows us to define a movement but, in addition, the tendency of this movement, and therefore its limits. Moreover, to judge this tendency, one must know whether it is revolutionary or progressive, assess the modifications affecting the body of the state itself, and determine whether these strikes are, in part, reasonably enlightened reactions to these modifications, or, rather, tend in the same direction as the modifications themselves, and so on.

All the foregoing considerations have only one objective: to refocus our attention on the paradox that the 'body of the state' is made up of men who, in their great majority, come from the popular classes, and thus on the paradox that the dominant class manages to utilize the state to mould its agents in such a way that their class origin is repressed or neutralized. Thus they become obedient 'subjects' who, even if they call a strike, will never call into question – let us say, never seriously call into question – their 'service', whose security they ensure. Training, ideological inculcation, strict discipline, a 'service' ethic, guaranteed employment, a pension, the right to strike for civil servants (except for the forces responsible for preserving public order): the state (and behind it, in it, the dominant class) succeeds, by exploiting and skilfully combining these means (including the various conventions that apply to civil servants – in France, the perquisites of those who are employed by the Ministry of Finance or belong to one of the '*grands corps* of the state', for example), in forging itself a 'body'

n In reality, the 'theory' of this state crisis is nothing but an apologetic illustration of prevailing illusions about a certain political line.

that is indeed separate from class struggle and made of a special 'human metal'.[123] One need only glance at the history of strikes in the French or even Italian 'civil service' in order to understand that the net result has been quite meagre, quite disappointing as far as politics, and, *a fortiori*, revolutionary politics go. One really has to conjure up altogether exceptional circumstances in order to imagine that this 'body' could crack and fall apart. Such circumstances ought not to be ruled out a priori, but the least one can say is that they are not on the horizon.

15. On the Destruction of the State

The state then, has a special, separate body. The transformation of Force-energy into power-energy takes place through it and in it. When Lenin talked about the destruction of the state, he had in mind, very precisely, *the body of the state*, which is inseparable from its conservative or reactionary ideology. When he said that the bourgeois state must be *destroyed*, employing, for the occasion, a word as powerful as the idea he meant to express (although this word as well was doubtless too powerful not to frighten his contemporaries and his readers), he had in mind, above all, the body of the state, which shows that he was aware of the importance of the body of the state for the definition of the function of the state (something that Marx had already demonstrated, taking the Paris Commune as his example, but unfortunately without thoroughly studying the social and political reasons for this adventure and its failure).

The many different passages in Lenin on the destruction of the state are doubtless the most advanced that Marxism has bequeathed us on the question of the state. They bring out *the organic unity existing between the 'metal' of this body and its functions.* Here, too, the state appears as a very 'special' 'apparatus', precisely in that its body is so well adapted to its functions that its functions seem to be a natural extension of its organs. Here Lenin has, above all, two things in mind: (1) the domination of the state by the upper echelons of the military, police and political administrations, the absolute domination (guaranteed by the upper crust of the dominant class in person) which a

tentacular caste maintains over the masses of agents in the various corps or agencies; and (2) the division of state labour among the various corps or agencies of the state.

Lenin did not by any means think that *the 'whole state' had to be destroyed*, a formula that makes no sense, unless it means that all agents of the state are to be exterminated and all existing state services abolished. He did, however, believe that it was necessary to *destroy the forms of domination and subordination* in all state apparatuses, and, simultaneously, *the forms of the division of labour between the various apparatuses.* His view of the matter – and it is a profound one – was that the separation of the state was not only produced but also reproduced° by the hierarchical system obtaining between the base of the civil service and the summit, and also by the division of labour between the distinct 'corps' of the state or its various agencies. It is indeed patent, once one has perceived the ideological role which the 'esprit de corps' can play in the state, that this 'esprit de corps' serves above all to maintain a division of labour in the state: a division of labour which may well have been in gestation for a long time, but was, in the end, established very firmly indeed, and relatively quickly at that, in order to ensure that the class state would have as effective an instrument as possible at its disposal. The state knows that one must 'divide' in order to 'rule', and applies this famous maxim to itself first. If the summits of the state are to 'rule' over their subordinates, their subordinates have to be divided, which means that the 'corps' or 'agencies' have to be divided as a function of the division of their functions.

All this seems *natural.* But what defines and establishes the functions of the state, if not the class domination and the nature of the dominant class? The major shake-up in the definition of these functions of which the Paris Commune dared to give a bad example, launching the dangerous idea that such redefinition was possible, plainly showed, like the experience of the soviets in 1905, that these functions are not 'natural' or self-evident, hence that the divisions between them are not either, hence that the apparatuses destined to

o The question of the reproduction of the forms, agents, practices and ideology of the state apparatus is crucial. It is closely bound up with the theme of the 'separation' of the state.

ensure the performance of these functions are not either. Lenin expected that modifying the division of labour between the different state apparatuses would, among other things, abolish the separation of the state, or would in any case be a step towards abolishing the separation of the state, or towards the withering away of the state. The destruction of the bourgeois forms of the state was to be nothing more than the inaugural moment of this process.

Seeking to put an end to the 'separation' of the state, the number one instrument of any state of a dominant class, Lenin attempted to carry out two different types of action. Starting from below, *from the soviets*, he sought to abolish, from below, the separation of the state from the workers – whence the idea of a state of soviets. At the same time, however, starting from above, and targeting the body of the state, he sought to destroy, in this body, the forms of the division of labour between the different 'functions' that Tsarist policy [*politique*] had assigned the state.

No one text by Lenin discusses this question systematically and theoretically. Practically, however, he never stops discussing it. That force and power should be one and the same thing in the state, that the body of the state should be, not 'special', but made of the same human stuff as the workers and the peasants: this is what he sought to realize with the slogan 'all power to the soviets!' and the formula 'the state of the soviets'. However, in order that the forms of this state not be marked by, determined by, and entrenched in a division of labour based on the division of functions considered desirable by the dominant class, Lenin went to work on these forms themselves. Hence he sought to *destroy – yes, destroy* – the division of labour prevailing within the state. He sought to abolish, for example, the separation of powers, the separation between education and work, culture and politics, manual and mental labour, and so on. I am using his very words, which should sometimes be employed with caution. His intention, however, is unmistakable, and it is lucid.

It is based on the idea that if one leaves the body of the state intact, if one does not alter its metal, then one can try as much as one likes to impose different policies or personnel on it; the end effect of the system by which the state reproduces itself (its personnel, as well as the

criteria used to measure the 'competence' to command or obey), and the end effect of the separation of powers, apparatuses and agencies, is that *this policy* [*will*] *ultimately be neutralized by the body of the state*, which will consent to produce laws, but not the corresponding decrees, or decrees, but not the directives calling for their application, and so on – in short, will boycott and sabotage the official policies of the revolution. Lenin soon learnt this by painful experience. It is not enough to put workers in the posts formerly held by bourgeois, or to give revolutionary orders to ensure that they are executed. The body of the state, for as long as *its organization* – that is, its ostensible natural *functions* together with their ostensible 'natural' *division* – is not called into question, will end up absorbing all the orders and transforming them into red tape in which even revolutionaries and the revolution will end up drowning. 'We have a state that is suffering from a grave defect. It is the state of the soviets, but it is suffering from a serious bureaucratic disease' (1919). By the end of his life, Lenin had quite simply sunk into despair: he had to make up his mind to create a 'reliable apparatus', a hardline apparatus, the Workers' and Peasants' Control commission, for the purpose of monitoring a bureaucratic state. Experience was to show that this was not a measure, but a failure. Those seeking the causes of Stalinism are not wrong to focus on the terrible adventure of the relations between the state and the Revolution. Nor are they wrong when they say that while we can deduce this handful of propositions from Lenin, he never clearly collected or stated them. Doubtless the reason, quite apart from the lack of time, was his failure to arrive at a sufficiently clear idea of the state.[124]

When one has ground to a halt before the 'absolute limit' represented by certain formulas that are extraordinarily accurate in and of themselves, but stated so enigmatically and peremptorily as to be intimidating and to block all research beyond the theoretical space that they delimit, it is no wonder that the most striking, dramatic experiences remain in the passive state of experience. They lack the liberty they would need to become experiments from which the actors of history can learn what is genuinely new about what they contain. If we fail to recognize the existence of these phenomena, which combine

insight with blindness to what has been understood, precisely because of the enigmatic intensity of the formulas in which a 'certain portion of truth' is captured, then we fail to grasp, cannot grasp, the 'limits' in which not only 'the Marxist theory of the state' – or, rather, the 'elements' of a theory that stand in for it – but also the historical actors found themselves trapped. For they were obliged, like Lenin, to innovate and cast about for ways of meeting terrible exigencies, despite the urgency of the situation and because of this urgency. 'Beyond this limit, your ticket is no longer valid.' The memory of this formula in its enamelled letters stayed with me for a long time; it had caught my eye when, in 1945, I took the Paris Underground. It had not appeared on the barbed wire of the POW camps from which I was returning to France: the barbed wire had taken its place. I often recalled it in later years while reading Marx and Lenin, struck by their astonishing reactions of blockage. These authors certainly provided us with 'tickets', and very valuable ones at that. But 'beyond' certain 'limits', whose contours one had to discover in their works and their struggles, the 'tickets' were 'no longer valid'. Matters have remained at this point, without budging, for many years. It may be that they will change now, and that the old enamelled signs will at last disappear from Marxism just as, today, they have disappeared from the Paris Underground.[125]

16. The Great Mystification of the State

Once we begin prospecting in the vicinity of the aforementioned 'limits' of the 'Marxist theory' of the superstructure and, especially, the state (for this point commands everything else in that 'theory'), we cannot get away with adding a few new stipulations, however emphatic. It is enough to lift the 'barriers' ever so slightly to discover a landscape made up of an infinite number of questions that we can, at least, try to pose. Providing concrete answers would require painstakingly concrete analyses, which it is not possible to essay here.

Take the simple point of the 'separation' of the state, which, as we have seen, is 'separate', as far as possible, from class struggle, but only so that it can intervene in it reliably, and 'from all sides at once', in order to maintain and perpetuate the class domination of the

dominant class. This is the first meaning of the separation of the state, found in Engels as well, in a passage in which the state is said to be 'above the classes'. It is 'above the classes', and therefore above class struggle, *only* in order to intervene the more effectively in both, in the interests of the dominant class.

Yet this formula, if it is isolated from its explanation, can breed illusions. It can even come perilously close to the definition of the state always given by the ideology of the dominant classes. That the state is 'above classes' would thus mean that it bears no relation, either by nature or by function, to any of the classes in the struggle. Quite the contrary: it is a Neutral Institution that stands 'above the classes', like a Referee who, because he is above the match between two teams, or two classes, limits their struggle and their excesses in such a way as to guarantee that the 'common interest', or the 'general' or 'public' interest, will prevail.

On this hypothesis, the body of the state is made up of neutral civil servants (the best and the most 'cultivated', in Hegel's view, recruited by means of objective examinations that are in their turn subject to the control of an objective jury under the supervision of a neutral president). And these civil servants have only one goal: 'public service'. There might be the occasional lapse, but, overall, the system works. The notion of the 'civil servant' effacing himself before his service is held in such high regard that even the German philosopher Husserl defined himself by way of his definition of philosophers as the 'civil servants of humanity'. It is also well known that the French philosopher Brunschvicg (who, as a Jew, was stripped of his post by Pétain and persecuted) declared one day that since the policeman's function was to maintain respect for public order, and since the same respect [for the] same public order constituted [one] of the functions of Reason, nothing was more respectable and reassuring than a policeman.... Brunschvicg was a pure, Kantian soul, but he was unable to 'anticipate' certain 'perceptions'.

This version of the thesis of the 'separation' of the state can – as is clearly shown by the interpretations prevailing in the Communist Parties of, for example, France and Italy – mobilize a massive argument that never fails to impress, since it is rooted not only in

'obvious empirical realities' (just open your eyes!), but also in certain formulas taken from Engels, which, at the very least, have been misinterpreted.[126] Yes, the basic argument runs, the state does provide essential public services – water, gas, electricity, the post, transport, health, education, and so on and so forth. Yes, the state does play a role in investment (in France and Italy, it is the biggest financial power). Yes, it does play a role in maintaining the value of labour-power, and as an 'arbiter' between the two sides (employers and workers), and so on. In all these cases, it 'decides', on its own, in the 'general interest', or 'arbitrates' between two different or contradictory interests. And it can take on and fulfil this role of arbiter only because, charged with carrying out *objective* 'public' tasks, it is truly, in a sense, 'above classes'. Think of those amazing societies of the ancient Middle East, endowed with what is called an 'Asiatic' or, by others, a 'hydraulic'[127] mode of production. In order that the peasant communities, virtually the only producers, could live and work, these societies had to construct huge systems of dams, reservoirs and irrigation ditches to ensure the circulation and distribution of water. This was beyond the capacities of any individual or group, or of any class (if there were classes), just like the construction of the pyramids in Egypt or Mexico, and so on. Only the state, which was 'above the communities' or 'above classes', had agents and soldiers enough to levy enough taxes in kind and mobilize masses of men, compelling them to carry out these mammoth tasks. Public service.

It is here that we see the superficiality (and therefore sterility) of a descriptive conception of the state that is content to affirm that the state is 'separate' and 'above classes'. Such a conception is 'ripe' and ready to fall into the bourgeois theory of the state as the objective arbiter of class conflict. In reality, to shed some light on this question, *we need to bring reproduction into play*. The state is 'separate' and 'above classes' only in order to ensure the reproduction of the conditions of domination by the dominant class. This reproduction does not consist solely in the reproduction of the conditions of 'social relations' and, ultimately, the 'productive relation'; it also includes the reproduction of the *material conditions* of the relations of production and exploitation.

Exploitation does not take place in the realm of 'intersubjective relations'[128] or ethereal 'social relations'. It takes place *in material conditions* that are by no means arbitrary, but are, rather, the material conditions required and produced by the existing mode of production. To give an example which could be multiplied *ad infinitum*: those who imagine that the major roads, built by the state since time immemorial – the Roman roads or, in our countries,[p] the highways – were built in order to facilitate pleasure trips are telling themselves fairy tales. The major roads have always been constructed – just as the railways, and so on, later were – in accordance with plans and directions (and also *in* directions) whose objectives were military or economic, and closely bound up with contemporaneous forms of domination, and therefore also exploitation. That, over and above everything else, these roads are also used by people on holiday, and that these highways, now that their military utilization has been more or less suspended, are also, and today primarily, used *both* by heavy-goods vehicles *and* for holiday travel, now a capitalist enterprise in its own right, not only does not exclude the purpose they were really designed for but, on the contrary, reinforces it with an unforeseen supplement (those very 'holidays' which help to reproduce labour-power). It would be interesting to demonstrate this with respect to the railways, even if they have been 'nationalized' in France, and almost everywhere else, both for reasons having to do with the class struggle, but also (this is, moreover, in part the same thing) for reasons deriving from the needs of 'modern industry', that is, the classical material form (there are other forms!) of capitalist exploitation. The fierce competition between trains, lorries and aeroplanes, the politics of differential price schemes (low rates for the big companies, high ones for individuals), the systematic closing of routes said to be of 'secondary interest'), and so on, would enable us to make a more accurate estimate of the stakes of the economico-political conflicts over 'transport policy'. This might seem to be a purely 'technical' matter; yet the high-ranking civil servants who work for the French National Railway

p It makes little difference whether they are (as in France) constructed and managed by 'private' firms, to which they are leased by the state.

company (or for *Gaz de France*, or the electrical and nuclear power industry), as well as those who assist the ministers and government in coming to a decision that is ultimately taken by all the political personnel of the state, make no bones about the fact that several different 'technical solutions' exist, but that a political choice always comes into play, so that only one solution wins out. It is then justified by bogus 'technical' arguments, notwithstanding its profoundly political nature. (What is more, this class politics is increasingly an international class politics.)

Those Communists who (for unavowed reasons) can think the state only by moving towards a definition of it as a public service in the public domain are perhaps telling *themselves* fairy tales. It does not much matter whether, in order publicly to defend the theses they defend, they feel the need to believe in them (the function creates the organ!). In any event, they display (I am not talking about their bad faith or visionary mystifications here) stubborn ignorance of the nature of the Marxist theory of exploitation. Class struggle does not take place in the sky. It begins with exploitation, and by far the most exploitation takes place in production, hence *in matter*: the matter of factory buildings, machines, energy, raw materials, the 'working day', the assembly line, work rhythms, and so on. Moreover, to assemble all these things in the same place, the materiality of the means of transport, the processing of financial and technical information, and so on, is required. That all this ultimately presents itself in the form of railways and ground, air or sea transport; that all this also ultimately presents itself in the form of the postal service and post-office counters (with, here too, special sliding rates unavailable to the 'general public'), or in the form of a switch that one flips to bring the current leaping to light up one's house; that all this also takes the form of the 'modern' material conditions of private life, that is, *private life considered from the standpoint of its mass distribution, as so many conditions for the reproduction of labour-power* (children, the school system – also a 'public service', is it not?; the national health service – also a 'public service', is it not?; the Church and sports – also 'public services', are they not?; and the telephone, but watch out for taps, and the telly – also 'public services', are they not?, even if they are at the beck and

call of adroit or inept ministers), *is not only not surprising, but necessary and inevitable.*

Public 'service' is the form taken by the gigantic mystification of the so-called 'public services' of the state, which *has been compelled to provide and multiply public service* in order to cope with the modern forms of class struggle. And if one invokes the tendential fall in the rate of profit here, in order to explain, as Boccara[129] does, that it is owing to the 'devalorization of capital' (too much capital for the existing workforce to exploit) that the state has had to take charge of such-and-such a loss-making 'sector' in order to operate it as a loss-making public service, one sharply reduces the import of the Marxist theory of the tendential fall in the rate of profit, which is in fact a *theory of the tendential rise in the class struggle.* One makes it a question of financial performance, even operating results, whereas it is in fact a profoundly political question. One has to be singularly blinded by the putatively theoretical arguments which serve only as theoretical window-dressing for political convictions received from the higher echelons in order to suggest or maintain that, because the 'state' must increasingly take responsibility for sectors which only yesterday were nonexistent, or left to the private sector, it is, owing to its 'expansion', becoming increasingly 'socialized', or soon will; or that – to repeat an unfortunate phrase of Lenin's (but consider the context: this was under Kerensky, and 'disaster' was 'imminent'!)[130] – the state of so-called State Monopoly Capitalism is the antechamber of the socialist state. But let us say no more about these inanities, which exist only in the state of *Wunscherfüllung*, as Feuerbach said first[131] and Freud repeated after him. They were both talking about dreams.

17. The Pseudo-Circle of the State

But if we take the concept of reproduction seriously; if we take seriously the requirement which 'even a child would understand' (Marx) – namely that, in order to exist, every 'society' has to reproduce the conditions of its own production, and that every class society has to perpetuate the relation of exploitation and of production that sustains it; if we conclude from this that the state plays, in this reproduction,

a 'special' role, on condition that it is 'separated' from the class struggle in order to be able to intervene dependably in the service of the dominant class (a dependable servant has to be cast in a special metal and mentality); if, finally, the state can play a role only as a machine, then we are still not at the end of our labours.

For the attentive reader will certainly have noticed a curious sort of 'play' in our explanations.

Even if we admit the principle of the transformation of energy ensured by the state-machine, which – reproducing the result of class struggle – transforms the excess of Force of the dominant class into legal power *tout court* (the classes having been conjured away during this transmutation), the fact remains that we confront a situation which is hard to think.

If the state-machine serves to transform class Force or Violence into Power, and to transform this Power into right, laws and norms, *it would seem that there is a before and an after*, in the following order: *before*, there was the Force that is an excess of the Force of a dominant class over the dominated classes; this Force enters into the state-machine or the power-machine not as an excess of force, but as Force *tout court*; afterwards, at the other end of the machine, this Force emerges in the form of Power and its juridical, legal and normative forms (the way the pig comes out the other end of the meat-mincer as pâté and sausages). Yet this is not quite how things happen, unless we are to trace the state back to its *origin* (which it is difficult to pinpoint), as Engels tried to do in his famous book[132] (but without examining this Machine in detail). As for us, we are not only not in a position to reason about the origin; *the origin, even if it could be pinned down, would be of absolutely no use to us*. For what functions in the state today has nothing to do with the origin; it has to do with *the forms of reproduction* of *both* class society *and* the state-machine itself.

To put it another way: the Force that enters the mechanisms of the state-machine in order to emerge from them as Power (right, political laws, ideological norms) does not enter as pure Force, for the very good reason that *the world from which it issues is itself already subject to the power of the state*, hence to the power of right, laws and norms. This is as might be expected, since, in attempting to understand the class

domination which requires a state for its defence and perpetuation, we invoked 'the ensemble of the forms of class domination, in production, politics and ideology'. But the existence of the ensemble of these forms presupposes the existence of the state, right, political and other laws, and ideological norms. Thus there is no breaking out of *the circle of the state, which has nothing of a vicious circle about it, because it simply reflects the fact that the reproduction of the material and social conditions* encompasses, and implies the reproduction of, the state and its forms *as well*, while the state and its forms contribute, but in a 'special' way, to ensuring the reproduction of existing class society. The 'special function' of the reproduction of the state is the reproduction of the 'special' forms (those of the state) required to control the class conflicts that are, at the limit, capable of undoing the existing regime of exploitation. Gramsci mocked the Mancunian formula that made the state a 'night watchman', and he was right: for even when Mancunian capitalism was at its peak, it was absurd to conceive of the state as guarding society only at night, when everyone is asleep. The state is indeed a watchman, but it is a permanent watchman, on duty night and day, and it sees to it that, in Engels's euphemism, 'society' is not 'destroyed' as a result of the struggle of its antagonistic classes. I would say, rather, that it sees to it that class struggle – that is, exploitation – is *not abolished, but, rather, preserved, maintained, and reinforced*, for the benefit, naturally, of the dominant class; hence that it sees to it that the conditions of this exploitation are conserved and reinforced. To that end, it also 'keeps an eye out for' explosions, which are always possible, as in 1848 and 1871 – there the result was bloodbaths – or in May 1968, when it was tear gas and the violence of street confrontations.

Lenin was right a thousand times over to emphasize, in his Sverdlov lecture on the state, that the state is 'complex', terribly complex, and to add that class struggle is the cause of its complexity. But he was wrong to reduce class struggle to certain of its ideological effects: above all, to the bourgeois ideologues who 'confuse and complicate everything'[133] – that is to say, do so consciously and by design, so that the popular masses will misunderstand the state and lend credence instead to the 'self-evident truths' of what Plato, in his time, called the

Noble Lies required for the exercise of state power. This is a bit too simple; this judgement proves that Lenin, in the tradition of the founders of Marxism, overestimated the powers of the conscious ideology of his class adversaries. The truth of the matter is that bourgeois ideologues lie as easily as they do, and trap the popular masses in their Noble Lies as easily as they do, only because 'the lying goes on all by itself' [*ça ment tout seul*],[134] because the reality of the separation of the state, of the special character of the state-machine and the disconcertingly simple forms of the reproduction of the state on the basis of its own effects, constitute a system with extraordinarily complicated mechanisms. At every moment, this system objectively masks its functions behind its apparatus, its apparatus behind its functions, its reproduction behind its interventions, and so on.

If I may be allowed to charge the term 'circle' with the weight of everything I have just said, then it is '*the circle of the reproduction of the state in its functions as an instrument for the reproduction of the conditions of production, hence of exploitation, hence of the conditions of existence of the domination of the exploiting class' which constitutes, in and of itself,* the *supreme objective mystification.* The bourgeois ideologues whose misdeeds Lenin evokes simply extend the effects of the supreme mystification in the classic apologies of their writings or pamphlets. They do not have a clear understanding of matters, for all that; we give them much too much credit if we believe that they are aware of a truth that they falsify for class reasons. It must therefore be said – *pace* Lenin – that if the question of the state is indeed terribly complex, the 'credit' does not, in the last instance, go to the falsifications of the bourgeois ideologues, but to the complex nature of the mechanism which reproduces the state-machine as a 'separate, special machine' in a class society.

18. On Fetishism

Let us note something in passing: because *Capital* (which becomes one-hundred-per-cent Feuerbachian in Chapter 1, Section 4) offers us a theory of objective mystification, the theory of fetishism, what we have just said about the state may enable us to settle – at least in part,

because there is no controlling the destiny of words – the vexed, endlessly rehashed question of fetishism in *Capital.*

Everyone knows that the few visionary pages that Marx devotes to fetishism, which are too self-evident for what they pretend to be, have spawned an enormous literature that continues to proliferate and 'is laid on a little thicker' with each new round. The reasons are easy to see. In these pages (rather too often regarded as homogeneous, and therefore always right), all those Marxists who refuse to enter into the logic of the 'mechanistic economism' of certain of Marx's formulas seek the means with which to defend positions that are, let us say, 'workerist' in the noble sense of the term; the means with which to defend the human resources represented by the workers' rebelliousness, or by their 'straight talk'. These Marxists refuse to be intimidated by the fact that the theory of fetishism also provides a springboard for all the 'humanist', or even 'religious', interpreters of Marx's thought.

In a text of this importance, situated where it is in *Capital*'s order of exposition, several different 'meanings' come into play. The fact is that Marx plays on this multiplicity of possible meanings; it is not even impossible that it helps him make his demonstration, which, near the beginning, evokes religion: 'to find an analogy, we must take flight into the misty realms of religion'.[135] The counter-proof appears at the end, where we learn that Christianity is 'the most fitting form of religion' for a society based on commodity production. Held fast in the religious model, exalting the simplicity and transparency of the *relations* between the man Robinson Crusoe and *things*, Marx can advance his thesis: 'To the producers ... the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as ... social relations between things.'[136] This sentence (I have picked out the one that gives fetishism its best theoretical chance) actually states the reality of fetishism rather well.[137]

Here Marx plays on the term 'social relations', which are sometimes relations between 'persons' [*personnes*] and sometimes relations between things. When he evokes the immediate social relations of 'persons' in their work itself, he in fact evokes a double transparency,

founded in each instance on *immediacy*: (1) every subject's relation to the product of its labour (a thing) is transparent; and (2) the reciprocal relation between subjects in their collective (social) labour process is transparent. These relations are transparent because they are immediate. But this is to take a purely philosophical postulate for granted (a subject's relation to 'its' object is transparent because it is immediate), unless one traces this transparency-by-virtue-of-immediacy back to the domain where it rules supreme: mercantile law, or, rather, the ideology of the law [*du droit*].

In mercantile law, the relation of a subject of law to a thing in its possession, of which it is also the legal owner, is indeed transparent-because-immediate. Juridical ideology even affirms that, because all commodity relations are founded on the immediacy of the possession of things by each subject of the law, this transparency extends to all juridical relations. Finally, it affirms that the relation of the subject of the law to things is simultaneously, since it is a proprietary relation, a relation which entails the right to alienate, and therefore to buy and sell 'things' (commodities). This makes the immediate, transparent relation of the subject to the thing appear to be a social relation. Thus the law recognizes that the social relations between men [are] identical to the social relations between commodities (things), since they are merely the other side [*l'envers*] of these relations.

The paradox is that Marx opposes relations between men to relations between things, whereas the reality of the law itself describes these relations in their unity. Actually, if we examine Marx's text closely, we see that his quarrel is less with this unity than with the fact that it is *apparent*: the relations between men *appear* to them to be relations between things. Yet this appearance – Marx observes that it continues to exist after being deconstructed at the theoretical level – is as much a part of the reality of social relations as is the other appearance, that of the immediacy and transparency of the relations between men and 'their things' or 'their products'.

For as long as we remain the prisoners of a conceptual system based on the opposition person/thing, the two basic categories of law and juridical ideology, we can just as easily defend Marx's position as its opposite, or adopt both positions, or even reject both. In any case,

we remain trapped in the categories of the law or in the notions of juridical ideology.

In reality, the theory of fetishism in Marx is merely a kind of parable whose ulterior motives appear clearly in the rest of the text. When they do, however, they destroy the effect of 'demonstration' that the brilliant paragraphs which precede lead one to expect.

Marx first offers us a series of examples of 'societies' in which 'the social relations between persons' reign supreme in their immediacy and transparency – and not, as in commodity-producing society, *while appearing* to be social relations between things (commodities). For example: Robinson Crusoe, the man who stands in a perfectly transparent relation to things, including those he produces in order to reproduce on his island, for himself, the world of the 'objects' of a civilized society based on commodity production. For example: feudal society, in which the relations between men do not wear the appearance of relations between things, since these relations unfold between persons, in direct, crystal-clear fashion (for example: corvées, bastinadoes, and so on). For example: a patriarchal family. One final example: the society of freely associated producers, in which everything unfolds amid the transparency of consciousness and the planning to which all give their voluntary consent.

Taken literally, Marx's ostensible proofs have no general meaning. For, every time Marx uses the terms 'person' and 'thing', he assigns them the meaning that fits his 'demonstration': the rabbit is always-already in the hat. If, on the other hand, we have ears to hear the parable, it means that the commodity relations in which we live and which, like all established social relations – whether Robinsonian (Robinson Crusoe's relation with himself is a social relation), feudal or patriarchal – always have the 'transparency' of their 'obviousness' going for them; it means that these commodity relations have not always existed, that they are not foreordained and immutable, and that communism will abolish them. In that case, we understand. But we do not understand why Marx had to entangle himself in this parable.

Marx, however, goes on to offer us a series of examples that are far more convincing. This time, it is a question of more or less ideological

'theories': those of the Mercantilists, who held that all wealth (value) resided in the qualities of one or another metal (gold or silver); of the Physiocrats, who held that the soil alone was productive; of the penny-a-dozen ideologues who hold that capital consists of 'things' (means of production), and so on. Here Marx calls his adversaries by their real names, denouncing 'the degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, *or by the material appearance* of the social attributes of labour'.[138] Yet he simultaneously admits something that is perhaps not without importance: that fetishism is here identified with the 'illusions' of the 'economists', ideologues doing their job as ideologues. The short circuit thanks to which Marx relates these 'illusions' of the 'economists' to the 'fetishism inherent in the world of commodities' is overhasty, to say the least; it is a way (which ought to be justified) of relieving them of their theoretical responsibility by pinning it on 'the world of commodities'.

What is more, Marx is obliged to 'lay it on' very thick indeed, for he does not hesitate to say '*the material appearance of the social characteristics* [*attributs*] *of labour*', a phrase that undeniably designates everything that is material: the material conditions of labour, including raw materials and the means of production, currency, and so on. What, then, is this 'labour', this Substance which is thus endowed from the outset with Social Attributes (the means of production), and whose material reality is, in its entirety, nothing but '*appearance*'? If we recall a memorable little phrase from the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' in which, discussing 'labour' and a thesis in the Programme to the effect that all value comes from it (in sum, from Labour-Substance),[139] Marx vigorously denounces the bourgeois ideologues' belief in the 'omnipotence of labour', then we have reason to be astonished by the words 'the material appearance of the social characteristics of labour', which here found the whole theory of fetishism.

It is only too clear that Marx intended in this passage, which paves the way for the chapter on money, to fit himself out in advance with the means for an easy refutation of the theory of the Mercantilists (who think that the value of gold derives from its 'nature'). It is only too obvious that he also intended to discuss commodity relations (note that he talks about 'private labours', a curious notion) while pursuing the trajectory dictated by his unfortunate order of exposition, based on the decision to begin *Capital* with the simple (and transparent) abstraction of value. It is understandable that he should discuss commodity relations in order to clear a path for the idea that social relations are not necessarily commodity relations. But his reasoning is quite weak, and simply points back, here as in every other passage in which he is weak, to his first weakness, into which he throws all his strength. It comes from beginning *Capital* the way he did.

These reflections do not constitute a digression. For if we leave fetishism to one side as the theory of a certain appearance that is necessary in general – a theory that is here based, hardly by accident, on the abstraction of value and its commodity form – what remains in this text, what is serious about it, is what it says by way of what it does not say. For the one thing which is certain, out of all the examples that Marx cites, is the case of the 'illusions of most economists', that is, the theoretical constructions (which are illusory, at least as far as some of their affirmations are concerned) that have served as economic thought not for a 'world of commodities', but for an already advanced 'capitalist world': a world in which there existed not only commodities and a gold-based currency, but also wage labour, hence capitalist exploitation, and the state. In deducing things from the simplest abstraction, value, Marx has no choice but to bracket these realities, which are of fundamental importance for understanding not only Robinson Crusoe, but also the 'illusions of the economists'. He cannot bring them into play in order to account for 'commodity fetishism', since, at this point, he has not got beyond the deduction of the concept of the commodity.

Thus we see Marx make the stupendous attempt to derive the necessity of the 'illusions of most economists' – the economists whom he will have to refute in order to introduce his deduction of money, the economists who dwelt in a world altogether different from that rooted in the relation between value and the value-form, not to speak of the concrete relations of this world, which [made] it a world rather than a chapter in a book – by setting out from a wholly improvised,

imaginary theory of 'commodity fetishism'!! It is the commodity all by itself, its 'division' into use value (the thing) and value (a social relation between men), which will provide, all by itself, an explanation for the sensational misunderstanding that bamboozles you into conferring upon the 'Social Attributes of Labour' (coal, ore, blast furnaces, etc.) a '*material appearance*'!

We can deduce two things from this. First, that Marx, who was in a rush, wanted to indicate, at this early point, the end he had in mind (communism, a 'mode of production' without commodity relations). Second, that from the moment he '*began*' with the simple, transparent abstraction of value, he had the wherewithal to confect this theory[140] of 'fetishism', since it depends on juridical categories and the notions of the corresponding juridical ideology in whose terms, precisely, he has to think in order to 'begin' with the beginning of his *magnum opus*, *Capital*. Basically, Marx was 'itching' to produce this theory (which depends on a theory of alienation) from the very first words of *Capital*. He had everything he needed to produce it, and, as soon as he had derived the commodity form, as if urged on by his impatience, he delivered the goods, just before turning to the 'illusions of the economists' about money.

This is not a digression, because what is missing in this text, what prevents us from grasping such reality as it contains, is – besides everything that Marx will say later about the process of capitalist production and the process of its reproduction – everything that law [*droit*], the state and the ideologies contribute to producing the 'illusions of the economists'. As soon as we bring up law, we are talking about the state. Marx clearly tried, in the unpublished essays entitled *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, to 'derive' mercantile law [*le droit marchand*] from ... commodity relations [*des rapports marchands*]; but, unless we are to endorse the notion of a providential self-regulation of these commodity relations, we cannot understand how they could function without money minted by the state, transactions registered by state agencies, and courts capable of settling possible disputes. Moreover, since the commodity relations in question here are not those of an imaginary society in which, by guesswork or some other method, 'private' individual producers compare the time

they will spend on their respective private labours in order to determine the value of the products which they set out to produce long before they actually produce them (for these private producers believe, not in the 'material appearance' of the celebrated 'Social Attributes of Labour', but in the material conditions of their own labour); and as the commodity relations in question here are those of an already quite advanced capitalist society, these 'commodity relations' are established as commodity relations the way they always have been: between, not 'private' individuals, but social groups – here, social classes – of which one owns the 'Social Attributes of Labour', while the other owns, not the 'Substance of Labour', but its own raw labour-power. Moreover, in this capitalist class society, the state and law [*droit*] adamantly continue to exist – not just private, mercantile law, but also public, political law, which is, despite the term 'common law', of an altogether different sort; and there are also the ideologies, which the ideology of the dominant class strives to unify in the dominant ideology.

That the law and juridical ideology are at the heart of the (tendentially) dominant ideology known as bourgeois ideology no doubt has something to do with the 'illusions of most economists', who lapse into the 'fetishism' of believing that the social relations between men take on 'the appearance of relations between things'. These worthies believe that the value of gold stems from the matter it is made of, from the quality of this matter. They are vulgar materialists. But that this law and this juridical ideology are at the heart of the (tendentially dominant) ideology known as bourgeois ideology no doubt also has something to do with the 'illusions' of the 'omnipotence of labour' that found the 'illusions' of a 'theory of the fetishism *of the* commodity' of a philosopher named Marx. Here he pays the price, for the first but not the last time, for having set off on an analysis of the capitalist mode of production (*Capital*) with a certain idea of the order of exposition that compelled him to 'begin' with the prescribed beginning: the simplest abstraction, value.

Let us note this point carefully. For, on the first occasion on which Marx risks a discussion of 'illusory', and *necessarily* 'illusory', discourses – and therefore, in the case to hand, risks coming face-to-face

with law, the state and also the reality of what is conventionally called (for lack of a better term) 'ideologies' – he goes very wide of the mark. And he does so because he has been wide of the mark from the first. The most serious reason for this is not, as he himself believed, that he 'flirted' with Hegelian terminology, but, rather, that in his way of broaching the subject of value, and in his insistence on broaching it from the outset in order to derive everything else from it, he got entangled in the notions of bourgeois juridical ideology concerning, precisely, value itself, without as yet being able to extricate himself from them. I talked, somewhat earlier, about the 'absolute limits' of every author, including Marx. This is an example of what I meant.

I do not think that it makes any sense at all to talk about the fetishism of the commodity, as if the commodity could be the source [*l'auteur*] 'of' fetishism. No doubt it does make some sense to use the term fetishism, but only on condition that we bring fetishism into relation with what actually causes it, without telling ourselves the fairy tales that Marx inflicts on us in order to fabricate the evidence he needs. Moreover, it is not certain that fetishism, which comes down to considering that that which appears natural is only 'natural', can take us very far towards an 'explanation' of these illusions: for the essence of any 'illusion' is to appear as if it went without saying, that is, as if it were natural.[141] More than this mark of self-evidence, what matters is the explanation of the mechanism that produces it. But the mechanism, or, rather, the 'twofold character' [*double face*] of value, surreptitiously transmogrified into its 'division' in the interests of a dubious theoretical cause, is only a pseudo-explanation of fetishism, a reduplication of the concepts (person, thing) by means of which Marx has already thought value. In contrast, at the level of Marx's concrete examples (the 'illusions' of the Mercantilists, Physiocrats, *et al.*), the explanation calls up different realities: the existence of capitalist production, law, money, the state and the ideologies which bourgeois ideology, with juridical ideology at its core, 'works on' in order to become dominant.

There are fetishisms and fetishisms: when considering 'illusions', it would be far more fruitful to examine those that owe their existence to the state, which, according to Engels, was 'the first ideological

power' on earth.[142] We have said enough about the state's political-economical-ideological function as a machine for transforming the force that emanates from class struggle into power, and enough about the conditions for the reproduction of the state, to warrant the suspicion that this very complicated reality may be at the origin of massive mystifications that go well beyond the illusion that consists, or is said to consist, in taking the social relations between men for social relations between things.

19. The 'Absolute Limits' of Marx on Ideology

While still on the subject of Marx's 'absolute limits', I would like to mention the conception of ideology that he arrived at very early, and, as far as I know, never gave up.

Marx, who borrowed the term 'ideology' from the Ideologues while considerably altering its original meaning, basically always conceived of it as something related to the consciousness-form, as an 'object' of consciousness. He conceived consciousness, in turn, in very traditional fashion, as the subject's capacity to be present to sense perceptions, emotions and ideas that come to it from without or within: an external sense and an internal sense, with the internal sense capable of perception, reflection, retention (memory), protention (anticipation), judgement, and so on.

On this basis, which not only takes up the 'classic' (= bourgeois) philosophical theme of consciousness, but also situates the self-conscious act at the summit of the hierarchy of the subject's acts, Marx made a significant contribution by considering the possibility that the ideologies are *systems of ideas and representations* in which the reality of the subject itself is represented, although it is distorted and usually inverted; and also by defending the thesis that the ideologies are social (Lenin would talk about 'ideological social relations'), and have a function in the class struggle.

Of course, he applied this notion to class struggle and the social classes themselves. Thus he distinguishes, in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, the social class 'in itself' from the social class 'for itself'[143] (that is, endowed with self-consciousness). He also attaches extreme importance

to political consciousness: not to the simple subjective consciousness that can produce rebellious or embittered subjects, but to the objective consciousness (or 'theory') that can attain knowledge of the objective conditions of social life, exploitation and struggle. Slogans about 'raising the consciousness' of political activists and endowing them with 'true class-consciousness' derive from this terminological tradition. In the Preface to *A Contribution*, Marx goes so far as to talk about ideologies '*in which* men become conscious of [class] conflict and fight it out'. In this formula, ideology is no longer considered to be the sum of individual ideas, but is, rather, regarded as a supra-individual 'mental' reality that imposes itself on individuals. This is the sense that eventually prevails in Marx; although he keeps the term 'ideology', he ceases to conceive of it as the distorted individual representation of a subject, conceiving instead of an objective reality 'in which' men – here, classes, but also the individuals in these classes – 'become conscious' of their class conflict 'and fight it out'.

But this collective reality, to which Marx begins to refer very early on (the concept of a dominant ideology associated with the dominant class appears as early as *The German Ideology*), was something he never attempted *to think*. No doubt, he believed that he had, in principle, acquitted himself of that task with his 'theory of fetishism', which has indeed served generations of Marxists as a theory of ideologies. Confronted with this theoretical vacuum filled by a fictitious theory (that of fetishism–alienation), those who have undertaken to produce an explanation of this ideal [*idéal*] social reality have produced very disappointing statements. Thus we find ideology explained in psycho-sociological terms in Plekhanov. The explanation is altogether disarming, because it is redundant: to explain the social nature of ideology, Plekhanov contents himself with the term 'social mentality' [*conscience sociale*], regarded as a godsend by sociologists, those with a Marxist bent not excepted.[144] Gramsci – at least in my opinion – has not contributed much of importance on the question; he is content to emphasize that the function of ideology is to serve a social group as a 'unifying "cement"' (something that Durkheim and others had already said), and happily replaces the question of ideology with that of 'culture'. In this way, Gramsci pulls Marx's innovations 'back into line',

back on to the well-trodden paths of the philosophy of his day, which revived a theme that had been previously 'worked up' by Hegel and all of German Idealism, from Kant to Goethe, Fichte and Schelling.

It may safely be said that Marx basically never abandoned the conviction that *ideology consists of ideas*, and that, to understand an ideology, it suffices to have three absolute terms of reference: first, *consciousness* (which Marx was careful not to call 'social'), and then *ideas*, with the whole – as is, of course, fitting for a good materialist – brought into relation to, and compared with, the '*real*': the real conditions of the existing subject, whether it is an individual, a class, or even a 'society'. Whence the materialist precept that no individual, class, society or historical period should be judged by its 'self-consciousness'.

This recommendation implies the primacy of the real over consciousness, of 'social being over social' (and individual) 'consciousness'. It further implies that one can distinguish consciousness from being, and thus presupposes a certain conception of ideological distortion, as either simple distortion or inversion (the way the image is inverted on the retina or by the *camera obscura*). But 'distortion' and 'inversion' (typical of the ideological relation for Marx) did not give rise, any more than 'commodity fetishism' did, to any theoretical explanation at all, except for the appeal to alienation, which was conceived of in terms that were borrowed directly from Feuerbach, and were vague or precise, depending on the case. It is no accident that so many Marxists have fallen back on fetishism to account for ideological alienation: this is consistent with the logic of the 'operation' that Marx attempted in order to think these two 'material appearances' in terms, precisely, of an idealist philosophical 'operation'.

At any event, the real was real, and the ideas of ideology were *merely ideas*. To the transparency of consciousness, therefore, there corresponded the transparency of ideas. Despite all the difficulties with which concrete history confronted Marx – as he realized, for example, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* – and despite all the problems thrown up by the existence of the 'illusions', not only of 'most economists', but of most politicians and ordinary people as well,[q] Marx never felt any

q The 'illusions' sustained by the Gotha Programme provide an example.

need to quit the philosophical domain from which he drew *both* consciousness *and* ideas, skilfully combining them in order to obtain the effect of distortion he was after. Although he manifestly believed that the ideologies bear a relation to practice, or 'the interests' of groups or classes, Marx never crossed 'the absolute limit' of the material existence of ideologies, of their material existence in the materiality of the class struggle. He did not say the contrary; rather, he said nothing at all about the material existence of ideology. He remained on the hither side of this 'limit', which, as one of the falsely 'self-evident truths' that he accepted, was, in his view, not a limit at all.

By suggesting that the ideologies could find this *material existence* in apparatuses that are tendentially linked to the state, I attempted – in a text that is already old and, in many respects, inept[145] – to cross this 'limit'. In the face of ideas that seemed very obvious at the time, I risked the suggestion that one could and should, if not systematically, then at least tendentially, approach ideologies *in terms of Ideological State Apparatuses*.

This suggestion was criticized on the grounds that it might be functionalism. Yet the 1970 notes to my essay[146] flagged that danger, and what I then saw as the means of avoiding it (thinking and affirming the primacy of class struggle over the ISAs). As a rule, readers eliminated all mention of the state from my formula (ISA), retaining only the term 'ideological apparatus', for obvious political reasons. My critics did not want to compromise, by association with the class values of the state, the 'values' at stake in the 'family', the 'school system', 'health care', 'architecture', the constitutional order, the news services, the press, culture, the Churches, the parties, the trade unions, and so on.

Moreover, it seemed that what I was suggesting had already been said, and said much better, by Gramsci (who did indeed raise the question of the '*material* infrastructure of the ideologies', but provided a rather mechanistic and economistic answer to it). The general assumption was that I was discussing the same thing in the same register.

It seems to me that Gramsci does not, in fact, have the same object in view as I did in making my remarks. Gramsci *never* talks about *Ideological State Apparatuses*; his term is 'hegemonic apparatuses'. This

leaves a question hanging in midair: what produces, in Gramsci's apparatuses, Gramsci's hegemony-effect? Gramsci, in sum, defines his apparatuses in terms of their effect or result, *hegemony*, which is also poorly conceived. I, for my part, was attempting to define the ISAs in terms of their 'motor cause': ideology. Furthermore, Gramsci affirms that the hegemonic apparatuses are part of 'civil society' (which is nothing but *the whole set of them*, unlike traditional civil society, which is all of society *minus the state*), on the pretext that they are 'private'. Thinking, as he does, in terms of the distinction between public (the state) and private (civil society), Gramsci nevertheless does eventually come round, in one of those stupefying reversals that make one dizzy because they contradict, word for word, a formula he defends in the same breath, to saying that 'civil society ... is the State' [*l'Etat ... est la société civile*].[147] When one thinks in this perspective, one embarks on the adventures of, not the dialectic (Gramsci had plenty of them, and to spare – adventurous verbal manipulations, at any rate), but *hegemony*.

20. Hegemony According to Gramsci

It is not easy to understand the question of hegemony in Gramsci: to begin with, because one has to make out – behind his vocabulary and, especially, the varied, contradictory examples which he complacently adduces – what he is driving at and, not very convincingly, trying to say. It is not easy, again, because of Gramsci's *terminology*; on the question of the state, he owes almost nothing to Marx and Lenin (apart from the word 'hegemony'), but a great deal to Croce, Gentile and Mosca,[148] whom he naturally utilizes after his own fashion. It is even harder today, since Togliatti,[149] beginning in 1947, made Gramsci the official theoretician of the PCI, and now that countless philosophers, politicians, historians, Party leaders, and so on have tried to add something of their own to Gramsci's terminology, which has become something very much like the terminology of the Tower of Babel – with the proviso that the tower in question is under the control of another, the one from which the PCI's political watchmen keep a vigilant eye on these linguistic deviations. With all these

reservations, and on condition that the reader consents to tolerate a few deviations from what has become a consecrated, hallowed vocabulary, I shall try to explain why Gramsci's way of attempting to cross the 'absolute limit' of Marx on Ideology and the State (the two problems are closely connected), at the price of profound hesitations and contradictions, is not the best.

To understand this, however, we have to go where Gramsci unexpectedly summons us, in order to subject us to an astonishingly simple problematic.[150] He has read Machiavelli (I shall discuss this at length elsewhere[151]) and learnt from him that a Prince (a true, classic Prince, or the Communist Party, the 'modern Prince' ...) is simultaneously 'man and beast', like the centaur which, in Greek mythology, educates the men who have to rule men. The Prince is, then, both man and lion; he is, then, Force (the lion) and morals or ethics (Gramsci, who knows Hegel by way of [***][152] and, above all, Croce and Gentile, loves to talk about ethics). It is on this basis that, after contradictions that Perry Anderson has analysed extremely well (in his *New Left Review* essay),[153] Gramsci invites us into his problematic on the state.

He is not holding too many cards. He has the state, with its two 'moments' or 'elements': namely, Force, and hegemony or consensus. He has 'civil society', which, for him, comprises the whole set of 'hegemonic apparatuses'; we do not know what they run on (a petrol engine runs on petrol; an Ideological State Apparatus runs on ideology; but what does a hegemonic apparatus run on?). And that is all! That is all; for Gramsci, who cannot be unaware of the existence of the 'infrastructure', hence of production and the state-determined [*étatique*] conditions of production (law, currency and control over the reproduction of social relations, hence of the class struggle, in the interests of the dominant class), does not discuss them. For him, obviously – apart from, after all, a certain echo of the class struggle in the simple evocation of Force and hegemony – the infrastructure and the state-determined conditions of exploitation and the reproduction of social relations have been put in brackets, so that the question of the state can and must be decided *for itself*, on the basis of the four concepts at his disposal, and without bringing the infrastructure into play. Gramsci is reluctant to refer to the infrastructure, for the Marxist

distinction between infrastructure and superstructure seems to him to be, fundamentally, a mechanistic-economistic error on Marx's part.

We must be aware of this reservation[154] if we are to understand what will be played out between the state, hegemony, the hegemonic apparatuses and civil society. I shall not go into the details of the little game of swapping words and places in this match with four players; I shall go straight to the point.

The point is that, *in Gramsci, the 'moment' of Force is ultimately swallowed up by the moment of hegemony.* Gramsci offers us a long series of equivalents for force: coercion, violence and, of course, dictatorship (it is here that, in the Gramscian tradition of the Italian Party, the sleight of hand that Gerratana clearly perceived is brought off[155]), a dictatorship which has nothing to do, at this point in Gramsci's manipulations, with class dictatorship or class domination, but, rather, characterizes one of the 'moments' of the state, which has two. Similarly, Gramsci proposes a long series of equivalents for Hegemony: consensus, agreement, voluntary consent and non-violent leadership, with all the possible variants (active, passive, and so on). What is the reason for all this 'labour' on concepts that have been adopted arbitrarily, and taken more from the political scientist Mosca than from Marx and Lenin? The answer is that Gramsci hopes to arrive at a strategy for the workers' movement after the great failures represented, in his view, by the 'dictatorial' political form dominant in the USSR, *and* the success of fascism in Italy, Germany and Japan, *and* Roosevelt's New Deal policies in America.

Thus what presents itself, in Gramsci, as a 'theory of the state' (or, rather, what has been taken for a theory of the state for precisely identifiable political reasons) seems to me more closely akin to *a political examination of the 'nature', hence of the 'composition' or internal arrangement [dispositif] of the states of the day, undertaken with a view to defining a political strategy for the workers' movement* after all hope that the schema of 1917 would be repeated had faded, and after these states had been marked by the transformation inflicted on them by the development of imperialism – by, that is, industrial and financial concentration.

Within the framework of this political 'in-depth study' [*auscultation*], the investigations carried out by Gramsci – who constantly alters his

terminology, blithely contradicts himself, and *eventually comes to think everything in terms of the category of Hegemony* – may make some sense at the political level; although this is not always certain[156] in view of their abstraction, which is such that they can always be filled with pious contents. In any case, the real reasons commanding the definition of 'civil society' and its private hegemonic apparatuses; the distinction between, and subsequent identification of, 'political society' (the state) and 'civil society'; and, finally, the absorption of political and civil society by the single category of 'Hegemony' – and, consequently, the reasons commanding these strange theoretical concepts that cannot be distinctly defined without inconsistency – are to be sought in the famous theory of the war of movement (frontal attacks, as on the Winter Palace in 1917 Russia) and of position (in which one conquers, inch by inch, and over the long term, the trenches and fortifications of 'civil society', which protect the state from a great distance).[157]

As has often been pointed out, to reduce the extraordinary complexity of the events of 1917 in Russia, or to describe the Tsarist state as being 'too powerful' for a 'gelatinous' civil society,[158] involves outrageous simplifications that are difficult to defend. But Gramsci needed this excess (accompanied by all the classic inanities about the backwardness of both Russian society and the Russian state) as a foil. It enabled him to propose another 'political line', that of the war of position, a long-term war which involves conquering, step by step, the 'fortifications and trenches' constituting the glacis of any proper, normal state, governed by 'the proper balance' between Force and hegemony – that is, of a state in which 'hegemony [is] armoured with coercion'.[159]

The idea that a strategy of long-term struggle is required to ensure the hegemony of the workers' movement over its allies (this is the sense in which Lenin uses the term 'hegemony') – that is to say, over social elements that belong not just to the working class, but include rural workers as well as members of the productive or salaried petty bourgeoisie – is a classical thesis of the Marxist tradition. The idea that this struggle therefore takes as its objective the conquest of positions in *both* the infrastructure *and* the superstructure, or even of the 'associations' that Gramsci restrictively designates as 'civil society',

contains nothing that is genuinely new. The novelty that Gramsci introduces is, rather, the idea that Hegemony can, as it were, *be representative of the whole constituted by* (1) *'civil society'* (which is its domain); (2) *the state as Force or coercion;* and (3) *the effect, also called Hegemony, that results from the functioning of the state as a whole,* comprising, be it recalled, Force and Hegemony.

In other words, hegemony is inscribed twice, or even three times, in the Gramscian scheme. The initial hegemony is that of the private 'hegemonic apparatuses' (the school system, Church, trade unions, and so on) which induce acceptance, without violence, of the power of the state, and, behind it, of the dominant class. This initial Hegemony (H1) is, let us recall, one of the two moments of the state, the one that coexists with Force. The second hegemony (H2) is the effect of the hegemony of the state itself considered in its entirety – that is to say, the effect of the 'well-balanced' union, in a proper state, of Force and Hegemony (H1). Force has not disappeared from this conception of hegemony, but it is so well 'enveloped' by hegemony, integrated in hegemony (H2), that, ultimately, there is no need for it to be displayed or exercised. There we have the beautiful state, the ethical state, which functions like a beautiful organism, whose 'organic intellectuals' see to it that the hegemonic apparatuses of 'civil society' operate smoothly. Yet there is a third form of Hegemony: that of the party of the working class, which ensures that the Party can lead, without the use of force, both its members and its allies, and, without using any force at all, extend its influence beyond its limits, and, ultimately, over ... the whole of 'civil society', and even 'political society'. If we carry this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, we will conclude that *everything can be played out at the level of Hegemony*: first, the Hegemony of the working class, its party, and its allies; second, the Hegemony exercised by the dominant class by means of the state; and, finally, the Hegemony-effect that the dominant class derives from the unity of Force and Hegemony in its state ('civil society'). In this case, it would be legitimate to speak in terms of a '*conflict of Hegemony*'; or – to go even further, since the two Hegemonies are united in One[160] – it would be necessary to speak in terms of a '*crisis of Hegemony*', as if Hegemony were an entity that absorbed

within itself, and summed up in itself, all the conflicts and contradictions of 'society'. In this perspective it is readily understandable that, throughout the class struggle, we are, in the last instance, never dealing with anything *other than a contradiction internal to Hegemony*, and that this ultimate contradiction, which sums up all other struggles, can undergo a radical reversal [*basculer*] purely as a result of its crisis.

It is all too obvious that this ingenious, ambiguous 'montage' can be construed to mean that Gramsci is talking about class struggle, so that, at this level, the term 'Hegemony' clearly designates class domination, that is to say, what Marx and Lenin called class dictatorship, either bourgeois or proletarian. This 'reading' would consequently authorize a 'left' reading of Gramsci, a Leninist interpretation of him. But it would come at the very high cost of a strange silence about the reality of the economic, political and ideological class struggles. They are represented in this scheme in the form of a Hegemony-effect alone, and at the price of the absolute idealism of *a Hegemony lacking a material basis*, with no explanation of the Coercive Apparatuses which nevertheless play an active part in engendering the Hegemony-effect.

In reality, this ambiguity has pushed most of Gramsci's commentators into making 'right-wing interpretations', which are, moreover, authorized by the fact that Gramsci almost completely hides the infrastructure behind the arbitrary concept of a private 'civil society', and therefore also hides both reproduction and the class struggle, with its different levels and its stake, the state. The Force of the state is accordingly regarded as virtually nil, since it is fully integrated into the Hegemony-effect. Hence everything in this fluid model is played out within the abstraction of 'Hegemony'. It is not only the supreme effect, but also the supreme cause, since it is the cause of itself and, simultaneously, the effect of itself; for we are told nothing about what causes it. Moreover, it has extraordinary power, since it needs only go into crisis (or is it always in crisis?) for the domination of the dominant class to begin to totter and then collapse.

To be realistic, we have to say that Gramsci's reasoning in all his celebrated texts is not, in fact, that of someone who is ignorant either of *Capital* or of Marx's and Lenin's theses on the state; it is the reasoning of a politician who thinks that everything which occurs in the

infrastructure, reproduction and the class struggle *can be bracketed out*, i.e., that these realities may be treated as *constants*. The pathetic little tag to the effect that 'hegemony is born in the factory'[161] is hardly sufficient to counterbalance this conclusion, for, even if we give Gramsci's 'repetitive discourse' on the state the benefit of the doubt, it is clear that the Hegemony he discusses begins nowhere, for it has no 'beginning'.

The idea that it might be not merely possible, but actually necessary, *to decipher everything that happens* not just in the infrastructure, reproduction and the class struggle, but also in law and the state (Force + Hegemony), *exclusively at the level of what Gramsci calls Hegemony* in his discussion of the 'crisis of Hegemony'; the idea that it is possible to decipher everything about the terribly material nature of production and exploitation (hence of the class struggle in production) and the terribly material nature of the constraints and practices of the law, of the political and ideological class struggles, by referring exclusively to the reality that Gramsci christens Hegemony (without telling us just what the word might mean!) is an astoundingly idealist notion.[162]

This impression is redoubled when we ask just what the specific meaning of the term 'Hegemony' might be. The root of the word signifies a form of 'leadership' [*direction*] that is not dictatorship, coercion or domination. It suggests the idea of an effect of voluntary consensus. Let us put to one side the fact that this effect of voluntary consensus can just as easily be produced – to repeat the Aristotelian and Hegelian distinctions that constantly peek through Gramsci's writing and thought – by a good state (the 'ethical state') as by a bad one (brute Force + gelatinous civil society). The fact remains that this consensus can as readily be produced by naked Force, Force cloaked in beguiling discourse, or elegant rhetoric or elegant sophistry, as by a truth that is voluntarily set out and voluntarily consented to for the reason of its truth. Rousseau long ago said, of a brigand at the edge of a wood, that 'the pistol he holds is also a power'[163] – of dissuasion, of conviction, and thus of consensus. He added that the sophistic discourse of the philosophers of his day produced the same effect of deceptive consensus. But it would be too easy to have it out with Gramsci at this level of argument.

We must trace matters further back: to the old Hegelian idea, adopted by Croce and Gentile, that the *state is, by its nature, an educator*,[164] and that men become men, that is to say, are educated, only under constraint – an argument that can be defended; but also that mass education [*Bildung*] is the ideal which humanity sets itself as its ultimate task. With this, we begin to understand Gramsci's strange fondness for the idealist phrase in the Preface to the *Contribution* to the effect that 'mankind inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve' – in Gramsci's case, as in that of all idealists, one would have to say 'as it *must* [*doit*] solve'. However surprising it may seem, Gramsci has not got beyond the Hegeliano–Crocean conception of culture as the ultimate End of Humanity, and therefore the ultimate task of Humanity. Moreover, as in Hegel or Croce, the state is plainly the 'instrument' foreordained to accomplish this task and this End. Hence we can understand the *process of the sublimation of the state into Hegemony* that unfolds before our very eyes in so many of Gramsci's texts, along with his catchphrases about the state. No doubt some constraint is required – fundamentally, a *measure* of constraint in general [*de la contrainte*] – in order to transform 'uneducated' men – whether improperly educated, or poorly educated – into educated men, endowed with *Bildung*. That is why Force figures in the state, even if Gramsci never feels the need to show us where it is lodged, what it is made of, and how it is exercised. Force, however, is as discreet as it is only because there are better things to do than to use or display it: Hegemony (H1) is far superior, since it obtains the same result of 'training' (Gramsci's word) as Force, at lower cost, and, what is more, simultaneously anticipates the results of 'culture' itself. In hegemony (that of the 'apparatuses of civil society'), one learns without violence and solely by virtue of one's recognition of ... the truth. It is this nostalgic notion that Gramsci has literally sublimated in the notion of Hegemony (in the second sense), by granting himself a conception of the state as the kind of educator that realizes the ideal of a *universal self-cultivation*. It cannot, to be sure, come about without the 'mediations' indispensable to any teleological system, but it is essentially achieved 'without violence', if not without 'pain'. In this self-cultivation (*Selbstbildung*: self-training, self-education, and so on) is realized the

supersession, in the Hegelian sense [*Aufhebung*], of all Force. Hence it is all too clear that Force disappears from the ultimate 'definition' of the state as the 'unity of the state and civil society', of the state as Hegemony, and, finally, of Hegemony all by itself (since the state itself has been 'superseded'). Thus Gramsci confesses his profoundest idea. Fortunately for us, it is contradicted by other views of his.

There is no need to linger over the conception of the working-class political party that Gramsci goes on to develop. The End and Task of this 'modern Prince' is the 'regulated society' (!) known as communism. But it will not attain it unless it plays, as a party, its pre-state role, by educating its members and the masses over whom it extends its 'leadership', its 'hegemony'. Just like the state, the Party has to educate men, with a view, once the revolution has been made and 'the party has become the state',[165] to ensuring the triumph of the End of humanity in this regulated society in which Hegemony, its Hegemony, will continue to rule, until it vanishes before the end result of universal cultivation become self-cultivation: the infinite development of free individuals in free association.

To espouse these views of Gramsci's is not without consequences. I shall mention only three.

The first consists in making the specific problems of the state quite literally disappear. Yet we have seen just how important they are if one wishes to retain the crucial idea that the state is a 'special machine' possessing a special body and destined to be the 'instrument' of the dominant class in order to serve, guarantee and perpetuate its class domination. The specific reality of the state clearly does disappear in a formula in which Hegemony = Force + consensus, or political society + civil society,[166] and so on. When the realities of class struggle are treated *in the guise of Hegemony-effects alone*, it is obviously no longer necessary to scrutinize *either* the nature *or* the function of the state as a 'special machine'. In particular, one brackets out (and here it is difficult to imagine that the function of these apparatuses is stable!) the state apparatuses of Force (the army, the police, the other forces responsible for maintaining pubic order, the apparatuses of the courts, and so on). This is hardly serious – unless we assume that all these realities can be *regarded as nonexistent because they have been cancelled*

out of the equation, politically and historically. Here we again meet the presupposition mentioned a moment ago. I just said that, in Gramsci, it is quite as if the infrastructure and its effects were treated as nonexistent or constant, and therefore cancelled out, since, at the level of the state, and contrary to the famous phrase of Marx's in Volume Three of *Capital*, we no longer have to take into account the determination of the state on the basis of the productive relation. Similarly, in the present instance, it is quite as if Gramsci's argument, about the state this time, were predicated on the absolute hypothesis that the state apparatus exercises a constant effect, that is, has effectively been cancelled out.

Yet it is rather facile to suppose that the state is cancelled out [*neutralisé*] (a formula which, it will be granted, can easily be transformed into the bourgeois idea that the state is neutral ...). And the paradox is that this consequence can be deduced from texts by a man who had to jot them down in a school notebook after being condemned to the harshest of prisons by a fascist state.... It is so facile that it is not very serious. In building up his arguments in *Capital*, Marx assumes that one and then another variable is constant, but he does so for the sake of the argument; after finishing the demonstration that he has set out to make, he corrects the assumption that such-and-such a variable could be cancelled out, precisely because the variable in question *is not neutral.* Strikingly, Gramsci never rectifies the presupposition that the state or the infrastructure can be treated as neutral. This is no doubt proof – as the diversity of the historical examples he cites makes superabundantly clear – that he had in mind a model of the elements of the state, and of their unity amid the difference of these elements, balanced or not, which he treated as the essence of any possible state. Yet, paradoxically, he had his sights trained on very disparate modern states.

It does not much matter which arguments are brought to bear here. They all boil down to the fact that, since Gramsci talks about a 'crisis of Hegemony', and thus about Hegemony itself as if it were the last word on the state, the effect of his little formulas is to hide the question of the material nature of the state-machine behind a hyper-allusive invocation of Hegemony. This breeds all manner of misunderstanding. It can also give rise to every imaginable sort of reformist lucubration about the nature of the state and the 'development of the party into the state'.

These views naturally culminate in the reduction of ideology to culture, or, more exactly, in a theory of the nonexistence of ideology (except as a 'cement' for groups of men, with no mention of classes) and the exaltation of the theoretical value of a notion that is altogether vacuous, the notion of 'culture'. Moreover, Gramsci does not identify, at least not directly, the specific element designated by the notion of culture that cannot be located within the notion of ideology. Anyone can imagine the consequences, political consequences included, which can flow from *replacing the notion of ideology with that of culture*: the intellectuals of the Italian Party are living proof of them. For if ideology rather quickly comes to mean ideological struggle, hence an inevitable, necessary form of class struggle, the notion of culture leads straight to the ecumenism of the notion that an elite (in the Party as well as in bourgeois society) is the guardian of culture's own values of 'production' ('creators') and consumption ('connoisseurs', 'art-lovers', and so on). I shall not labour the point; it would be too easy.

We can draw another consequence, perhaps still more serious, from Gramsci's nebulous treatment of both the state and private 'civil society', as well as of the sublimation of the state into Hegemony. It is what has traditionally been called, and for a long time now, '*the autonomy of politics*' or 'of the political'. I did nothing more than give its philosophical name to this thesis, inevitable in Gramsci's system of thought, when I said that, in the final analysis, Hegemony (in sense no. 2) as the sublimation of the unity of 'political society' (the state) and 'civil society', had necessarily to present itself as '*causa sui*', as that reality which, encompasssing everything, has no outside. But this 'practical autonomy of hegemony' is reproduced in the practical autonomy of its 'essence': since everything is political, Hegemony is for Gramsci the high point, the summa and the summit of politics. Gramsci is political through and through, and he says so. As we have seen, he is political to the point of thinking the political question of the strategy of the future workers' movement (at least in our societies,

which have struck 'the proper balance between Force and Hegemony' [in sense no. 1]) in terms of the manipulation and modification of concepts taken over from bourgeois political science and haunted, in their fashion, by class struggle. In his views on the state, its two moments, and, especially, in his views on Hegemony as encompassing the two moments of the state – in, therefore, Hegemony – Gramsci remains just as political, just as universally political ('everything is political'). The difference is that, in his final theory of Hegemony, he actually declares that, for him, politics (and the politician, its agent) are *causa sui*, autonomous – and *by rights*, or, rather, by destiny. That 'everything is political' by no means contradicts 'the autonomy of politics', since, as is shown by the sublimation of the whole reality of the state (and, as a result of Gramsci's silences, of the superstructure and even the infrastructure) into Hegemony, it is the autonomy of this Hegemony which embraces everything: 'everything is political'. It thus coincides with the autonomy of all politics, and thus proclaims, beyond the shadow of a doubt, 'the autonomy of politics'.

There is a great deal to be said about this thesis of the autonomy of the political or of politics, particularly about the fact that it can be understood neither as the autonomy of the party from the masses in the class struggle, nor as that of political leaders in the life of the Party, and so on. Yet the fact is that this aberrant thesis brings us to the threshold of another 'absolute limit' of Marxist thought: namely, its inability to think 'politics'. It will be objected that this is to court paradox: the work of Marx and Lenin is full of 'politics'. It is indeed full of politics, full of political analyses. But our authors have never given us, except in the form of lists or descriptions, even the rudiments of an analysis responding to the question: *just what might politics be?* Where is politics to be found? In what forms? What distinguishes it from non-political forms, and how then should we designate these other forms? Unless we broach these questions, we risk remaining, for a long time yet, 'in the night in which all cows are grey'. And, colour for colour, our hands will most assuredly not be white.

For to ask what politics might be implies that one state one's views on the Party. But what does one do in the Party, if not politics?[167]

Notes

1 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le Parti communiste français', *Le Monde*, 24–27 April 1978; 'What Must Change in the Party', trans. Patrick Camiller, *New Left Review*, no. 109, May–June 1978, pp. 19–45. Althusser published a slightly revised version of his text in book form in May 1978. [*Trans.*]

2 Gérard Duménil's *Le Concept de loi économique dans Le Capital*, Paris, 1978; 'CM'; 'MT'. [*Trans.*]

3 This is a literal translation of the French title of a paper (translated into English as 'CM') that Althusser delivered in Italian at a November 1977 conference in Venice.

4 Lenin, 'Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International', *LCW* 21: 438–53.

5 The first draft reads 'the most serious conflicts'.

6 At the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, Nikita Khrushchev delivered his 'secret speech' on 'Stalin's crimes'.

7 These were the main counts in Khrushchev's indictment of the practices of the Stalinist period. In addition to 'Marxism and Humanism' (*FM* 219–47) and 'Note on "The Critique of the Personality Cult"' (appended to 'RTJL' 115–32), Althusser wrote two texts on alienation and the 'personality cult' in 1964, both of them more overtly political than the published texts. He worked for a long time on these two manuscripts, but finished neither.

8 The Chinese Communist Party's official break with the Soviet Party sealed the 1963 'split in the international Communist movement'.

9 Althusser published an anonymous essay on the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 'Sur la révolution culturelle', in *Cahiers marxistes-léninistes*, no. 14, November–December 1966, pp. 5–16.

10 The first draft reads 'crisis of Marxism'.

11 In the 1980 'Livre sur le communisme' (A28–03.05, p. 1), Althusser attributes this phrase to Jacques Derrida. The allusion is to the 'New Philosophers' and especially to André Glucksmann's *The Master Thinkers*, trans. Brian Pearce, Brighton, 1980 (1977), pp. 120–2. A number of Althusser's letters indicate that while he considered Glucksmann's book a very poor one, he was hurt by the tone of the attacks on him contained in it; he felt that Glucksmann had caricatured him, presenting him as what he had always feared he might become – an intellectual tyrant.

12 A slogan of George Marchais's, Secretary General of the PCF at the time Althusser was writing 'Marx in his Limits'.

13 'Count on your own strength', a slogan of Mao Zedong's famous in its day.

14 See 'What Must Change in the Party', pp. 41–2.

15 'The main tendency is towards revolution', a slogan of Mao Zedong's famous in its day.

16 In a 2–3 November 1882 letter to Edouard Bernstein (trans. Peter and Betty Ross, *MECW* 46: 356), Engels reports that Marx once said this, in French, to Lafargue. See also Engels, Letter of 5 August 1890 to Conrad Schmidt, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 3rd edn, ed. S. W. Ryazanskaya, trans. I. Lasker, Moscow, 1975, p. 393; and Karl Kautsky, 'Mein zweiter Aufenthalt in London', in Benedikt Kautsky, ed., *Friedrich Engels' Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Vienna, 1955, p. 90.

17 *CI* 90, 93.

18 Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 471–514. Althusser's extended correspondence with the management of the PCF publishing house Éditions sociales – especially in 1966–67 with its director, Guy Besse – testifies to his intention to publish this section of the *Grundrisse* (often abbreviated *'Formen'*) in the collection 'Théorie' at a time when the text had not yet appeared in French. After having it translated, he gave up the idea of publishing it himself at the request of Éditions sociales, to which he had sent the translation on 13 August 1966. Éditions sociales ultimately published a different translation in the collection *Sur les sociétés précapitalistes* (Paris, 1970). As Althusser's letters show, this experience left him with the impression that he had been taken for a ride.

19 Marx, Letter of 17 April 1867 to Johann Philipp Becker, *MECW* 42:358. [*Trans.*]

20 Althusser would appear to be thinking of a passage from a review of *Capital* that Marx approvingly cites in the Postface to the second German edition (*CI* 101–2); the reviewer, I. I. Kaufman, says that criticism consists, for Marx, in 'confronting and comparing a fact with another fact'. [*Trans.*]

21 'Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise'. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. Clemens Dutt *et al.*, *MECW* 5: 49.

22 *CI* 98. [*Trans.*]

23 In what he would later call his 'theoreticist' period, Althusser took a position that was at the opposite extreme from the one he defends in this chapter. See 'Theory, Theoretical Practice, and Theoretical Formation', trans. James H. Kavanagh, *PSPS* 16 (an essay that remains unpublished in French): 'Marxist-Leninist science, which serves the objective interests of the working class, could not be the spontaneous product of proletarian practice; it was produced by the theoretical practice of intellectuals possessing a very high degree of culture (Marx, Engels, Lenin), and "introduced from without" into proletarian practice.' See also *SH* 246.

24 *Kritisch-revolutionär*: *CI* 103. The line of the *Internationale* to which Althusser is alluding runs: 'le monde va changer de base': literally, 'the world will change its base'. The equivalent line in the most common English version of the *Internationale* is 'the earth shall rise on new foundations'.

25 Best known for his *History and Constitution of the Icarian Community* (trans. Thomas Teakle, New York, 1975), Étienne Cabet (1788–1856) came under the influence of Robert Owen after emigrating to England during the July monarchy. He subsequently attempted to found communal settlements in Illinois and Missouri.

26 Wilhelm Weitling (1807–71), a tailor, is one of the major figures of German 'utopian communism'. Among his works are *Garantien der Harmonie und der Freiheit* (1842), a book Marx held in high esteem, and *The Poor Sinner's Gospel*. Marx broke with Weitling in 1846.

27 The first draft reads 'from a proletarian point of view'.

28 Marx, Letter of 5 March 1852 to Joseph Weydemeyer, trans. Peter and Betty Ross, *MECW* 39: 62, 65.

29 'P' 264.

30 This and the following interpolation are Althusser's.

31 Karl Kautsky, 'On the New Draft Programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party', *Die Neue Zeit*, 20, 1901–02, I, no. 3, p. 79, cited in Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, trans. Joe Fineberg and George Hanna, *LCW* 5: 383–4. Althusser quotes the text from the French translation of Lenin's *What Is To be Done?* published in Moscow.

32 The organ of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party and, subsequently, the Bolshevik Party.

33 1904–05.

34 Lenin, 'Preface to the Collection *Twelve Years*', trans. Bernard Isaacs, *LCW* 13: 101–2, 107–8. The translation has been modified to bring it into line with Althusser's. The interpolations are Althusser's. [*Trans.*]

35 The manuscript reads 'Trotsky'.

36 This paragraph is an addendum inserted into the manuscript by Althusser.

37 See *FM* 63–4: 'If the problem of Marx's Early Works is really to be posed, the first condition to fulfil is to admit that *even philosophers* are young men for a time. They must be born somewhere, sometime, and begin to think and write.'

38 Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels*, vol. 3, Paris, 1962. Althusser took most of his biographical information about Marx and Engels from this work. He dedicated 'On the Young Marx', included in *FM*, to Cornu.

39 'P' 264. [*Trans.*]

40 Engels, 'Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy', *MECW* 1.

41 *FM* 28.

42 'Hegelianized' is a handwritten addendum to the manuscript.

43 'Not only does Proudhon write in the interest of the proletarians, he is himself a proletarian, an *ouvrier*. His work is a scientific manifesto of the French proletariat.' Marx, *The Holy Family*, trans. Richard Dixon and Clemens Dutt, *MECW* 4: 41.

44 'P' 265.

45 Marx, 'Introduction to *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*', trans. Ernst Wangermann, *MECW* 28: 17–48.

46 The translation in *CI* 95 is more accurate: 'the appreciation which *Das Kapital* rapidly gained in wide circles of the German working class is the best reward of my labours'.

47 *CI* 112.

48 Marx's 1875 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' was first published, by Engels, in *Die Neue Zeit* of 31 January 1891.

49 Karl Kautsky, *Les Trois Sources de la pensée de Karl Marx* (1907), Paris, 2000; Lenin, 'The Three Sources and the Three Component Parts of Marxism', trans. George Hanna, *LCW* 19: 23–8.

50 Compare Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, 1977, p. 56; *Hegel's Logic*, trans. William Wallace, Oxford, 1975, §25. Althusser was fond of the Hegelian phrase 'behind its back', citing it from memory in his 1947 Master's Thesis, 'On Content in the Thought of G. W. F. Hegel' (*SH* 111) and giving it a prominent place in the 1976 'La Transformation de la philosophie' (*Sur la philosophie*, Paris, 1994, p. 153). [The passage referred to here was included in the Spanish version of 'La Transformation de la philosophie', on which the English translation was based, but was edited out of the published English translation (see 'TP' 249). It has been incorporated into 'Philosophy and Marxism'; see p. 275 below.]

51 In *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (Moscow, 1941, p. 3), Stalin says that historical materialism is an 'extension' and 'application of the principles' of dialectical materialism. [*Trans.*]

52 See esp. Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* [*Anti-Dühring*], trans. Emile Burns, *MECW* 25: 125–9.

53 *C3* 959 ff, 1016 ('the full development of individuality'); Paul Lafargue, *Le Droit à la paresse* (1881).

54 Marx, 'Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner's *Lehrbuch der politischen Oekonomie*', trans. Barrie Selman, *MECW* 24: 531–59.

55 Engels, 'Foreword to *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*', trans. anon., in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1970, vol. 3, p. 336.

56 'P' 263.

57 *CI* 89.

58 Marx, 'Introduction to *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*', *MECW* 28: 37–45. Let us note that the theory of 'theoretical practice' that Althusser put forward in his 1963 essay 'On the Materialist Dialectic' included in *FM* is based mainly on this text.

59 Althusser owned a copy of Galvano Della Volpe's *La Libertà communista*, Milan, 1963, containing a handwritten dedication by the author. He read one of the essays in it very closely; entitled 'Sulla dialectica', it focuses on Marx's 1859 Introduction.

60 'I have completely demolished the theory of profit as hitherto propounded. What was of great use to me as regards *method* of treatment was Hegel's Logic, at which I had taken another look by accident; Freiligrath having found and made me a present of several volumes of Hegel, originally the property of Bakunin. If ever the time comes when such work is again possible, I should very much like to write two or three sheets making accessible to the common reader the *rational* aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified.' Marx, Letter of 16 January 1858 to Engels, *MECW* 40: 249. [*Trans.*]

61 *CI* 321 ff.

62 'P' 261.

63 'The dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists.' (*CI* 103)

64 'The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true.' (Lenin, 'The Three Sources and the Three Component Parts of Marxism', *LCW* 19: 23).

65 'P' 263.

66 'It is this circumstance alone which has made it possible for Marx and myself not to disassociate ourselves publicly from a programme such as this.' Engels, Letter of 12 October 1875 to August Bebel, trans. Peter and Betty Ross, *MECW* 45: 98.

67 Engels, Letter of 18–28 March 1875 to August Bebel, trans. Peter and Betty Ross, *MECW* 45: 65, translation modified.

68 'I have spoken and saved my soul.' It is with this phrase that Althusser begins a text written in 1982 and incorporated into a manuscript partially published in the present volume under the title 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter.' The 1982 text was posthumously published as 'Sur la pensée marxiste', *Futur antérieur*, special issue: *Passages, Paris*, 1993, 11–29. Too much of it has been drawn from 'Marx in his Limits' to warrant republication here.

69 'And could therefore also hold his tongue' is an addendum to the manuscript.

70 'Buried in the files' is an addendum to the manuscript.

71 Althusser mistakenly interpolates the word *Erfahrung*, and translates 'experience'; Marx wrote *Erforschung* ('study' or 'research into'). [*Trans.*]

72 'P' 261–3.

73 Althusser's translation, which differs somewhat from his 1969 translation of part of the same passage (see *SR* 244–5), is in fact rather similar to the one in Gilbert Badia and Maurice Husson, *Contribution à la Critique de l'Économie politique*, a text published by the PCF's publishing house, Éditions sociales, in 1957 to replace a translation by Jacques Molitor, which itself replaced one by Marx's daughter Laura Lafargue. Among the changes Althusser made in Badia and Husson's translation (which corresponds quite closely to the translation in *MECW* reproduced here), the following are noteworthy: 'the general conclusion at which I arrived' becomes 'the conclusion that offered itself up to me' [*qui s'offrit à moi*]; in the famous phrase, 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness', Althusser twice substitutes 'conditions' for 'determines'; 'at a certain stage of development' becomes 'at a certain degree of their development'; 'determined with the precision of natural science' becomes 'that one can observe in a manner faithful to that of the natural sciences' [*qu'on peut constater fidèlement à la manière des sciences de la nature*]; 'no social order is ever destroyed before' becomes 'no social formation can ever die before' (furthermore, as in Badia and Husson's translation, the rest of the sentence, 'before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient [*für die sie weit genug ist*] have been developed' is rendered literally: 'before all the productive forces that it is large enough to contain'). It should also be noted that where the English translation used here has 'social order', Althusser's as well as Badia and Husson's translations have *formation sociale* (the German is *Gesellschaftsformation*).

The interpolations from the original German text are all Althusser's. [*Trans.*]

74 *Séparé*, which is both the past participle of *séparer*, to separate, and an adjective meaning 'separated'. [*Trans.*]

75 The first draft reads 'had been sly enough'.

76 The parenthetical phrase is in English in the original text.

77 The subtitle initially chosen by Feuerbach was *Contribution to the Critique of Pure Unreason.*

78 In 1836, Feuerbach married Bertha Löw, heir, along with other members of her family, to Brucherg Castle and the porcelain manufactory housed in it.

79 *Le genre humain*, which also means 'the human race', is often translated the 'human species' (whence 'species-being'). [*Trans.*]

80 The *sic* is Althusser's interpolation.

81 See Marx, Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, *MECW* 5: 4: 'Feuerbach ... is obliged ... to abstract from the historical process'; or, again, Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *MECW* 5: 41: 'As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history, he is not a materialist.'

82 According to the Fifth Thesis on Feuerbach, 'Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract* thinking, wants [*sensuous*] *contemplation*, but he does not conceive sensuousness as *practical*, human-sensuous activity.' Cf. the First Thesis on Feuerbach, which runs: '[Feuerbach] regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance.' *MECW* 5: 3.

83 Most of Marx's 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' was first published in 1927.

84 The first draft reads 'rudiments'.

85 See especially 'The Historic Significance of the 22nd Congress', trans. Ben Brewster, *New Left Review*, no. 104, July–August 1977, pp. 3–22.

86 Timbaud and Michels were executed on 22 October 1941, along with other Communist internees selected for execution by the Interior Minister of the Vichy regime. [*Trans.*]

87 Francs-Tireurs et Partisans. See Charles Tillon, *Les FTP*, 2nd edn, Paris, 1967.

88 De Gaulle addressed this appeal to the French people from London on 18 June 1941. [*Trans.*]

89 Maurice Thorez was the General Secretary of the French Communist Party. Conscripted in 1939, he deserted and left for the USSR, where he remained until 1944. [*Trans.*]

90 The *Compagnie républicaine de sécurité*, the National Security police.

91 *CI* 340–416.

92 The manuscript contains the following paragraph, which Althusser ultimately dropped:

> Not once, not for a moment, was he willing to be party to any practice other than that of an appeal to the duties of the citizens *vis-à-vis* the state of the oppressed and humiliated French nation. In other words, he invoked – in other words, exploited – the values of the state: obey the legitimate state, the legitimate leader of the legitimate state, that of Free France, and refrain from engaging in politics, because if you, as soldiers, whether in uniform or not, engage in politics, the state will be torn asunder and perish. To be sure, this meant that he had to walk down a tightrope [*corde raide*], but De Gaulle had the stiffness of character [*raideur*] required, and it was from this stiffness of character that he drew his strength, as Churchill eventually learnt. Yet the fact is that this was the right card to play, because, playing it for all it was worth, De Gaulle finally came out on top, defeating even the organizations and fighters of the domestic resistance, who, for their part, did not all have quite the same 'appreciation of the state', since they, for their part, thought they had a right to 'engage in politics'. But their status was ambiguous, after all; they were not real soldiers, as De Gaulle brought home to them in no uncertain fashion when, amid the

confusion of ranks characteristic of the Résistance, he compelled them to accept demotions and fall back into line.

93 A big scandal involving international corruption which, among other things, led Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to resign from all his public offices.

94 Maurice Grimaud, *En mai, fais ce qu'il te plaît*, Paris, 1977. Grimaud was chief of police in Paris at the time of the May 'events', in which he played a key role.

95 The first draft reads 'an inanity'.

96 The first draft reads 'albeit by different means'.

97 Lenin, 'The State: A Lecture Delivered at the Sverdlov University, July 11, 1919', trans. anon., *LCW* 29: 470–88. A French translation of this text may be found in an appendix to Étienne Balibar, *Sur la dictature du prolétariat*, Paris, 1976. Althusser's library included the volume of the French edition of Lenin's collected works containing the lecture on the state as well as Balibar's book; he extensively annotated the text in both.

98 The first draft reads 'like the Paris Municipal Museum of Modern Art'. The *Conseil d'État* or Council of State is the highest administrative tribunal in France.

99 Marx was in fact born in 1818. [*Trans.*]

100 Charles Babbage (1792–1871) was an English mathematician and mechanical engineer; he was the author of *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufacture* (2nd edn London, 1882), among other works. This sentence is quoted in *CI* 497n.

101 *CI*, p. 494 (Althusser's emphasis).

102 The question of the dictatorship of the proletariat was one of Althusser's central concerns in the 1975–78 period. He discusses it in 'The Historic Significance of the 22nd Congress', and in a number of lectures that he gave on the subject in France and Spain. He also devoted a typed, repeatedly revised 215-page manuscript to it: *Les Vaches noires: Interview imaginaire*.

103 The first draft reads 'but something necessitated by class relations'.

104 *C3* 926.

105 Ibid. (Althusser's emphasis.)

106 Ibid., 927–8 (Althusser's emphasis throughout the passage).

107 The first draft reads 'we know a little something about'.

108 The blanks are to be found in Althusser's manuscript. Compare 'the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist' (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon*, trans. Frida Knight., *MECW* 6: 166).

109 *EI* 1–60.

110 See note 97 on this page.

111 French civil servants are organized into corps. Throughout 'Marx in his Limits', Althusser plays on the fact that *corps* also means 'body'. Thus the literal meaning of *l'esprit de corps* is 'the spirit of the body', while the French equivalent of 'the body of the state', *le corps de l'État*, silently evokes the *corps* of civil servants. [*Trans.*]

112 Althusser originally wrote *violence publique*, which he deleted and replaced by *force publique*. [*Trans.*]

113 The *grands corps* are the highest state agencies and administrations: the Council of State, the diplomatic corps, the tax inspectorate, and so on. [*Trans.*]

114 In France, public school teachers, from primary school to university, are civil servants. [*Trans.*]

115 Louis Hubert Gonzalves Lyautey, a French Marshall and Minister of War who served mainly in the colonies. [*Trans.*]

116 See note 94.

117 I have changed Althusser's examples (*machine à percussion* and *machine à impression*) for the sake of readability. [*Trans.*]

118 In the manuscript, *par* (by) has been deleted and replaced by *sur* (on); the original reading has been retained here. [*Trans.*]

119 See p. 84 above.

120 The first draft reads 'contradictory'. Althusser uses the phrase *différence conflictuelle* in a similar sense in 'ISMBP?', 205 ('*une philosophie … n'existe donc que par sa différence conflictuelle*', *SM* 201); the English translation reads: 'a philosophy … exists only in so far as … conflict has made it something distinct'. [*Trans.*]

121 Althusser is alluding to the 1908 song *Gloire au 17ème*, by Gaston Montheus (Mardochée Brunswick). The song pays homage to the soldiers of the 17th regiment who rebelled against their officers at Agde in June 1907 rather than fire on striking winegrowers. Montheus also composed *La Jeune garde*, a song much in vogue on the French Left in the 1960s.

122 Enrico Berlinguer, General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party from 1972 to 1983, wrote a series of 1973 articles in *Rinascita* on the defeat of the Popular Unity government in Chile that justified the new PCI strategy of 'historic compromise' with Italy's Christian Democrats. See Berlinguer, *La questione comunista*, Rome, 1975, vol. 2, 632–3.

123 The salaries, pensions, employment conditions, possibilities for career advancement, etc., of French civil servants are governed by conventions [*régimes*] that vary with the category of public service. Among the advantages all these conventions confer, besides guaranteed employment, are regular bonuses and pensions determined in accordance with rules rather more generous than those applied to private sector employees. Among the perquisites reserved for the elite *grands corps* are sizeable bonuses. [*Trans.*]

124 The manuscript contains the following deleted passage: 'For, on all these questions, even after the experience of the Commune which suggested certain measures, although their exact significance and the conditions under which they were to be applied was never clearly understood, Marxist theoreticians and leaders had made very little progress. One does not get very far by saying that the state is a bludgeon, or by confounding the political dictatorship of the Supreme Soviet with the hegemony of the working class.'

125 The signs in question have since been replaced by others bearing precisely the same warning. *Au-delà de cette limite votre ticket n'est plus valable* is the title of a celebrated novel that Romain Gary published in 1975. [*Trans.*]

126 The particular target of this section of 'Marx in his Limits' is a book by three 'Eurocommunist' theoreticians, Lucien Sève, Jean Fabre, and François Hincker (*Les communistes et l'Etat*, Paris, 1977, esp. pp. 180–2), who, in the course of a defense of the PCF's decision to 'abandon' the dictatorship of the proletariat, lay out a plan for transforming the State adminstration into a 'public service' and 'democratizing' the state apparatus after the expected electoral victory of the Union of the Left. [*Trans.*]

127 Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, New Haven, 1957.

128 The first draft reads, 'does not take place in the clouds'.

129 Paul Boccara was, at the time, one of the key members of the PCF Central Committee's section for economics, and a leading editor of the review *Économie et politique*. He took an active hand in the writing of *Traité marxiste d'économie politique: Le Capitalisme monopoliste d'État*, Paris, 1971, and published, among other works, *Études sur le capitalisme monopoliste d'État, sa crise et son issu*, Paris, 1973. In 1972–73, Althusser envisaged writing a book on imperialism; one of its objectives was to refute the theory of 'state monopoly capitalism' then underpinning the PCF's strategy for the Union of the Left. He wrote the preface for the book and several preliminary sketches, one of which is entitled 'The Mistake of the State Monopoly Capitalism Boys'.

130 Lenin, 'The Impending Debacle' (October 1917), trans. anon., *LCW* 24: 395–7.

131 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Sämtliche Werke*, eds Wilhelm Bolin and Friedrich Jodl, Stuttgart, 1903–10, vol. 7, p. 248. [*Trans.*]

132 The first draft reads 'in his clumsily constructed book'. Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, trans. anon., *MECW* 26.

133 *LCW* 29: 472. [*Trans.*]

134 The phrase evokes Lacan's *ça parle or ça pense*, 'it speaks' / 'it thinks'. *Ça* is the French translation of the Freudian 'id'. [*Trans.*]

135 *CI* 165. [*Trans.*]

136 Ibid., 165–6. [*Trans.*]

137 The first draft reads 'terribly well'.

138 Althusser's emphasis. The translation given here reflects the French translation given by Althusser. Compare *CI* 176: 'the degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, or by the objective appearance of the social attributes of labour'. The German reads, 'Wie sehr ein Teil der Ökonomen von dem der Warenwelt anklebenden Fetischismus oder dem gegenständlichen Schein der gesellschaftlichen Arbeitsbestimmungen getäuscht wird.' [*Trans.*]

139 'Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use-values (and it is surely these which make up material wealth!).' Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', in Marx, *The First International and After: Political Writings*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach, London, 1974, p. 341. [*Trans.*]

140 The first draft reads 'this theory, a handy little theory'.

141 The kind of analysis that Althusser has in mind here is exemplified by a passage from Jean-Marie Vincent, 'Le théoricisme et sa rectification', in *Contre Althusser*, ed. Denise Avenas et al., Paris, 1974, p. 227: 'The different modulations of the value-form are reproduced, at all levels, as if they were the result of a natural movement. Juridical, political, or libidinal relations are fetishized, becoming "natural" properties … which people utilize, but to which they also submit because they are natural.' [*Trans.*]

142 Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, trans. Nicholas Jacobs *et al.*, *MECW* 26: 392. Althusser's translation makes the state 'the greatest ideological power on earth'.

143 Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *MECW* 6: 211.

144 Georgy Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, eds James S. Allen and V. A. Fomina, trans. Julius Katzer, London, 1969. A heavily annotated version of the French translation of Plekhanov's book was found in Althusser's library.

145 'IISA'.

146 Foreword to *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, 1971, pp. 7–9; Postscript to 'IISA', *EI* 57–60. [*Trans.*]

147 *SPN* 261. Althusser underlined the following passage in Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, trans. David Fernbach, London, 1980, p. 70: 'But what does that signify if not that by "State" should be understood not only the apparatus of government, but also the "private" apparatus of "hegemony" or civil society?' (*SPN* 263).

148 The manuscript contains the words 'Sorel, or even Bergson', which have been deleted. Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941) was an Italian legal scholar and politician who is sometimes regarded as a 'Machiavellian'. His works includes *The Ruling Class*, ed. Arthur Livingston, trans. Hannah D. Kahn, London, 1939.

149 Palmiro Togliatti, General Secretary of the PCI until his death in 1964.
150 The first draft reads 'a problematic of stupefying simplicity'. [*Trans.*]
151 In an unpublished 95-page manuscript entitled 'What is To Be Done?', Althusser offers a long analysis of Gramsci's reading of Machiavelli, which is also evoked in *MU*.
152 The manuscript reads 'him'.
153 See p. 104, footnote m.
154 The first draft reads 'this enormity'.
155 Valentino Gerratana, the general editor of the definitive Italian edition of Gramsci.
156 The first draft reads, 'but not even this is certain'.
157 See, for example, *Note sul Machiavelli, sula politica e sullo stato moderno*, Turin, 1949, pp. 68 ff.
158 *SPN* 238 ('In Russia the state was everything').
159 Ibid., p. 263.
160 The following words have been deleted from the manuscript: 'which would have horrified Mao'.
161 'Hegemony is born in the factory and does not need so many political and ideological intermediaries.' Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Buttigieg, trans. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari, New York, 1992, p. 169.
162 The first draft reads 'unbelievable'.
163 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, ed. P. D. Jimack, trans. G. D. H. Cole, London, 1993, p. 185.
164 Compare 'Every relationship of "hegemony" is necessarily an educational relationship' (Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman, London, 1995, p. 157).
165 *SPN* 267.
166 'State = political society + civil society, that is, hegemony protected by the armour of coercion.' (*SPN* 263) 'In politics the error occurs as a result of an inaccurate understanding of what the State (in its integral meaning: dictatorship and hegemony) really is.' (*SPN* 510) See also 'CM' 219: 'Something pathetic strikes you when you re-read in the same light Gramsci's little equations written in prison (the State = coercion + hegemony, dictatorship + hegemony, force + consensus, etc.) which are the expression less of a theory than of a search, in terms borrowed from "political science" as much as from Lenin, for a political line aiming at the conquest of state power by the working class.'
167 These are the last words of the manuscript, which Althusser probably considered unfinished.

The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter[1]

In July 1982, first in a clinic at Soisy-sur-Seine and then in his Paris apartment, Althusser began writing again. In a few months, he had completed a dozen texts on both the political conjuncture and what he would henceforth call 'the materialism of the encounter'. That autumn, he decided to recast these texts as a book. He photocopied some of them and wrote several new transitional passages and chapters, eventually producing a manuscript comprising sixteen chapters and 142 typed pages. The two, three, or even four page numbers on certain pages of the projected book show that he tried piecing the parts of it together in several different ways; one would be hard put to reconstruct these various 'montages' today. Since the document that survives in Althusser's archives is not the original manuscript, but a set of photocopies, re-creating the history of these texts would be a formidable task: although it seems that the countless handwritten emendations photocopied along with the rest originated in different periods, the fact that we have them in this form alone makes any attempt to date them an altogether aleatory affair.

It quickly became apparent that we could not publish the whole of Althusser's manuscript as it stands, since some passages in it occur twice.[2] *But since the repeated passages crop up in the middle of others that they suddenly turn in a new direction, it proved impossible to solve the problem by simply excising them, since that would have meant breaking the thread of Althusser's argument. This is not the only problem with his montage: one or more pages are often intercalated in the midst of sentences that they unceremoniously interrupt, leaving many passges of the manuscript altogether incomprehensible. Thus it was obvious that, whatever editorial policy was adopted, the published version of the text would have to be an a*