
THE VACILLATION OF IDEOLOGY IN MARXISM

C'est dans le détail même des notions que s'établit un relativisme du rationnel et de l'empirique. La science éprouve alors ce que Nietzsche appelle "un tremblement de concepts," comme si la Terre, le Monde, les choses prenaient une autre structure du fait qu'on pose l'explication sur de nouvelles bases. Toute l'organisation rationnelle "tremble" quand les concepts fondamentaux sont dialectisés.

—Gaston Bachelard, "La dialectique philosophique des notions de la relativité," in *L'engagement rationaliste* (Paris: P.U.F., 1972), 120-21

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The political and ideological uses of Marxist theory are no more logically implied in its original formulations than they are exterior to its meaning (or to its truth). In fact, the political and ideological uses of Marxism maintain the historical process of its production, which already includes the texts of Marx, Engels, and their immediate successors. From this point of view, Marxist discourse presents from the beginning an acute internal contradiction between the old and the new, materialism and idealism, the effect of a revolutionary irruption and a conservative recuperation, if not a counter-revolutionary one in the strictest sense of the term.

Because the Marxist contradiction cannot be simply located between this or that part of the system but cuts across each of its fundamental theses or concepts, because it keeps displacing its point of application, it is perfectly vain to imagine that one could get rid of that contradiction either by *purifying* Marxism of its bad side, in order to make it entirely positive, or by *refuting* it, in order to consign it to the trash can of history. Whether in the name of Marx, or of Marxism-Leninism, or of scientific socialism, the

contradictions at stake here are, at present, strictly insurmountable; they never stop being at work in our everyday existence, just as that existence never stops working on them. On this point at least I agree with Alain Badiou: we have no other way, today, to think philosophically and politically than to stay within the immediate vicinity of this internal/external crisis, closest to its sensitive points.¹

The initial political and epistemological “break” in Marxism occurs when the terms of this contradiction are bound up—with the double positioning of the concepts of a science of history and the watchwords of a proletarian politics—within the unity of a “class point of view in theory.” Nonetheless the contradiction within Marxism only exists within a history. To grasp it we must embark upon a detailed examination of this history, by addressing, simultaneously, the formulation of problems, the application of concepts, and mass social practice. Such an analysis is neither ready-made nor well known; it can no longer be got at simply by destroying traditional illusions about the meaning and internal coherence of Marxism as a “scientific worldview.” However, it involves nothing unknowable or mysterious *a priori*. I am offering only a small part of such an analysis, an account of the history of theory. I will speak of the place occupied by the concept of ideology in the Marxism of Marx and Engels, which was to have a decisive historical importance. This place is highly paradoxical. I will express it in terms of the *theoretical vacillation* that characterizes the concept of ideology, a vacillation that consistently manifests itself in terms of eclipses, antithetical deviations, or displacements of problematics.

A Double Birth for a Single Concept

Our starting point is marked by the odd distribution of the term “ideology” in Marx’s and Engels’s texts themselves. Omnipresent in the writings of 1845–1846, reduced to a few peripheral appearances in the period 1847–1852, ideology is almost nowhere to be found after that until its full-blown restoration in the 1870s, chiefly from the *Anti-Dühring* on. In a sense, this is simply a “well-known” philological fact; but if we look more closely, it can also be seen as the source of a *fausse reconnaissance* played out in all contemporary discourse about Marxism, starting with its own discourse about itself.

The concept of ideology is clearly a decisive innovation and ensures Marxism’s theoretical specificity.² To use Althusser’s terms, its formulation is a mark of the “break” that engenders historical materialism. Yet it has

actually been formulated *twice*, in disparate historical contexts and within problematics that preclude any immediate conflation; *first*, in *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels (mostly Marx), an unpublished text whose uneven yet insistent influence, brought to light by various rereadings and rediscoveries, can be traced throughout the entire history of Marxism; and *second*, in the group of historical and philosophical texts, mostly by Engels, designed to provide Marxism, for the first time, with the appearance of a system. Writing these texts over two decades, Engels at once gave historical materialism its name, rediscovered the term “ideology,” and (temporarily) covered over the problems it posed in the guise of an entirely coherent, indeed even positivistic, definition.

How can we fail to assign some symptomatic value to this twenty-year eclipse of the crucial term “ideology” following its massive use in *The German Ideology*? Ideology almost vanished from the discourse of Marx and Engels. There are a few furtive appearances from 1846 to 1852, primarily as polemical references to the “ideologists” of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie (Proudhon *et al.*), then nothing more. There is no mention of ideology in the great analyses of the conjuncture and the balance of power such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, which Engels nonetheless took as the model of a materialist account of historical events. What is at stake in this subtle analysis of the political representation of social forces is the question of “class in itself” and “class for itself.” Ideology does not appear in the preliminary work of *Capital* (notably the *Grundrisse*), nor even in the detailed critique of the economists (*Theories of Surplus Value*). Here again, it is simply a matter of the difference between classical economics and vulgar or apologetic economics.³

Above all, there is nothing about ideology in *Capital*, which, whether one likes it or not, is the cornerstone on which the Marxist edifice rests. It can no doubt be argued that a good number of the theoretical models that figure in the classical analyses of ideology are well and truly present in *Capital*: those pertaining to commodity and money fetishism and, more generally, to the inverted relation between the deep sphere of production and the superficial sphere of exchange. Clearly these analyses, by dint of their object, ought to be part of the field of a theory of ideology (or of bourgeois ideology), either to explain the specific effects of ideology or to give an account of its genesis. That only makes more conspicuous the absence of ideology in the theoretical space of *Capital* and generally within what can be called the moment of *Capital* in the history of Marxism. Far from signifying the absence of any corresponding questions, this suggests a recognition that the

question is not so simple that it can be inscribed, unequivocally, within any one theoretical statement.

I think it is worth considering this eclipse, not as an accident or an irrelevant terminological quirk, but as the sign of a fundamental difficulty. This hypothesis would be confirmed if we could find one or more instances where the definition of ideology is incompatible with the critique of political economy and where the description of fetishism can be inserted. Our hypothesis already has its counterproof: after *Capital*, the term “fetishism” disappears in turn from the texts of Marx and Engels, in spite of its conceptual precision and the organic place it occupies at the core of the development of the “value-form” or of the relation between the essence and appearance of capitalist production, hence of the relation between wage exploitation, the consciousness assumed by the laborers themselves, and the discourse of the economists. In place of fetishism (but is it really in the same place?) a new term appears, one that Engels salvaged from a forgotten manuscript and whose meaning he transformed: “ideology.” This extraordinary shuffling of identities suggests that if the question of ideology is constitutive for historical materialism, then several relatively incompatible approaches are involved, each of which has to be pursued in its turn. The study of these differences then becomes a privileged means of access to the internal contradictions of the Marxist problematic.

Materialism and Criticism

Without going into the details of the text of *The German Ideology*, I would like to point out a few of its noteworthy features in a way that will throw some light on the paradoxical nature of the concept of ideology. We can start with a double question: what makes Marx’s materialism historical? and, what makes his concept of history materialist?

Marx’s history is obviously not materialist simply because it purports to eliminate the speculative in order to constitute itself on an empirically verifiable causality. In principle, this elimination entails snatching history from the clutches of teleology, both in its religious forms (providence, the meaning of history, origins and last things) and in its philosophical forms (a periodization, governed by a principle of human progress—moral, legal, spiritual, or logical); in short, this entails eliminating any identification of a subject of history. This critique coincides with the denunciation of an illusion that makes the *state* the universal component of the historical process, and *man*, as a universal abstraction, its proper subject. Yet this critique of

speculation cannot be reduced to an empiricism or positivism. Nor does it consist in a simple clarification of the economic process, of social labor, and of the needs and material interests of classes. By itself such an analysis (of the “real bases” of history) can only return to the presuppositions common to both political economy and classical philosophical utilitarianism, whose individualist materialism itself also rests on an abstract hypothesis of human nature.

Despite what the term traditionally suggests, Marx’s materialism can be contained neither within the definition of the matter of history nor within the application of a historical point of view (evolutionary, progressive, dialectical) to matter. It is presented as an essentially derivative position, as a critique of idealist (abstract, speculative, etc.) representations or illusions which mask, mystify, and repress the determining reality of the labor of individuals and social production. Only this critique, by virtue of its own “labor,” can provide materialism with its specific content.

Historical materialism is primarily a program of analysis of the process of the formation and real production of idealist representations of history and politics—in short, of the process of idealization. In *The German Ideology* this is the professed objective of a complex and incomplete construction centered on the role of the “division of manual and intellectual labor.” In other words, historical materialism is constituted to the extent to which it can prove that the idealization of history is itself the necessary result of a specific history. We can then see how the idea of a scientific critique (along with the equation, science = history) might be justified: because the movement of criticism that opens the analysis of these questions is itself just as much the result of “real historical relations” as are the idealities it addresses.

Yet this is still not enough. We must come to terms with the *force* or forces that allow the idealization of history to impose itself, not only on those who have an interest in it, but also on those whose real conditions it mystifies and whose “movement” for liberation it prohibits. On this point, someone like Stirner can only offer a tautology: the domination of ideas is the reign of ideas of domination (order, hierarchy, the sacred, etc.). What then becomes of ideas of democratic liberation (individual rights, political equality) when they are incarnated, in their turn, in the order of a state, albeit a profane, nonhierarchical one, that of the postrevolutionary bourgeoisie? In suggesting that every state makes use of religion and morality to impose its power, and that every discourse, when it begins to conflict with their interests, divides individuals, Machiavelli and Hobbes do nothing to break out of this vicious circle; they only translate it into the language of a functionalist

philosophy of power (the dominant ideas, whatever they are, are those serving the interests of the powerful; at best the powerful must believe in these ideas so that those they dominate will do likewise). It is necessary to determine the question historically, to examine the nature of the "ideas of the ruling class" and the way they become the dominant ideas. Thus, the concept of ideology adds a third question to the preceding two. With respect to the other critiques of the speculative illusion (Kant, Feuerbach) or of the necessity of appearances (Hegel), whether anthropological or dialectical, Marx's originality lies in his overdetermining the question of the cause or necessity of idealities by questioning their mode of action, their power, and their subjugating effects.⁴

Considered in the light of this triple determination (the critique of teleology and speculative theory, the materialist origin of idealization, and the analysis of effects of domination), the concept of ideology seems to be the corollary of a definition of the *real relations* that determine the historical process. In traditional philosophy such an invocation of the real and the empirical could only correspond to a denunciation of error or illusion, an antithesis between idealism and realism. The materialist critique of ideology, for its part, corresponds to the analysis of *the real as relation*, as a structure of practical relations. It corresponds to the discovery that the reality of the real is not a "being" immediately identical to itself but is, in a sense, a specific abstraction the individual can only at first perceive as an abstraction twice-removed—speculative or, as Marx puts it, inverted and rendered autonomous. It is not individuals who create this abstraction, for they are themselves only relations or the product of relations. The whole science of history is virtually the distinction between these two antithetical abstractions, which is to say that it deconstructs their identification. It is thus that the science of history is "concrete."

The Purely Proletarian Act

In rereading Marx's argument, however, it seems to be dominated by a frighteningly fragile theoretical *coup de force* which posits against ideology, in the form of an antithetical force or instance, the very being of the proletariat, or, more precisely, the prophetic establishment—in the very place occupied by the revolutionary proletariat—of the discourse that critiques ideology. Thus, it is from this site, the veritable site of truth as well as the place from which the world is changed, that one can grasp the equivalence between the different types of idealization that constitute ideology:

"consciousness" produced at a distance from the real, "abstraction" from the conditions of existence, inversion of their limitation (or their particularity) in a fictional universality, autonomization of "intellectual labor," political idealism, and philosophico-religious speculation (of which German Hegelianism is the quintessential example). It is only from this site that we can see the fundamental equivalence between *ideology* and *idealism*, a correspondence that makes the idea of a materialist ideology or a materialist philosophy a contradiction in terms.

By the same token, however, materialism is defined as an absolutely positive term that gathers within itself all the antitheses of ideology/idealism: (real) life, (real) individuality, production (of the conditions of existence), history, practice, and finally, the revolutionary practice of the proletariat (or communism, not as the ideal future, but as the "real movement which abolishes the present state of things"⁵ without ever losing touch with production, its initial condition). The real movement of history is a becoming-labor of production ("estrangement, to use a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers," Marx tells us [CW 5:48]), followed by a becoming-production (or better still, a becoming-productivity) of labor. The proletariat is thus a self-affirmation of production and a self-negation of labor. But it must be said that the materialist instance is only seen to be a revolutionary practice when ideology in general can be identified with idealism. And this identification is only possible from the point of view of the proletariat.

Marx's argument thus comes full circle, and it is a strictly *philosophical* circle. Although his thesis—completely identifying material *being* with *practice* and formally bound up within what he calls the "totality of productive forces"—is powerful and profound (if not wholly original), it nonetheless reconstitutes itself as philosophical at the very moment Marx claims to have abolished philosophy (or to have definitively "left" the element of philosophy).

This circle is actually the result of a *coup de force* (which radically divorces practice from theoretical abstraction) followed by a denial. The theoretical discourse announcing this divorce, we are told, is not a true "discourse"; it does not speak from a theoretical position but from the site of practice itself—practice speaking itself about itself (which presupposes, among other things, a notion of the absolute transparency of language—"the language of real life" [CW 5:36]). Moreover, it should be the only discourse that, because of its obviousness, is held not by intellectuals but by the proletariat itself, or at least in the very *site* of the proletariat—the discourse of communism.

This initial circle presents a major difficulty which *The German Ideology*

cope with only by way of new denials, precisely in reproducing the same circle for the proletariat itself. Consider two of its forms.

1. The self-consciousness of the proletariat is opposed to ideological illusion or inversion, but this consciousness must be both *immediate* (consciousness of its being, that is, its conditions of existence) and *produced* as a practical negation of immediacy; to coincide with its concept, the proletariat must transform and revolutionize itself. The proletariat is the prerequisite condition and the end result of its own revolutionary practice. Marx writes: "In revolutionary activity the changing of oneself coincides with the changing of conditions (of existence)" (CW 5:214).

2. The proletariat is first and foremost a class, the class antagonist of the bourgeoisie, and hence places its own interests above theirs. Put like this, however, the proletariat would, by definition, lack universality, or, more precisely, it would in turn be caught up within the mystifying process that abstractly erects a "particular interest" as a "general interest." For the interests of the proletariat to tally with a real universality, with practice as such, those interests must cease to be class interests, and for that to happen, the proletariat itself must *cease to be a class*, must be a class/nonclass. Marx writes of "a class which has really rid itself of the old world, and that stands in opposition to it at the same time." This is the surprising distinction made between *the proletariat as a class and the proletariat as the masses*, analogous in many respects to Rousseau's distinction between the "will of all" and the "general will" (we will encounter Rousseau again further on). Only the masses are revolutionary, because they are *the actual dissolution of society* as it exists, at the point when extreme exploitation has completely stripped the workers of all property and all inherited historical specificity, leaving them effectively naked. Marx presents us with this radical loss of individuality in the shape of a radical individualization. Revolution is nothing but the deed of this act, or the way that history records this dissolution which is its own product. But by the same rigorous logic, this means that there is no—or, at this point, no longer any—class struggle. Properly speaking, *the bourgeoisie is the only class in history*; before it there were only castes, orders, and estates (*Stände*), which were not yet real classes. As for the proletariat, once it matches its definition, it is no longer simply a class but the masses.

I will not discuss here the historical analyses that Marx uses to support this thesis; they are primarily a generalization, a hyperbolic extension of Adam Smith's ideas about the division of labor. In fact, they are derived from the politico-philosophical assumptions that define the proletariat. Yet we must emphasize the disastrous logical consequences of these analyses in the

case of the relation between the (communist) proletariat and politics: these two terms are simply incompatible. The proletariat, by definition, is the negation of all politics, identified with an ideological illusion/abstraction. Similarly, communism is the nonstate (*Staat*), it is a state of things (*Zustand*) in which all political mediation has, by definition, disappeared.

Because the proletariat is the act of practical negation of all ideology, there is no such thing as a proletarian ideology, or an ideology of the proletariat, just as we have seen that it would be absurd to talk about a materialist ideology. The proletariat is precisely the mass of concrete individuals, inasmuch as, and under the effect of their conditions of existence, these individuals destroy all ideological consciousness. That is why, as the *Manifesto* will continue to say, the proletariat has no nationality or religion, no family or morality, no politico-juridical illusions: the absolute "*Illusionslosigkeit*" of the proletariat as such. This leads us, of course, to ask about the empirical working class *hic et nunc*: is it really so devoid of all ideological consciousness? The answer suggested by the text of *The German Ideology* is simple but completely tautological: such a working class would not (or not yet) be the revolutionary proletariat.⁶

We should not, however, hasten to pass judgment on this construction, doing no more than condemning it for its idealist or speculative, if not mystical, character and thereby repeating Marx's attack on Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy.

On the one hand, this construction includes concepts that will be shown to be susceptible to a series of modifications, ending with its very opposite: a historical analysis of proletarian class struggles as they are determined by the successive configurations, created by capitalism, of the working class and the bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, and most important in virtue of its critical radicality, these formulations are likely, in a different context, to take on a new function and hence a new meaning. They will come to stand for something all the more pertinent to our reading of them, something more than a separation: an inevitable *contradiction* between the ideologies of the proletariat (whether spontaneous or imported) and revolutionary practice. The corollary is that there always comes a time when "revolutionary ideologies" prove to be counterrevolutionary in practice, a time when revolutions occur *against* revolutionary ideologies or ideologies of the proletariat and effectively destroy them. In other words, what Marx does not "think" but what we can think, by no means arbitrarily, in some of the concepts of *The German Ideology*, what these concepts *can think* today, is this intrinsically

contradictory relation between revolution and ideology. Though this is not what Marx says in *The German Ideology*, it is a use we can make of his most radical philosophical theses, turned back on themselves and against the “dogmatic sleep” of Marxism.

Domination without the Dominated?

Almost immediately the theses of *The German Ideology* must have raised insoluble contradictions for Marx himself. One therefore understands why he had to do away with this concept of ideology even if he could not do away with the problems it harbored.

The first difficulty lay in the impossibility of inserting the discourse of political economy into the theoretical space thus defined. It would not, in fact, fit into either the category of ideological abstraction (since its specific object was productive labor, analyzed as a social relation: division of labor and exchange) or into that of historical materialism or the science of history (because, expressing the point of view of the bourgeoisie—Marx calls economists their “scientific representatives”—the discourse of political economy always erects a specific interest, that of private property, into the realization of human nature in general). This difficulty lies at the heart of *The German Ideology*. Indeed, it is from Adam Smith, Ferguson, and the Saint-Simonians that Marx draws the “materialist” categories of a periodization of civil society, a correspondence between the forms of property and the forms of the division of labor. All this becomes untenable when Marx, progressing from Smith to Ricardo, comes to grips with the Ricardian definition of value in order to extract socialist conclusions from it, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and, implicitly, in the *Manifesto*.

Far from clearing up this difficulty, Marx’s extension of this critique to Ricardian economic principles (the definition of labor and value) only makes things worse. The critique of economic categories can no longer consist in the prior separation of the domain of the real from that of illusion but rather consists in the work of internally deconstructing each theoretical category. Such a critique involves separating the contradictory elements imbricated within the economic concepts in order to confront them with a practice that is not directly the revolutionary practice of the proletariat but is, rather, *the practice of capital* (with its own contradictions). Thus, one would have to be able to think both the objectivity of economic discourse and its bourgeois class character simultaneously; or even, contrary to the original definition, to think both *the real and the imaginary* within

ideology. This is precisely what Marx tries to do in his analysis of fetishism, in attempting to demonstrate how the simultaneous birth of the “form of value” and the necessary illusions of commodity production are brought about, though he returns to a problematic of illusion inspired by Kant and Feuerbach.

A second difficulty, however, may be more directly decisive. It arises from the radical antithesis between the autonomous action of the proletariat (absolutely creative because it is absolutely determined by its conditions of existence) and the abstract world of politics. One would think that by the time Marx (and Engels) wrote *The German Ideology* this difficulty could no longer be ignored, since at that very moment Marx was doing his utmost to bring the communists of several countries together within a single international organization, soon to become the Communist League. If that is not *practicing politics* (against the politics of states and their ruling classes), one wonders what is.

The evidence of this difficulty in the text itself is a symptomatic lack of coherence, political theses that seem to be totally out of place, or equivocal statements for which several contradictory readings are possible.

For instance, we may recall those sentences which no longer have anything to do with communism as a real movement of universal history but rather with real, living communists of the sort one meets *hic et nunc* (in Paris, for instance), communists we have to call to mind in order to explain this name we give to the real movement: “The few non-revolutionary communist bourgeois who made their appearance since the time of Babeuf were a rare occurrence; the vast majority of the communists in all countries are revolutionary” (CW 5:226).

We may also recall how Marx emphasizes the difference between French (political) ideology and German (philosophical) ideology: the former is to the latter what history or practice in general is to ideology in general, namely, its antithesis, and thus its real criterion. Here, again, Marx takes up the old nostalgic notions of the young German radicals going back at least to Fichte: “in Germany it is impossible to write this sort of history...since there history has stopped happening” (CW 5:43). History happens in France; it happens politically. And it is because this political element is not purely illusory, or rather because all illusions are not equal, that the real differences between these ideologies offer as important a base for the concept of the revolutionary proletariat, perhaps, as the bedrock assumption of material existence or production. Above all, these differences are the effect of a different relation *to the state*. They do not refer to an absolute action,

with neither past nor future, but to a specific historical memory: the French had Danton and Robespierre, the mass levy of 1793, Babeuf, Bonaparte; the Germans had only Metternich and Wilhelm-Friedrich—at best they watched history pass by on horseback in the streets below.

The problem becomes more sharply defined in Marx's paradoxical formula of the "*dominant ideology*," whose importance we have noted. What does "ideology of the ruling class" mean? From one paragraph to the next, Marx gives us two answers, and it is from these that we can infer, not without ambiguity, the meaning of the question posed. This ambiguity is clearly reflected in the double semantic value of the term "*herrschend*": is it the *dominance* of a body of representations or a discursive paradigm that typifies the epoch of its own, more or less undivided, "rule,"⁷ or else the *domination* exercised (in a "repressive" manner, overtly or not) by one body of representations over another, and, through this mediation, by one practice over another, by one way of life or thought over another? Both are correct, but to understand the causality at work we must look to another, more tricky ambiguity.

We can construe the dominant ideology as a kind of "symbolic capital" of the ruling class itself, as the body of representations that expresses its relation to its *own* conditions and means of existence (for the bourgeoisie, for instance, commodity ownership, legal equality, and political freedom), or to put it another way, as the expression of the relation of the average members of the ruling class to the conditions of rule common to their class (hence, the kind of universal values this rule assumes for each of them). But how does this representation impose itself on individuals who do not have the same relation to the conditions of existence of the ruling class ("manual" workers, for example)? Apparently it can only be because it is forced on them by the "material" means (which include the press and intellectual production in general) monopolized by the ruling class (a monopoly acquired through the mediation of their ideological servants—scribes and scholars of every ilk).

Such a domination, however, remains necessarily exterior to the consciousness of the oppressed (without bringing in, as Marx did not, the irrationalist hypothesis of a "desire for submission"). This is why Marx writes that, for the proletariat, the representations of the dominant ideology—whether legal, moral, patriotic, or otherwise—ultimately "do not exist" (CW5:56), or are purely fictional. But then the concept of ideology disintegrates, surviving only as a variation on the conspiracy theories of the "useful fictions" of power ("if God did not exist, they would have to invent him")

of the sort put forward by the mechanistic rationalists of the eighteenth century.

Alternatively, we can construe ideological domination as the result (always already present, which is not to say eternally assured) of a true ideological struggle, that is, as the domination of one ideological consciousness over another. From this point of view, what always corresponds to the constitution of a *dominant* ideology, in tendency at least, is the constitution of a *dominated* ideology, yoked to a process of repression but capable of subverting it. How do we interpret this conflicted birth? Should we posit the reciprocal confrontation, for example, of the representations of the relations members of the antagonistic classes have with their *respective* conditions of existence? Probably not. Rather, we should posit against each other the representations of the relations individuals of antagonistic classes have *to the antagonism itself*, that is, to the social relation that unites them while opposing them and to its derivative forms (property, division of labor, the state, etc.)—a relation they cannot, of course, "live" in the same manner but one that necessarily represents, for them as for others, what is universal in a given epoch, "their" epoch, or the epoch of their antagonism.

This second interpretation is much more profound than the first. It is in fact the one toward which Marx's text is heading. At any rate, we find its deferred trace in the résumé of 1859 (the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) in a reference to the "ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."⁸

If we ourselves are to fight out an understanding of the logic brought into play here, we will obviously find ourselves opposed to any thesis imputing an absolute lack of reality to the ideological world, and we will no longer understand the sense in which this world "lacks history," or the sense in which it "cannot exist" for the proletariat. We will conclude that there are not only real differences in the ideological world but also contradictions, and that they clash with the contradictions of practice, contributing, in themselves, to "real life."

At this stage of Marx's problematic, however, this interpretation is no less aporetic than the one before; and in order to be able to bring it to conclusion, a dominated ideology would have to be placed in opposition to the dominant ideology—which is exactly what Marx does not do, except implicitly, in the emptiness or vacillation of his first expression. The whole of *The German Ideology* is precariously balanced on this concept of "dominant" ideology, for which there is no corresponding "dominated" ideology. It would be impossible to take this term literally without giving credence,

finally, to the concept of a proletarian ideology and thus without questioning, again, the divorce of the proletariat from all ideology. And this means breaking up the whole constituent structure of materialism, the layers of correspondence between materiality, production, practice, history, and revolution.

Historical Materialism or Political Materialism

It is obvious that Marx has no solution to the problem. But he is hardly able to ignore it, since it is the essence of revolutionary politics. Ample confirmation of this is provided in the *Communist Manifesto*, written two years after *The German Ideology*. The *Manifesto* presents more than ever the radical antithesis between revolutionary consciousness and all the forms of social consciousness that actually reflect the *past* history of former class oppressions: "The communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas."⁹ These ideas are none other than those of nationality, religion, family, freedom, culture, law, and so on, which made up the content of what Marx used to call "ideology."

If the *Manifesto* refutes accusations of immorality and barbarism leveled at communism—the "specter that is haunting Europe"—it is clearly not to paint a better picture of proletarian morality, nor even proletarian culture, but rather to establish that the bases of morality and culture have already been destroyed by the rule of bourgeois property.¹⁰ This essential de-ideologization, or, if you like, this anti-ideological tendency of the proletariat, is consistent with the catastrophism of the *Manifesto's* theses on class antagonism (the idea of "absolute impoverishment," the bourgeoisie can no longer feed those who feed it), and with its universalism (the ideal of crisis and world revolution). It is consistent with the description of socialist and communist literature put forward in chapter 3, a remarkable outline for a class analysis of anticapitalist ideologies but one strictly limited to the range of *nonproletarian* discourse, or discourse that expresses not the proletariat itself but rather the figure it cuts in the imaginary of other classes.

Confronted with this imaginary, the discourse of the *Manifesto* is positioned by both the critical relation it maintains with this imaginary and another radically different relation, since it looks not to the past but to the future of the movement, to the way this future is already at work in the present: toward what, in the whirlwind of the revolutions of 1848, Marx was soon to call—fleetingly—the "permanent revolution."¹¹ It is nonetheless

necessary to give a name and an empirical proof of existence to this other-than-ideological discourse, if only in order to conjure away the vicious circle that would appear immediately if the "proletarian" character of Marx's and Engels's theses "only drew their authority from themselves," if communism had no other existence than the publication of its "manifesto." The name and the proof are combined in one phrase: "We do not refer to that literature which, in every great modern revolution, has always given voice to the demands of the proletariat, such as the writings of Babeuf and others" (*Manifesto*, 94). Perhaps the whole trouble lies in the interpretation of "and others." What irreducible *tendency* do the writings of Babeuf represent? And how is this tendency less ideological than that of the "systems of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, etc."?

The context of this question is quite clear. What distinguishes Babeuf's communism (and that of the Blanquistes) is simply that it is purely political, that it identifies itself with the practical revolutionary will against the various systems, themselves identified with reformism. In this, however, we have the full-blown contradiction of the *Manifesto*: how do we think a politics without a political ideology, without a discourse on the state, or the future state, or the future of the state (were this future its disappearance)?

On this question the *Manifesto* strikes a markedly different note than *The German Ideology*. It uncovers, or recovers, a materialism other than that of history or even practice: *a materialism of politics*. Its analysis of the class struggle is articulated with the definition of a strategy.¹² The principal ideal, with respect to the revolution, is no longer that of an act at once complete and instantaneous, although this image always haunts its catastrophic vision of the crisis of capitalism. Rather, it is a process, or a transition, that will bring about the change from a class society to a classless society, starting from social contradictions in their actual configurations. Henceforth, the very concept of practice changes its meaning; it has to include the moment of a direction, in the dual sense of the term—orientation and program. The real movement of the revolution is no longer a radical *breakup* of bourgeois society, liberating the totality of the productive forces—or at least this is only its negative condition. Rather, it is a progressive construction, or *composition*, of forces, capable of joining together "the interests and immediate goals of the working class" with "the future of the movement," and capable of severing the constraints common to all of the "already established workers' parties," transcending their national divisions and the limitations of their respective "class points of view."

It is clearly no longer a case of representing the revolutionary proletariat

as situated *beyond* any existence as a class, in a mass of de-individualized individuals, as *The German Ideology* would have it. On the contrary, the concept of a class struggle must be extended to the revolutionary process itself in order to *think the revolution within the class struggle* (and not the class struggle within the imminence of revolution). Within the revolution, far from distinguishing itself from the bourgeoisie by ceasing to be a true class, the proletariat actually “constitutes itself as the ruling class” (by way of “winning the battle of democracy”), which must lead dialectically to its own negation and the destruction of all class rule, including its own. It is hardly credible that the proletariat, acting in this process as a specific class, would not be both the bearer of an ideology of its own and driven by the representations borne by that ideology. Thus, the proletariat is ultimately determined in its action, or in the strategic vicissitudes of its action, by these representations.

Does Marx pose this problem? Yes, he does, if you take into account his reflection on the historical conditions in which the *bourgeois* class struggle inevitably had to provide a political education for the *proletarian* class struggle. And no, he does not, in the sense that none of the theses of the *Manifesto* correct, however modestly, the myth of a class consciousness as radically exterior to ideology, nor do they give any idea of what a proletarian ideology might be. Thenceforth, theoretical conflict could only be resolved (apparently) by breaking up the concept of ideology and even abandoning its very use. Exit ideology, German or otherwise.

II

I shall now take the liberty of jumping over twenty years of history in order to consider the conditions of the revival of the concept of ideology in Marxism in the form given it by Engels. Again, we should speak of a vacillation, but in a different way, for it is no longer the case of a possible double reading of a single term. Rather, there is an unresolved theoretical conflict signaled by the recourse to *two* competing terms, each of them assured of a long life: “ideology” and “worldview.” What does this conflict consist of? And what can it teach us about the contradictory articulations of theory and politics?

Two Concepts for One Problem?

These two terms make their debut in Engels’s writing at the same time; the

formulations of the *Anti-Dühring* can be used as a point of reference. At the beginning of chapter 10, part 1, “Morality and Law: Equality,” is the first definition of ideology: it comes from the opposition between the methodology of materialist thinking, which proceeds from the real to the conceptual, and that of idealist thought (“apriorist” and “axiomatic”), which inverts this process in order to pass (fictitiously) from the concept, or the abstraction, to the real which it spuriously purports to engender.¹³ The definition, then, is purely epistemological. It implies, however, that if the effect of ideological discourse belongs to the order of knowledge (and of misunderstanding), its object, and its *raison d’être*, is social and political: ideological systems always result from the combination of a completely arbitrary element, which according to Engels would be a result of the individual imagination, and an objective element constituted by pre-existing social perspectives or conceptions (*Anschauungen*), which express real social relations. These perspectives are always already invested in a side chosen or a position taken (“*positiv oder negativ, bestätigend oder bekämpfend*”). We are thus led to believe that if the specific modality of the ideas of ideology is to appear in the form of “eternal truths,” universal and ahistorical, then it is precisely because they represent a political value judgment, a sanctioning of the existing order, which goes forth masked.¹⁴

This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the model for ideological discourse is the juridical discourse that turns on freedom, equality, justice, the rights and duties of man, contractual relations, relations of violence, and so on. Engels returns here to a habitual theme of Marx’s critique, one that joins the economic critique and the political critique in making legal ideology the kernel of all bourgeois philosophical ideology.¹⁵ Within this arrangement, the term “ideology” stands only for the misunderstanding, or the illusion, implied by these additional elaborations. Ideology, by definition, does not admit of any historical efficacy, apart from its blocking knowledge and consciousness of the real movement: ideology is “pure” ideas.

Another term surfaces, however, alongside this critique: “worldview” (*Weltanschauungen*). It is remarkable that Engels never gives it a general definition. Clearly it has been borrowed: even more than “ideology”—a word riddled with allusions to the philosophical issues of Franco-German history,¹⁶ but which, before the diffusion of Marxism (with an exception made for the brief career of the French “Ideologues,” such as Destutt de Tracy), had never figured as a systematic concept—“worldview” is an imported term. In the *Anti-Dühring*, and simultaneously in a series of other

texts, published or otherwise (particularly those exhumed under the title *Dialectics of Nature*), there is not only an attempt to counteract “ideology” (and idealism) with a “scientific” and “materialist worldview,” but also an attempt to expose in its own right “the communist worldview championed by Marx and myself...covering a fairly comprehensive range of subjects” (CW25:8) (which, taken literally, implies that *others* could champion it, too, in their own way, with respect to other subjects).

The goal of this project poses an immediate problem. In opposition to the idealism of bourgeois ideology which vindicates the existing order, the idea of a communist *and* materialist worldview constitutes itself as a result of Marx’s theoretical “discovery,” the theory of exploitation and the state. It is the fact of this theory, or this “discovery,” that sustains it. From then on, we find ourselves running counter to the theses of *The German Ideology*. Even when its terms and propositions are taken up again (or rediscovered), the point of reference (and the perspective on the structure and functions of ideology) has clearly been radically displaced—to the other end of the philosophical spectrum—from *practice* (and pure practice at that) *to theory*, or to historical materialism as a science of social production and class struggle.

One insistent theme, developed specifically in the fragments of the *Dialectics of Nature*, conveniently maps out this reversal of perspective: a history of thought (*des Denkens*), the trajectory and principal stages of which Engels tries to chart. Whereas in *The German Ideology* thought had no history of its own, now the logic of this history gives the materialist-communist worldview its content and allows the historical necessity of the idealizations of ideology to be understood. In an ultrapositivist way, the Marx of *The German Ideology* denies philosophy any knowledge value and any historical positivity. Engels now takes the opposite position. If he is hesitant to qualify as philosophy (or materialist philosophy) the communist worldview, whose kernel is the theory of history “discovered” by Marx,¹⁷ he nonetheless sees philosophy as having a legitimate domain (“the laws and operations of thought”), and, above all, he describes the birth of the theory of history in terms of an essential relation to philosophy and its own history. The materialist worldview is not, in this respect, a radical shift of ground, an absolute antithesis of all philosophy. If it succeeds in going beyond the categories of philosophical thought, then it is because *it comes out of them*, or rather because it comes out of their contradictions. So there are contradictions in philosophy. Consequently, in good dialectical reasoning, even if philosophy is not itself *the real*, there is *a reality* to philosophy: for, as Engels will more or less say later, in his best reading of Hegel, all that is

contradictory is real.

To put it another way, materialism, or *some* materialism (even in the form of its inversion and its denial), is present within this history of thought in the form of an element always already constitutive of philosophy. The history of thought, of which philosophy is a kind of distillation, is the struggle for and against materialism. In contrast to *The German Ideology*, for which only practice is materialist in the true sense, it is now necessary to posit that there is a *theoretical materialism* (well prior to historical materialism).

Let us not join those who have hastened to label this new discourse of Engels’s regressive. Such a way of posing the problem of materialism, regardless of its own difficulties, is much less speculative than a direct identification of practice with reality that makes it equivalent to the purely revolutionary act and establishes ideology (if not all theory) on the level of illusion or nonbeing. At least in this new arrangement a *site* (that of discourse?) is set aside for the confrontation between revolutionary practice and ideological domination, across the opposition of worldviews and the interference between the history of thought and the history of class struggle. If materialism is a specific relation between theory and practice, it ought to be legible in theory itself.

As we will see, this modification is linked to new political conditions within the working-class movement. But it is also clear that it is ordained by the incontrovertible intellectual “fact” of Marx’s production of a theory of class struggle. The first concept of ideology ran up against the difficulty of thinking of the classical economic theory targeted by Marx’s critical project at the beginning of the 1850s as a science, or even as a nonscience. The second concept of ideology and its antithesis, the worldview, constitutes an initial attempt to come to terms with the scientific result of this critique, as much in the field of theory (the identification of the juridical and anthropological presuppositions of bourgeois economics) as in the practical field of proletarian revolution (the passage from the moral idealism of utopian socialism to the mass politics of scientific socialism, transcending the abstract alternatives of law and violence, or anarchism and “state socialism,” etc.).

A well-known term sums up this recasting of the Marxist problematic: “dialectical materialism” (or “dialectical method”). But does this ambivalent term (as the later history of Marxism was to prove) not serve, again, to camouflage a simple *coup de force*? Is the idea of a “history of thought,” supporting this recourse to the dialectic, anything more than the confused designation of two separate processes that cannot be completely unified,

and inevitably tend to drift apart—namely, a history of ideologies (political history) and a history of worldviews (theoretical history)? In Engels himself the immediate breakup of this false identity is quite evident. The formulations I have just referred to are only the beginning of a contradictory development.

We must recall here the conditions that provided a proper time and space (over twenty years) for Engels's theoretical reflections. At the outset, following the Commune and the dissolution of the First International, the formation of workers' parties was on the agenda. These parties developed within the struggle between tendencies, against the "deviations" represented by anarchism, ("apolitical") trade unionism, and state socialism both national (Lassalle) and liberal (for example the "lawyer's socialism" about which we will hear more; or "possibilism" in France). The struggles for a revolutionary socialism and for the hegemony of Marxist theory—indeed, for the control of the Social Democratic Party—are effectively bound together. However, from the 1880s on (after Marx's death), the situation is reversed: already within German social democracy this hegemony has been officially attained (and sanctioned by the Erfurt Program). Book I of *Capital*, resituated by Engels himself in the more general historical framework set forth in the *Manifesto*, is recognized as the theory of the party, along with the interpretation of it put forward by the *Anti-Dühring*. While the first texts by Engels (and the last by Marx) are written to inaugurate and enforce "Marxism," Engels's last texts are also written against it, and take a distance from it, because its mission, even though incomplete, has been too successful. They are written as an attempt to rectify what, in the process of constituting a Marxist orthodoxy, appears from the start to be an idealization and an ideologization of theory, as disturbing in its critical form (neo-Kantian: Bernstein) as in its materialist form (Darwinian: Kautsky).¹⁸

As part of this realignment, could there not also be an element of self-criticism, more or less avowed, directed not only at Engels's own texts (since Bernstein and Kautsky insist they became Marxists by reading the *Anti-Dühring*) but also at the "perverse" effects of the (available) texts of Marx, along with their omissions or excesses? These reflections also anticipate the character of the "crisis of Marxism" openly proclaimed in the years following Engels's death. They are inscribed, moreover, within the compass of the same practical contradictions, the same historical dislocations. The same contradictions arise: on the one hand, the growth of the Socialist party, the strengthening of its organization, and its trade union ties; on the other, its tendency to subordinate itself to the "rules of the game" of bourgeois

politics, drawn up by the state, such that Engels feared Germany would repeat the English counterexample (an "*embourgeoisement*" of the proletariat, which the concept of a "workers' aristocracy" does not suffice to explain). The same dislocations emerge: between the theses freshly culled from *Capital* concerning the development of class relations in capitalist society and the actual results of the Great Depression of the 1870s (the emergence of finance capital and the first signs of a "social policy" from the bourgeoisie, not easily reducible to the simple schema of the bourgeoisie having become a "superfluous class").¹⁹

This displacement (Engels literally changes his position toward "Marxism," or if you prefer, "Marxism" escapes him) is translated by conceptual reworkings. The drift of the pair ideology/worldview can be taken as a symptom of the crisis. Tendentially, these concepts change ground: having arisen out of an essentially epistemological problematic, they end up, in the 1890s, being formulated in an essentially historical and political way (it is tempting to say that they are now back where the whole thing started). Their symmetry falls apart; they become partly interchangeable and, at the same time, partly incompatible.

The Failure of Engels's Epistemological Project

If Engels's first formulations are so heavily drawn toward epistemology, this is not only a result of the theoretical "fact" represented by *Capital* (and the use to which he is trying to put it in the construction of a party); it is also the effect of the intellectual environment. "*Erkenntnistheoretisch*," the adjective Engels uses, is the very word that for the neo-Kantians qualifies the problem of knowledge, which is not the case for *Weltanschauung* (or at least not yet).²⁰

In the *Anti-Dühring*, Engels sets out by opposing to philosophy a simple *Anschauung der Welt*; he then graduates to the idea of a *Weltanschauung* (or *Weltauffassung*), which takes into account the materialist aspect of philosophy, basing itself on a history of nature, of society, and of thought—a "worldview" that must be "scientific" as much in its form as in its content. This brings us back to the question of "method," to a traditional opposition between a "system of knowledge," fantasmally constructed, and "systematic knowledge," proceeding indefinitely, beyond any closure. As for the content, it leads us back to the laws of "internal connection" between things, discovered by science, and to the general "law of evolution," which it eventually articulates for each specific domain (the examples of Laplace in cosmology,

Helmholtz in physics, Darwin in biology, and Marx in economics). If philosophy as Engels practices it does not claim to “found” these laws, it does reflect their common opposition to metaphysics and their analogy with each other (in this, Engels is clearly more Aristotelian than Kantian). The idea of the history of thought is thus established; it stands for the claim that, in history, “materialism” and “dialectic” reciprocally imply each other. Each is a means of developing the other.²¹

Engels’s argument is obviously neither conclusive nor free of vacillation (particularly over the definition of philosophy). However, it is plainly not vulgar, and certainly not scientistic according to the criteria of contemporary discourse.²²

Its basic features would have to be confronted with positivism properly speaking, whereby it could be seen that any significant agreement between them points, nonetheless, to an entirely different attitude toward historical “tendencies.” Engels indeed clearly disavows a conception of the relation between theory and practice (and, consequently, the status of a “political science”) in the positivist mode of a simple exteriority as a prediction or application, implying the primacy of theory.

A more delicate question is that of the relation between Engels’s epistemological project and post-Darwinian “evolutionist” ideology. Whenever he characterizes the dialectical element of the “worldview,” Engels always harkens back to the Darwinian example, the analogy between the discovery of a “historical law of nature” and Marx’s own “natural law of history,” as well as the analogy between these two discoveries, on the one hand, and the historicism of Hegel, on the other. (They share, Engels tells us, the same basic idea of process.) More seriously, this same Engels, who openly challenges social Darwinism (in the often cited letter to Lavrov, for example, dated November 12, 1875), does not think twice about applying pseudo-Darwinian models of the “natural selection of ideas” to the history of Christianity and socialism (he was neither the first nor the last—think of Sir Karl Popper!—to take this path so well worn today).²³

We can observe in this the undeniable effects of the attraction exercised on Engels’s thought by that of Haeckel, the first, it appears, to have used the phrase “struggle between two worldviews”—one monist, mechanist, even materialist, the other dualist, finalist, spiritualist—in his *History of Creation* (1868). If Engels does not employ the technical principle that Haeckel made the cornerstone of his evolutionism, the “fundamental law of biogenetics,” the “theory of the recapitulation of phylogeny by ontogeny”²⁴ (could it be that he thought it too “mechanistic”?), he nonetheless retains the idea of the

principle of evolution as a passage from inferior to superior, in the sense of an increasing complexity, by shifts at levels of organization. Written into this law is the passage from natural to human history and the differentiation therein (from life to work, from work to language and consciousness). Hence, the linking of Darwin with Marx—one a theorist of the descent of humankind, the other a theorist of the necessity of the passage from capitalism to socialism—results in founding the latter upon the increasing mastery over nature (by way of science, social planning). So the proletariat is not only “heir to German classical philosophy” (as he was later to write),²⁵ it is *heir to the full range of evolution*, in short, the Son of Man (not, of course, theological man, but “natural” Darwinian man).²⁶

If we are obliged to take this tendency seriously—one well and truly present in Engels, which will be dominant for a good part of his posterity—it is because it goes hand in hand with a countertendency that is, perhaps paradoxically, manifest in the way he rediscovers Hegel and reverts to his dialectic, itself surely “evolutionist” though irreducible to the model of biological evolutionism. The idea of history conceived as evolutionary law, though heavy with consequences, only temporarily provides Engels with the structure of his materialist dialectic, in opposition to a specific worldview or image: the fixed or mechanistic structure of the natural science, political philosophy, and metaphysics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This critique, however, very quickly changes its tune. Having used the weapons of evolutionism against the doctrine of immutability, it directs the firepower of its Hegelian references (and occasionally Fourierist ones) against the transformation of evolutionism in its turn into a metaphysics or a system. For Engels, the idea of an “evolutionary law” never works alone; it is always accompanied by its opposite number, which defines the dialectic *through contradiction*. Evolutionism ignores this completely (including Darwin and, most of all, Haeckel). Contradiction, however, is not the “struggle for existence.” The importance of Hegel’s thought, according to Engels, lies in the fact that, even though it is totally incapable of discovering any determinate scientific laws, it posits the whole world (natural and social) as a process and immediately identifies this process with the immanent interplay or internal concatenation of a set of contradictions. In Engels’s sense, a “dialectical law,” holding sway within the material conditions that specify it and with which it “interacts” (what Engels calls, more in a Spinozist than in a Kantian sense, *Wechselwirkung* or *Zusammenhang*), does not express the continuity of a developing order or plan (belonging, implicitly, to a subject) but rather the moments of a contradiction or the phases of an antagonism. It is above all

here we must grant all its importance to the thesis that calls for the world to be thought of not as a “complex of things” but as a “complex of processes,” that is, a complexity without a pre-existing or final identity, without a substantial identity of the elements that make up its reality.

Though the results of this investigation were later to be presented as a “coherent” system, I do not think that it is tenable; quite the contrary. But it must be judged in context. Ultimately, Engels can be seen here *playing one teleology off against another*. Under the circumstances, we should not be surprised by the political and theoretical ambiguity that results when, in the name of his dialectical explanation of the tendency toward socialism—the source for which is Marx’s famous phrase about the “expropriation of the expropriators” as a “negation of a negation”²⁷—he finds himself cornered once more by the insoluble problem of a nonteleological conception of the “end of the state,” or if you will, of an end of the state that would not be the end of history). However, if we want to accept, as a working hypothesis, the general inevitability of evolutionism as a nineteenth-century scientific ideology,²⁸ we will have to call attention to both the impasse caused by this recourse to Hegel in the constitution of a materialist worldview and the singular place it occupies, historically, between the official bourgeois evolutionism of the nineteenth century (notably, that which will inspire *Kulturkampf*) and the Darwinian Marxism of social democracy. Engels’s efforts then take on the air of a *proleptic critique* of the evolutionism at the heart of the working-class movement and of Marxism itself.

This project turns out to be untenable for Engels himself, however, an indication of which is the incompleteness and abandonment of the theoretical project whose fragments are collected in *Dialectics of Nature*. Our understanding of this stems from the paradox inherent in the idea of such a history of thought: indeed, the more Engels adds to his empiricist proclamations (for example, all thought comes from experience, or social experience), the more it appears his history of thought is fundamentally autonomous, with its own pre-existing logic, and consonant with an overall dialectical structure that comes not from experience but from the idealist tradition. As if by chance, this structure always falls back upon the trinitarian model of the familiar adventures of the dialectic and posits materialism, hence the materialist and communist worldview, as the end of the process. And it easily falls under Engels’s own critique of Hegel with respect to the system and absolute spirit. Could communism-materialism not be another name for the absolute spirit? How can one not ask this question?

Above all, Engels assumes that the materialist worldview is identical to

the communist one. What justifies his identifying them? To say that it is the fulfillment of materialism by Marx in a science of the historical necessity of communism only provides a mirror image of the question. It can be said that the communist worldview will necessarily be materialistic because it bases itself on extending the contemporary scientific method, culminating in the laws of evolution, to history and politics. But it can also be said that “materialism,” basically, means nothing other than this *petitio principii*: “communism + science = materialism.” What seems to be missing here is a specifically political component, one both internal to the theory and necessarily implicated in its history.

But where do we go to look for this lack—to the materialist side or the communist side? Which of these two terms suggests a class point of view, and which can thus *add* it to science *without* it being an “alien addition” (CW 25:479)? In fact, two historical structures, fundamentally at odds with each other, layered on top of one another, are at stake here. The first is that of the adventures of the dialectic, from its Greek origins to its fulfillment in historical materialism. The second is that of the struggle between materialism and idealism throughout the history of thought. Each of these categories, considered alone, can be read in a perfectly idealistic way, as an expression of the *autonomy* of thought. What would authorize another reading would be to understand each of these categories, and each in relation to the other, as representing the very instance of the class struggle.

It would be necessary to be able to say, for example, that materialism in different historical epochs expresses resistance to the established order, the struggle of the oppressed and the exploited, in order to understand how the history of the dialectic, intersected by this struggle, ends up precisely in a theory of exploitation and the advent of communism. Inversely, it would be necessary to be able to show that the first form of the dialectic, the Greek one, is organically linked to the emergence of the class state in the ancient city and that its ultimate form (representing, to some extent, its immanent self-criticism) is aimed at thinking the disintegration of that bond, the end of the state and of classes. Then we would have an explanation of how the relation between materialism and idealism is inverted before our eyes; how, for the first time, the struggle of the exploited ceases to assume the simple form of an endless resistance or rebellion, or of a stepping-stone toward a new order of domination; how, for the first time, the consciousness of the struggling classes ceases to be idealistic (or utopian) and how the theory of this struggle can be identified with materialism, with the thinking of the real movement. However, for this interpretation, or any one like it, to lead us

effectively away from any pre-established plan, we would need a complete history of the “class struggle within theory” and its necessary material conditions. The fusion of materialism with the class struggle would no longer seem naturally given or guaranteed (in the way that the philosophy of the Enlightenment figured the identity in nature between the idealism of reason and mankind’s struggle for bourgeois freedoms); it would be produced as an encounter, within the determinate conditions on which its modalities depend. But if Engels’s assumption implicitly encompasses this historical problem, it also calls an immediate halt to any attempt at concrete analysis.

State, Masses, Ideology

If this analysis is correct, we are in a better position to judge the new definition of ideology that Engels puts forward in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888), and which is clearly inscribed in the phase of rectification of and reaction against the form taken by nascent “Marxism” mentioned above.²⁹

This detailed definition begins with the critique of the Hegelian dialectic, showing that the contradiction of materialism and idealism must be thought of as immanent. An idealism can itself be historical; one must, however, distinguish idealism from the “ideological process” in general. The ideological process (a formulation used in *Ludwig Feuerbach*) is more general than idealism, which is a necessary, but derivative, effect of the ideological process:

Still higher ideologies, that is, such as are still further removed from the material, economic basis, take the form of philosophy and religion. Here the connection between conceptions and their material conditions of existence becomes more and more complicated, more and more obscured by intermediate links. But the connection exists. ...Every ideology, however, once it has arisen, develops in connection with the given concept-material, and develops this material further; otherwise it would not be an ideology, that is, occupation with thought as with independent entities, developing independently and subject only to their own laws. That the material conditions of life of the persons inside whose heads this thought process goes on in the last resort determine the course of this process remains of necessity unknown to these persons, for otherwise all ideology would be finished. (CW 26:393-94)

It is clear that ideology is above all a chain of mediations. The opposition of

practice to ideology takes the form of a relation (the unconscious last instance) between two histories, one of which (that of secondary ideological elaborations) is inserted into the other (that of economics) by way of a materialist genesis.

None of this would move us beyond a well-worn geneticism and empiricism were it not for the way Engels attaches this definition to a new conception of the state. The birth of ideological forms is mediated essentially by the history of the forms of the state apparatus (“the state (is) the first ideological power” [CW 26:392]). What we have again (as in *The German Ideology*, which Engels had just reread in manuscript) is at once a theory of the state and a theory of ideology. Yet their respective articulation has changed. In *The German Ideology*, ideology is formally anterior to the state, since it arises directly out of the division of labor at the base of the development of bourgeois civil society. In substance, however, it is no different from the state itself: they are mirror images of the same critique of political illusion. Strictly speaking, the bourgeois state is itself only an ideological form, its material base being the division of intellectual and manual labor. In *Ludwig Feuerbach*, there is a tendency to recognize a real complexity of the state, not only because it assumes both the general, productive functions of society and the coercive role of a class-state but also because it recapitulates or condenses all the historically anterior forms of domination (whereas the capitalist production relation actually makes the past a *tabula rasa*).

This singular reality of the state apparatus raises the question of a (re)production of ideology by the state, or at least in strict complicity with the existence of the state, by means of those institutions that have a statelike character (like the medieval Church). Only through this sort of mediation is the relation to social antagonisms established, the result being an autonomization of the state as a class apparatus. Only this internal relation to the state explains why the organization of ideology ultimately tends to manufacture dogmas or systems, and to confer upon them the logic that will give them the illusory appearance of absolute truth. In effect, no state is viable that does not repress contradiction, inherent within every difference, beneath the unity of a dominant discourse. This relation, finally, enables the mapping of a topography of ideological regions (religious, legal, moral, philosophical); it shows that in each social formation the articulation and hierarchy of these regions changes. When a new class becomes dominant and the state apparatus changes form, a new ideological form likewise becomes dominant, which means that it imposes on other forms its own logic and, as it were, its illumination (a metaphor inspired by Hegel). Thus

every revolt against the state, subject to this determination by the “dominant” system, necessarily starts as a heresy.

But his definition of ideological forms is not given for its own sake. It fulfills a well-defined role: to resolve, in a materialist and scientific manner, the question of the historical movement (*geschichtliche Bewegung*) and of its “motor forces” (*Triebkräfte*), otherwise known as the reciprocal problem of the “reduction” of ideology to its “material base.” Engels thus comes to terms with what, since Machiavelli and Hegel, was a fundamental question, namely, “the relation between individuality and the mass.” Engels tries to solve this by combining two pre-existing theoretical components: first, the construction of the *inverted ideological reflection* as a means of explaining how, “in the minds of men,” interests become ideas, then motives, then wills; second, the “statistical” construction of the *composition of individual wills*, which explains why “men” want a determinate outcome but end up with an entirely different result. The conjuncture of these two components makes ideological forms the fundamental explanation of *Rückwirkung*, the “retro-action” that defines the historical movement. What is important here is not so much the fact that ideology “reacts” on its base but, more fundamentally, that ideology is, in its own right, the middle term of the historical process or of *society’s reflection upon itself*, which permanently engenders its historicity.³⁰

Whatever the validity or originality of Engels’s constructions, they lead to an incontestable result: the concept of ideology can be both an instrument for the differential analysis of social formations and an organic component of the theory of history. In reality, there was no historical materialism beyond a critique of ideology (*The German Ideology*) and of political economy (*Capital*) until the time had come for raising the question of the relation among the economic, political, and ideological “instances.” It is crucial that we recognize this problem as that of the historical relation between the masses and the state.

What constitutes historical materialism for Engels is neither the single concept of class struggle, nor even the correspondence of ideology with class relations, but the articulation of a series of concepts: classes, state, masses, ideology. That the class struggle is the “motor of history” and that it is “the masses who make history” still does not represent a solution but, rather, the problem itself. In the conjuncture of what one can analyze as “the classes” (antagonism) and “the masses” (or mass movements), Engels attempts to define what should be understood as ideology: if the masses in their “being” are *nothing other* than the classes—or rather, do not consist in other “real”

individuals than the individuals of determinate classes—their mode of historical existence cannot be reduced to the classes.

Just as Rousseau asked himself, “what makes a people a people?” and answered by way of the contract and its distinctive ideality (or its symbolic form), Engels here asks *what constitutes the masses as masses*, and answers by way of ideology and its distinctive unconsciousness, linking it to a materialist genesis in which the state represents the instance of the class struggle. On the political scene, where regimes come and go historically, the classes are not introduced in person, in the abstract, but as masses and mass movements, always already subject to the “retro-action” of ideology. It is this last moment that represents the concrete instance of politics.

In spite of what has just been suggested, however, it would be wrong to believe that the concept of ideology, defined in this way, actually enables Engels to solve the ongoing problem concerning the relation between the scientific theory of historical materialism and proletarian political practice, or the organization of the class struggle in the form of the party. Only this solution would support, *hic et nunc*, a distinction between a revolutionary politics “resulting in a great historical transformation” and the “transient flaring up of a straw-fire which quickly dies down” (CW 26:389). This shortcoming has to do with the way the theoretical construction of *Ludwig Feuerbach* always comes down to reducing mass ideological formations to the resultant of individual “motives.” And it has to do with the fact that, in this problematic, two expressions remain more impossible than ever: on the one hand that of “materialist ideology,” on the other that of “proletarian ideology.” Both would imply, if not the existence of a proletarian state, then at least the constitutive role played by the existing state in their formation. If there is an ideology of the proletariat, it is either a nonideology, or else it is the dominant ideology itself, surviving in the “lag of consciousness” or miraculously turned against the state. Engels thus, on the one hand, has a principle for explaining the historical movement *in terms of ideology* as a cause; on the other, he has a revolutionary force *devoid of ideology*, which, in this sense, is not a force. How can this circle be broken?³¹

“Neither God, nor Caesar, nor Tribune”?

One would think that it is in order to solve this problem from another angle that Engels embarks on a new attempt to define “worldview.” The most interesting text from this point of view is probably the article he co-wrote with Kautsky in 1887, “Lawyer’s Socialism,” attacking the theses of Anton

Menger. Engels's argument rests on a comparison among the "three great worldviews," medieval, bourgeois, and proletarian:

The medieval worldview was essentially theological... The unity of the West European world, which comprised a group of nations developing in constant interaction, was constituted by Catholicism. This theological unification (*Zusammenfassung*) was not merely ideal (*ideell*). It actually (*wirklich*) consisted... above all in the feudal and hierarchical organization of the Church... With its feudal landholdings, the Church was the real (*reale*) link between the different countries, and the Church's feudal organization gave a religious blessing to the secular feudal system of government. Besides, the clergy was the only educated class. It was therefore natural that Church dogma formed the starting-point and basis of all thought. Everything—jurisprudence, science, philosophy—was pursued from the angle of whether or not the contents were in keeping with Church doctrine.

Nevertheless, pursues Engels, the power of the merchant bourgeoisie developed in the bosom of the feudal system. The Reformation,

theoretically speaking, was nothing more than repeated attempts by the bourgeoisie, the urban plebeians and the peasantry that rose in rebellion together with them, to adapt the old, theological worldview to the changed economic conditions and position of the new class. But this did not work. The religious banner was raised for the last time in England in the seventeenth century, and scarcely fifty years later the new worldview that was to become the classical one of the bourgeoisie emerged undisguised in France: *the legal worldview*. It was a secularization (*Verweltlichung*) of the theological worldview. Dogma, divine right, was supplanted by human rights, the Church by the State. The economic and social relations, which people previously believed to have been created by the Church and its dogma—because sanctioned by the Church—were now believed to be founded on the law and created by the State.³²

This is explained, Engels argues, by the threefold action exercised by the universalization of exchange (which requires a fixed contractual form in accordance with state norms), free trade (which imposes the watchword of equality for all before the law), and the bourgeoisie's struggles for political power (which, fighting against privileges, had to take the form of demands for civil rights). All that, let us note, is very general but seems incontestable.

Against these two worldviews of the historical ruling classes, Engels posits the proletarian worldview, which is "now spreading throughout the world" through socialism, and the strengthening of the working class movement (Lenin and Gramsci would say that it is tendentially becoming hegemonic).

This idea appears to differ from the outline sketched in *Ludwig Feuerbach* only by way of a substitution of terms. But the substitution is enough to do away with the obstacle that the concept of ideology encounters: it clears a space for the proletariat. We can now speak of a proletarian worldview that would be to the class struggle of the proletariat what the legal worldview had been for the bourgeois class struggle: its weapon and its justification. We thereby move, it seems, away from an schema of the *reproduction* of ideological dominations (in which, to be frank, they are all essentially the same, insofar as they legitimate the existing order) toward a schema of *transformation* in which the relation to the state could be inverted. Thus, the conflict of "worldviews," according to their content and the nature of the classes that hold them, would not be limited to rearranging the various configurations of a game of ideological regions (or discourses of domination, which buttress each other) but would overturn their effects.

Have we really gotten any further? Perhaps not. In describing the "prolonged struggle between the two worldviews," bourgeois-legal and proletarian-communist, as the form of the current class struggle, Engels shows us that the latter has a necessary place in history. It is important that his demonstration is wholly based on the reaffirmation of the *existence of legal ideology*, which is always stubbornly denied, even among the critics of the school of natural right.³³ It is also symptomatic that this demonstration now has as its counterpart the eclipse of the very term "ideology." Engels seems to be in a quandary about defining the proper content of the proletarian "worldview" with a term comparable to "theological" and "legal." He stubbornly agonizes over these difficulties, as is evident in the description he offers for the transition from the bourgeois worldview to the proletarian worldview. He clarifies the analysis of utopian socialism presented in *Anti-Dühring* by identifying two stages. Socialist ideas first appear in a *legal* form by turning against the bourgeoisie its own catchword and ideal of equality. Then they appear in a *humanist* and implicitly moral form that sanctions the critique of legalism but rejects all politics, considered to be bourgeois (this corresponds very nicely to the themes of the early writings of Marx and Engels themselves). We can see that what this transition actually leads to, with the experience of the revolutions and growth of the working-class movement: the recognition of the *political* character of the class struggle,

denied by all previous worldviews, for which “politics” is rather the suppression of class struggle (but not, of course, of the classes themselves). This implies the recognition of the fact that the field of politics is constituted—in the strong sense of its being the principle of deployment of its forms—not by a substantial community or by an established order, but by the *irreconcilable* character of certain antagonisms. Thus, it is not an *a priori* deduction but its very history that would provide us with the key to the original content of the proletarian worldview, namely another theory and another practice of politics.

For all worldviews, it always comes back to an idea of politics (or a political idea), “for every class struggle is a political struggle,” as the *Manifesto* had already posited (*Ludwig Feuerbach*, CW 26:391; *Manifesto*, 76) (what was earlier called a “materialism of politics”). However, in the case of feudalism and the bourgeoisie, politics appears in different forms and under different names (religious or legal) that translate it or disguise it. In some texts from the same period (preparatory to his work in *The Origin of the Family*), Engels uses a remarkable phrase, speaking of a process of displacement toward *tangential* goals or objects (*Nebenzwecke*, *Nebendinge*), “to the side” of the fundamental problem of the class struggle.³⁴ This suggests that politics, in its essence, is not juridical, contrary to what is still assumed, if only in order to critique it, by the humanist early writings or *The German Ideology*. The juridical is itself a mask of the political, one of the ways to practice politics by turning it toward real or fictional *Nebenzwecke*. What would characterize the proletarian worldview, to the extent that it tends to remove state compulsion, would be the recognition of politics itself in a directly political form, without any “displacement” or diversion.

This argument only appears to be tautological, for the class struggle, in the last analysis, has a precise stake. Engels enters here into the whole consideration of communism, whose blueprint Marx had already provided (particularly in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*): *communism is a politics of labor*, not only as a struggle of workers aspiring to “government by the working class,” but, more profoundly, as a recomposition of politics starting from the very activity of labor, as a reciprocal transformation of politics by labor and labor by politics. This is what I elsewhere propose be analyzed as the second concept of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” in Marx and Engels—a new form of politics and not merely a revolutionary strategy for seizing power.³⁵

This reading of Engels’s historical schema assumes that we put an end to the ambiguity of the term “domination,” present as much in the expression

“dominant ideology” as in “dominant worldview,” not to mention the dominant (ruling) class. Until this point, paradoxically, Engels has always treated the proletarian worldview, that of the *exploited*, in a manner strictly parallel to that of the *exploiters* (apologists for slavery, serfdom, capitalism). In describing this revolutionary worldview, he fictively anticipates the moment when it will, in turn, come to be dominant and “take over the world.” Is it not precisely this fictive anticipation that curtails any analysis of the political organization of the class struggle corresponding to a proletarian worldview, precisely by constantly shuttling back and forth between the analogue of the state and its abstract antithesis, from the party-state to the “antistate” party (or movement)? Indeed, according to the logic of Engels’s historical account, one would need to have an institution or an organization corresponding, on the part of the proletariat, to what the Church or the state had been for other classes, in order to satisfy this function of theoretically developing the “class point of view” expressed by the worldview. To say that this institution is the “revolutionary party” (which Engels does not) would be to *give a name* to the process it suggests, that of an “affinity” or “correspondence” between what goes on in the mind of proletarians and what Marx’s mind produced: a materialist conception of history. But this would be to run the risk, as the anarchists point out, of perpetuating a political form that does not break with the historical succession of forms of domination. God and Caesar are “dead.” And the tribunes?

Religion and the “Thought of the Masses”

Engels seeks to bring about this theoretical change by representing the masses not “from above” but “from below,” in the light of their own “convictions” or “certainties” (what he designates, in the introduction to the English edition of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, as a “creed” [CW 27:290-95]). However, he is only able to do this in an indirect way, through a comparison between the history of socialism and the history of Christianity.

Let us reread, from this standpoint, one of his last texts, “On the History of Early Christianity,” dating from 1894-1895. There he expresses satisfaction in discovering in Renan (of whom he has a rather low opinion) a comparison between the groups formed by the first Christians during the decadent Roman Empire and the modern sections of the International Working Men’s Association, a comparison he proposes to “set on its feet” in order to explain, inversely, the history of modern socialism by that of

Christianity. It is not enough to identify the base of political class unity with the revolt of the exploited, slaves, or wage laborers; it remains to show how that base is produced out of the multiplicity of groups, sects, and rival organizations, and to describe the way in which, faced with exploitation, they represent to themselves salvation—the hopes and struggles that both unite them and perpetuate their divisions, which are properly the objects to be explained in examining revolutionary mass movements. As opposed to the “Jacobin” model, it is the Church or rather the religious community (“pre-Constantinian,” egalitarian Christianity, the terrestrial image of the “invisible Church”) that, as is so often the case in the German philosophical tradition, stands for the antithesis of the statist *imperium* and the form of autonomous organization of social consciousness. “In fact,” writes Engels,

the struggle against an initially overpowering world, and at the same time among the innovators themselves, is common to the early Christians and the socialists. Neither of these two great movements were made by leaders or prophets—although there are prophets in plenty in both of them—they are mass movements. And mass movements are bound to be confused at the beginning; confused because the thinking of the masses (*Massendenken*) at first moves among contradictions, uncertainties and incoherences (*sich zuerst in Widersprüchen, Unklarheiten, Zusammenhangslosigkeit bewegt*) and also because of the role that prophets still play in them at the beginning.

And later,

What kind of people were the first Christians recruited from? Mainly from the “laboring and burdened,” the members of the lower strata, as becomes a revolutionary element.... There was absolutely no common road to emancipation for all these elements. For all of them paradise lay lost behind them.... Where was the way out, salvation, for the enslaved, oppressed and impoverished, a way out (*Ausweg*) common to all these diverse groups of people whose interests were mutually alien or even opposed? And yet it had to be found if a great revolutionary movement was to embrace them all. This way out was found. But not in this world. As things were, it could only be a religious way out. Then a new world was embraced.³⁶

These texts, the sheer extreme of Engels’s speculations, are not without their relevance, even a historical one; but they are clearly circular, presupposing what they set out to demonstrate.

What they no doubt proclaim, and in no uncertain terms, is that “the masses think,” that *the proletarian worldview is nothing other than the thought of the masses*, whose specific content (what we have called the “politics of labor”) is not the result of a simple configuration of the class struggle but represents the conclusion to a long history (and a historical memory of its own). In this sense, this thought is not that of individuals; it is not the sum or resultant of individual psychologies (interests/motives/desires). Does this show the influence on Engels of a “social psychology” of the sort for which, at the time, certain reactionary theorists were drawing up a program?³⁷ I would say not, since we do not find in Engels any trace of the two constitutive elements of such a psychology: neither the idea that the process constitutive of the mass or crowd is its relation to a leader, an “agitator”; nor the idea that the thought of the masses is, in the last analysis, “religious” on account of a so-called elementary (archaic, primitive) religiosity that makes a periodic return in human social behavior. Rather, we find the inverse idea: that religious conviction, with its own ambivalence, is a given historical form of the thought of the masses. The line of demarcation between the two positions, however, could not be clearly drawn without constructing a concept of the *unconscious* as something other than the shadow cast by “consciousness,” but that theoretically reflects both the imaginary of “salvation” and the interpellation of individuals (if necessary, by themselves) as bearers of the collective, institutional identity of the group, the social movement.

Engels’s comparison never really breaks free from the positivist antithesis between illusion and reality, even when it willingly takes to task its most simplistic and dogmatic forms. Already, his insistence upon the heritage of classical German philosophy and utopian socialism in historical materialism is meant to be at odds with the scientism proper to the “organic intellectuals” of the workers’ party (or rather inherent in the historical relation between “intellectuals” and “workers,” constitutive of the mass party). But it still only refers to abstract intellectual productions. In making socialism not only an analogue of early Christianity but also the distant result of its transformation—through the revolutionary mass movements of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the peasant wars, the utopias of the English Levellers and Diggers, the struggle of the “Fourth Estate” in the French Revolution—Engels in fact inscribes the ideological relation to history within the very content of the proletarian worldview, or, if you will, within the mode of production of mass consciousness. But he only does this in order to confirm an evolutionist view of that history: in the end (“in the last instance”), sufficient cause for the transformation can always be found

in the “real conditions” of liberation, that is, in the development of the productive forces and in the simplification of class antagonisms by capitalism. If real communism can grow out of imaginary communism—so he tells us—it is because these conditions force the proletariat today to *leave illusion behind*, to go through the looking glass of its dreams; it is because there actually exists a pre-established harmony between the impoverishment of the masses, the radical absence of *property* among wage workers (*Eigentumlosigkeit*), and the radical absence of *illusions* in Marxist theory (*Illusionslosigkeit*). It is because the proletarian is “the man without qualities,” contemplating his essence in the naked text of the theoretician, which states reality “without alien addition,” with neither regret nor hope. The political content of mass thinking remains suspended within this pre-established harmony, which is basically always that of a radical negativity (in which the persistent trace of the concept of alienation could easily be found, for labor is to property what reality is to illusion), and which still requires all the pedagogical and organizational work of a party to deliver it and bring it to the fore.

The uncertainty of Engels’s position is then clear. It can be seen, in a rather academic way, as the expression of a double impossibility: the impossibility of maintaining a simply anti-Hegelian position, opposing the real as practice to ideology as speculation; and the impossibility of returning to a Hegelian position (or one perceived as such) in which practice and theory, being and consciousness would come together in the “final” figure of a proletariat, the absolute truth of history—perhaps not *outside* any determinate material condition, but nevertheless *beyond* all these conditions, at the end of their development.

This dilemma would seem to be the source of the equivocal line taken by Engels’s epistemological reflections, which, without totally identifying with either but drawing examples and concepts from each in turn, follow alongside both the “critical” path of neo-Kantianism and the “materialist” path of evolutionism and naturalism. In this respect the very insistence of the philosophical problem of the “unknowability of the thing-in-itself,” or of “relative truth” and “absolute truth,” is not only an effect of the ambiance of the times. It is an aporetic expression of the search for a “third path” that never stops escaping from its own concept.

This third path, which should represent both a new philosophical position and a departure from the element of philosophy, is presumed to be incarnated by the mass party as a unity of opposites: expression *and* transformation of proletarian consciousness; proletarian replica of the statist

forms of “ideological power” *and* practical anticipation of a communist civility in the course of the class struggle itself. We can of course consider this uncertainty simply to represent the intermediate historical link between a purely critical concept of ideology that would challenge all domination (Marx’s concept at the beginning) and a completely inverse concept, which would prepare other dominations (under the name of proletarian and then Marxist-Leninist ideology). But such a conclusion would be a way to close again the question that Engels had opened, under the effect of the disturbance that the emergence of an organized class struggle produced in the traditional confrontation of politics and philosophy. It would do no more than lead us back to the traditional antithesis of a theoretical knowledge, free of ideological conditioning (*Wertfrei*), and a “party” position expressing a subjective “worldview.” Is it not precisely the insufficiency and sterility of this opposition that Engels’s project, in its very uncertainty, makes clear?

IN SEARCH OF THE PROLETARIAT

The Notion of Class Politics in Marx

At the beginning, we are confronted with a flagrant paradox. Starting with the “encounter” which took place in 1843-1844 in Paris (a theoretical as well as a personal and “lived” encounter), the concept of the proletariat summarizes all the implications of a “class point of view” in Marx. It is the main object of his investigation into the capitalist mode of production, into the specific form of exploitation born out of the transformation of labor-power into a commodity, and with the industrial revolution. It is the last term in the historical evolution of the forms of the “social division of labor.” Finally, the concept of the proletariat is the tendential subject of the revolutionary practice which must “deliver” bourgeois society from its own internal contradictions. However, the argument that leads to this conclusion evolved considerably from the 1840s to the 1870s and 1880s. Above all, the very word “proletariat” almost *never* appears in *Capital* (vol. 1) which, whether one likes it or not, constitutes the basic text where the validity of Marxism is established. Moreover, this is true not only of the universal term “proletariat” as a singular substantive implying the representation of a personality

responsible for a historical mission, but also of the more “empirical” plural term “proletarians.” The latter is also almost absent from Marx’s eight hundred pages, the result of twenty years of work and line-by-line corrections, and the text in which Marx wanted to concentrate his theory most systematically. In general, *Capital* does not deal with the “proletariat,” but with the “working class” (*Arbeiterklasse*).

I need to be more specific in stating that the terms “proletariat” and “proletarians” are “almost” absent in *Capital*. In particular, I must carefully distinguish between the two successive editions of *Capital* published by Marx (first edition 1867; second edition 1872).¹

In the first edition, the terms “proletariat” and “proletarians,” with one possible exception (in the chapter on the work day, in relation to the factory inspectors’ reports [*Capital*, vol. 1, 405]), only appear in the dedication to Wilhelm Wolff and in the two final sections on the “general law of capitalist accumulation” (concerning the “law of population” peculiar to the capitalist mode of production), especially the process of “so-called primitive accumulation” (about twenty occurrences in all). Only on *one* occasion do “the proletarian” and “the capitalist” confront each other (even though the latter is omnipresent in *Capital*).

The location is very consistent. These passages have in common their insistence on the *insecurity* characteristic of the proletarian condition. This insecurity is first seen as a result of the expropriation of “independent” workers from the land and then as a permanent consequence of large-scale capitalist industry. This fact partially explains the placement of the discussion of the “expropriation of the expropriators,” which at first sight seemed so aberrant. These arguments point to the revolutionary reversal of the tendency begun violently at the beginnings of capitalism. However, this makes it all the more surprising to notice the absence of any reference to the proletariat in the body of the analysis dedicated to the labor process, to wages, and to the means of exploitation. All this happens as if the “proletariat” as such had *nothing to do* with the positive function which exploited labor-power accomplishes at the point of production as the “productive power,” nothing to do with the formation of value, with the transformation of surplus labor into surplus value, or with the metamorphosis of “living” labor into “capital.” All this happens as if the term “proletariat” only connoted the “transitional” nature of the working class, in a threefold way.

1. The condition of the working class is unstable. It is even a condition of “marginality,” in comparison with “normal” social existence. A state of general insecurity typifies those societies which have become more

and more “proletarianized.”

2. The condition of the working class perpetuates the violence which at first openly and “politically” characterized the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Capitalism legally normalized this violence by substituting a seemingly purely “economic” mechanism for it.

3. The condition of the working class is historically untenable. It implies another transition which will annul the preceding one and for which capitalist accumulation has already prepared the material conditions.

We should note, however, that these (rare) references to the proletariat in *Capital* belong to a very specific level of the text, one which allows the analysis of the mode of production to be embedded in the historical perspective originally elaborated by Marx in the revolutionary conjuncture of 1848. The dedication to Wolff is the symbolically affirmed continuity with the Communist League. Most important, the term “proletariat” is the “bridge” which makes it possible to quote significant passages of the *Manifesto* and *The Poverty of Philosophy* in the footnotes. Thus, such references constitute the beginnings of what, from 1870 on, will become “historical materialism.” However, on account of this very fact, the references to the “proletariat” accentuate the difficulty in holding together, without aporia or contradiction, historical materialism and the critical theory of *Capital*, although these “two discoveries,” as Engels calls them, constantly interfered with each other.

This problem takes on another dimension with the additions in the second edition (1872). There are two very significant references to the proletariat, still located at the same margins of the text, which reinforce the embedding effect of this historical perspective.

One is in the postface (*Capital*, vol. 1, 98), showing how the “maturity” of class struggles after 1848 caused the breakdown of the “scientific” problematic of classical economics by confronting it with the repressed political content of its own concepts. Thus, the “scientific” problematic is transformed, on the one hand, into “vulgar” economics (J. S. Mill), and, on the other hand, into socialism as the “science of the proletariat” (Marx himself). The question concerning a new relationship between science and politics (another name for “dialectics”) is raised.

The second and most symptomatic reference appears in an added paragraph on the abolition of the laws against “workers’ coalitions” (called Combination Acts, that is, antitrade-union laws) in England, brought about by the class struggle. It is the link between the preceding theme (the emergence of a “political economy of the working class”) and the theme of the working class’s autonomous political action and organization. It is the

introduction into the text of *Capital* of a problem that had been strictly absent from it: that of the form of the working class's political existence within the limits of the capitalist "system," and of its effects on the very "functioning" of the system. At the same time, it suggests not merely a *historical* way (some kind of a "tendential law"), but also a *strategic* way to pose the problem of the conditions under which the political action of the working class can begin to go beyond the capitalist mode of production, or begin the transition toward communism.

To make this point still more explicit, one must refer to several relevant contextual statements. At the same time, however, its ambivalence will become clearer.

1) The detailed analyses which *Capital* dedicates to the length of the work day and to the "factory laws" (limitations on women's and children's work, etc.) undoubtedly form a major element in the definition of the class struggle. However, as I mentioned earlier, they do not refer at all to the "proletariat." Moreover, since they focus on the law and on power relations at the point of production and in the labor market, they introduce the bourgeois state in two ways: (a) as a relatively autonomous agency with regard to the immediate interests of the capitalists; and (b) as a regulating agency for social antagonisms (Marx speaks of "the first conscious and methodical reaction of *society* against the spontaneously developed form of its production process" [*Capital*, vol. 1, 610, emphasis added]).

In short, the working class is presented as the subject of an "economic" struggle, whereas "politics" is the concern of the bourgeoisie, inasmuch as the latter, through the state, is distinguished from the simple aggregate of capitalists, the owners of the means of production.

2) In 1865, *Wages, Price and Profit* defines capitalism as a "system" endowed with an *inside* and an *outside*, or which functions according to regulatory limits. Within these limits, the system is stable; beyond them, it must become another system functioning according to other laws. This is a way for Marx to articulate economic and political struggle: the former remains "internal" to the system, and the latter, by definition, contradicts it and goes beyond it.

However, this definition runs the risk of becoming nothing but a tautology. It could be read as a statement that the working-class struggle only puts the system in question from the moment when it itself goes beyond the trade union form (defined as the collective defense of the level of wages) to assume a political form and political objectives (reversal of bourgeois rule). It could also be read as an act of theoretical decision: by definition, class struggle is

political insofar as it goes from the demands for "normal wages," for "the normal work day," etc., to the demands for the "abolition of the wages system." *Wages, Price and Profit* justifies this decision by describing the "double outcome" of the workers' economic struggle. On the one hand, it opposes the tendency of capital to decrease wages below the value of labor-power, a result which is simply defensive and historically conservative (like Sisyphus's rock which always needs to be pushed up again). In this sense, such a result serves the interests of the capitalist class much more than it serves the interests of the proletarians. At this point, however, the working-class struggle produces a second, potentially revolutionary result, far more decisive than the first. The workers' organization is reinforced, the workers' forces permanently come together; they are made conscious of revolutionary ideology, to the point where a break with the system occurs. This is indeed superb dialectics—although narrowly dependent on presuppositions which the history of capitalism was to nullify even while Marx and Engels were still alive: (a) the profits of capitalist production imply the maintenance of average wages at the absolute minimum; (b) the permanent organization of the proletariat is ultimately incompatible with the "system"; and (c) the class struggle, bourgeois as well as proletarian, irreversibly unifies the working class. None of this proved to be the case...

3) The addition made in 1872 to *Capital* fits into a very specific political context: the aftermath of the Paris Commune, the conflict within the International with the English trade-unionists and the anarchists, the resurgence of the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" with a new significance, and the attempt to elaborate the theory and organizational principles of the revolutionary party.² Let us reread this addition:

The barbarous laws against combinations of workers collapsed in 1825 in the face of the threatening attitude of the proletariat. Despite this, they disappeared only in part...until at length the "great Liberal party," by an alliance with the Tories, found the courage to turn decisively against the very proletariat that had carried it into power...It is evident that only against its will, and under the pressure of the masses, did the English parliament give up the laws against strikes and trade unions, *after it had itself, with shameless egoism, held the position of a permanent trade union of the capitalists against the workers.* (*Capital*, vol. 1, 903, emphasis added)

We recognize here the terminology of the criticisms of anarchism which more often than not bear an ironic tone:

The working class must not occupy itself with *politics*. They must only organize themselves by trades-unions. One fine day, by means of the *Internationale*, they will supplant the place of all existing states. You see what a caricature he (Bakunin) did of my doctrines! As the transformation of existing states into associations is our last end, we must allow *governments, these great trade-unions of the ruling classes*, to do as they like, because to occupy ourselves with them is to acknowledge them.³

There has been a complete reversal with respect to the analysis of the factory laws which I mentioned above. Everything takes place as if the two antagonistic classes of society had traded places with respect to the “political” and the “economic.” Now it is the bourgeois class that restricts its horizon to the economic struggle, or whose political organization merely represents a corporatist or “syndicalist” (in the broad sense of the term) practice. On the other hand, the mass action of the proletariat allows its own “political” forms and objectives to emerge. If one prefers, it is the proletarian initiative which, even when it only perceives itself as being simply trade-unionist, forces the bourgeoisie to “engage in politics,” to endow its state with a political capacity to use, control, and repress the proletariat. This thesis is consistent with the necessity for a working-class mass party, with the idea of a “proletarian worldview,” with the analysis of the Commune as the first “working-class government” (*The Civil Wars in France*), with Engels’s statement that “workers are political by nature” (*Critique of the Erfurt Program*), and with the definition of communism as a resolution of the old historical contradiction between *labor* and *politics* (a contradiction which was started at the dawn of history by the democratic and slave-holding Greek city-state). All these theses appear at the same moment in Marx’s and Engels’s “political” and “historical” texts.

The Antinomies of “Proletarian Politics”

The discursive configuration which I have just indicated can only seem highly paradoxical. All of Marx’s writings suggest that the term “proletariat” refers precisely to the political sense of his analyses, to the necessary tendency linking together the two theories of exploitation and revolution, and not just to the conclusions of his economic or historical analysis. On the other hand, we accept in *Capital* the most precise elaboration of this tendency. However, such a configuration indeed means that the determinant concept

of the analysis can only appear under its own name in a position of relative exteriority, and even then it must be added afterwards. One can guess that this situation, if it clarifies some difficulties engendered by the analysis of the capitalist mode of production (that is, by the development of the *labor/capital* antithesis), can only, in turn, lead to more ambiguities. We must now show how this difficulty does nothing but reflect an omnipresent uncertainty in Marx. This is not so much a mark of weakness with regard to the dominant ideas as a mark of the break Marx undertakes with those ideas and its repercussions on him.

Marx’s omnipresent uncertainty can be located at the theoretical level, but it is to be found principally at the level of the political action which he tried to conduct. Marx was never able to stabilize his discourse with respect to the concept of “politics.”

By emphasizing the extreme positions, it is doubtless possible to retrace something like an evolution on this point. Thus, it could be said that the works of the “young Marx,” including *The German Ideology* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*, are dominated by a negative thesis which is obviously not exclusively Marx’s, but which puts him within the mainstream of the working-class thought of the early nineteenth century, opposing the “social revolution” of the producers to the bourgeois “political” revolution, free association to the political state, and so on.⁴ This thesis makes politics and the state an alienated representation of the real conflicts and interests that constitute *society*. This implies that the “political state” be thought of both as an illusion or as the “locus” where all revolutionary practice becomes an illusion, and as the material instrument of an oppressive *domination* (according to all sorts of modalities: more or less archaic military-bureaucratic rule; “the committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” in the *Manifesto*; the final product of the “division of manual and intellectual labor” in *The German Ideology*, etc.). On the other hand, it can be said that the works of the “old Marx” after 1870, in what I once called the “period of rectification,”⁵ are dominated by the opposite thesis, that is, a positive concept of politics. This is so, first, in the sense that the necessity of the proletariat’s political organization is always stated in these works. The transition to communism is no longer the negation of politics, much less its “abolition,” but rather its expansion, its transformation by the mass practice of the workers, who take it over (it is the sole object of the “second” dictatorship of the proletariat to which, from this point of view, Lenin and Gramsci will always remain faithful). Second, this is so in the sense that the concept of the bourgeois state maintains the meaning of a domination, but

loses the idea of an illusion, insofar as the power of the ruling class is now characterized by the existence and the structure of a *state apparatus*.

This evolution is real, but it is only tendential, and is primarily indicative of the existence of a permanent contradiction. Indeed, the initial period is not only the period in which the proletariat appears entrusted with a historical and revolutionary mission, since it has already been liberated from all political illusions. It is also the period in which Marx defines the revolution as “proletarian politics” by directly associating himself with the experience which seems to him the furthest from the “utopianism” of the prophets of the “end of the political”: neo-Babouvism and Blanquism. The concept of “communism” then appears, at the end of a very rapid evolution, as the correction by one another of certain anticapitalist tendencies which claim to be political and others which claim to be “apolitical” or “antipolitical.” The same applies to the conception of the political party that runs throughout the *Manifesto*, which contradictorily finds some of its origins in English Chartism, and others in French Blanquism.

Similarly, at the other extreme, a comparison of Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program* and Engels’s *Anti-Dühring* (with Marx’s chapter)—despite their significant differences (the former obviously taking a stronger stand against state control than the latter)—is sufficient to establish that the period of affirmation of the necessity of the political is also, and contradictorily, the period during which the *denial* of the political finds its most striking formulations, those destined to have the greatest influence: Marx’s vindication against Bakunin of the idea of “anarchism in the real sense of the term,”⁶ as well as the borrowing of the Saint-Simonian catchphrase, “substitution of the administration of things for the government of men,” introduced in a dialectical schema for the withering away of the state.⁷ It is thus clear, as I said above, that Marx’s discourse is, in this regard, literally contradictory.

The objection will probably be made that the contradiction can be resolved with a necessary distinction between the *realm of politics* (*le politique*) and the *realm of the state* (*l’étatique*), abusively conflated in the preceding summary. It will be added that Marx’s texts (and those of the best Marxists) taken as a whole even provide a criterion for this distinction, which has the great advantage of dealing not only with the future or the ideal of a society without a state, but also with immediate actuality. The realm of the state would be defined as politics conducted *outside the masses* by an oppressive or manipulative minority. The political, in the strong sense of the term, would be the *politics of the masses*, conducted not only for them but also by them, and in this sense would be opposed to the realm of the state

by definition. But even if we admit that this criterion is properly Marxist (which is doubtful, since it can be found in a large portion of classical political philosophy, where it appears as a shadow cast by the formation of the bourgeois state apparatus), far from solving the contradiction, it only reinforces it. As a matter of fact, it is sufficient to reread the texts mentioned above to establish the impossibility Marx always felt of defining once and for all, from the proletariat’s point of view, the boundary line between the realm of politics and the realm of the state in this sense or, in other words, the boundary line between the “compromise” with the existing state forms and their revolutionary “use” against the ruling class.

The analyses of *Capital* with respect to the relation between the state and working-class struggles already displayed the same impossibility, and I will add that this is fortunate because Marx (Lenin perhaps even more so) thus shows us that the distinction between the realms of politics and the state can certainly have a regulatory function for revolutionary practice, but cannot, without lapsing into metaphysics, serve to categorize, once and for all, the strategies, the forms of organization, or the theories of the social movement. This distinction is useful only if it is submitted to the assessment of conjunctures and to the “practical criterion” of concrete actions. In this way, we begin to see that the contradictions, the vacillation of fundamental concepts in Marx, rather than simply masking a theoretical incapacity, conceal a dislocation between the historical reality which he brings to light and the necessarily “impure” discourse through which such clarification can be formulated. Why this dislocation is unavoidable remains to be understood.

The same conclusion would be reached from a study of the contradictions of Marx’s political action (to my knowledge, such a study has never been done entirely). Contrary to the wish set out in the *Manifesto* (“the communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties”; and “in the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole”),⁸ the actual struggle could only develop against a series of rival political and ideological positions. Some of these positions were, at certain times, more truly a part of the working-class movement than Marx’s positions were. I am even tempted to say that, taken together, these rival positions (those of Proudhon, Lassalle, Bakunin, the collectivists, etc.) have always been more massively accepted than his, even *after* the recognition here and there of a Marxist “orthodoxy.” Practically, Marx had to take this situation into account, although he completely misunderstood its reasons.⁹

Let us mention only one example: the triangle formed by Marx, Lassalle, and Bakunin. In my opinion, one does not wonder enough about the fact that such indefatigable polemicists such as Marx and his faithful assistant Engels turned out to be incapable of writing an "Anti-Lassalle" or an "Anti-Bakunin," which would have been practically much more important than an *Anti-Dühring* or even than the reissue of an *Anti-Proudhon*. No personal and no tactical reason in the world will ever be able to explain such a lapse, a lapse which moreover was, as we know, heavy with political consequences. *They did not write it because they could not write it.*

A reading of those texts ("marginal notes" on the Gotha Program, "notes" on Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*), which in a certain sense constitute "rough drafts" of these aborted critiques, shows fairly well why such an impossibility existed. What is Marx's response when Bakunin systematically associates the totality of Marx's "scientific socialism" with Lassalle's "state socialism"? He has no other recourse than to reaffirm the meaning of the *Manifesto's* democratic program, which, as a matter of fact, had allowed Lassalle to proclaim himself in its favor. Conversely, Marx also proclaimed himself, as against Bakunin, in favor of "real anarchism," which he supposedly discovered and defended "long before him." The high point of this "response" consists in the affirmation that Marxism and Bakunin's anarchism are the opposite of each other, which ends up admitting—an enormous concession—that they are constituted from the same terms. One would make capital the product of the state (and thus make the abolition of capital the result of the abolition of the state), the other would make the state the product of capital (and thus, etc.). Reciprocally, when Marx is confronted with the Lassallean theses ratified by the Gotha program—nationalism, statism, workerism (a combination which retrospectively appears to us as a striking anticipation of the so-called welfare state, which I prefer to call the national-social state, realized in most Western European countries in the twentieth century)¹⁰—he can certainly reaffirm the essential themes of class politics: internationalism, the autonomy of the working-class movement from the state, and the critical function of theory with respect to the institution of the party. But in the end Marx has no other solution than to resurrect the utopian ideological catchphrases ("from each according to his abilities," etc.) that constitute the common ground of antistatism (including anarchism), while trying to give them enough of a twist to reconcile them with his affirmation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In doing so, Marx finds himself "trapped" in the mirror relation (statism/anarchy) from which he needs to escape.

In fact, what these still allusive analyses demonstrate is that Marx's "political" theory and action have no proper space in the ideological configuration of his time. For this configuration is itself a "full" space, devoid of any gap in which a specifically Marxist discourse could have established itself alongside, or opposite, other discourses. This is why Marx finds himself reduced to playing these discourses off against one another. In the same vein, practically, all of his political "art" consisted in building more and more massive organizations of the working-class movement, while playing different tendencies off against one another in an attempt to dilute their antagonism and add to their strengths, at least for a while.

Now, this space is entirely structured by a series of oppositions that can be translated into one another: first of all, state/society, but also capital/labor, state/capital, compulsion/freedom, hierarchy/equality, public interest/private interest, plan/market, and so on. The only possible "game" in such a space is to substitute one antithesis for another, or to identify alternatively with one of the terms against the other. Such is the game unconsciously played by all interested sides in the struggles in which the constitution of the labor movement is at stake. It is also the game Marx played, sometimes from a defensive posture, as we have just seen, and sometimes, when he thought he could choose his own ground, from an offensive posture, starting from a theory which he thought allowed him to dominate the way the cards were dealt, the conditions of the game (the genesis of the "ideas" that compose it, and the material basis of their constitution). Let us just suggest here that when Marx and Marxists think that they have mastered the political game which they inevitably must play, this game in fact escapes their control and comes back to haunt them.

However, this does not mean that one should be content merely to record and illustrate the inscription of Marxism in the space of the "dominant ideology" and the effects in return of this ideology upon Marxist discourse, which I discussed earlier in terms of vacillations, contradictions, uncertainty. This would be a little too easy. And under these conditions, it would be hard to understand why Marxism, or *something* obviously central to it, did not end up being digested, and blended into the banality of dominant ideas. On the contrary, Marxism has constituted for a century one of the permanent anchoring points for any critique of social domination (if necessary by passing through a prior "critique of Marxism" in its official form).

It seems to me that there are both theoretical and factual reasons for this critical function. The political "game" is not static. It is a process that must confront the unexpectedness of an excessive reality that contradicts its

own representations. As a consequence, what is significant is the conceptual displacements, the effects of twisting of the dominant discourse that, in a given conjuncture, make its coherence vacillate. It is indeed the case that, if *no* discourse can be held outside of the existing ideological space, *every* discourse in a conjuncture or in a given relationship of forces is not, for all that, reducible to its logic and does not thereby function as a moment in its reproduction. The fact is that in the conjuncture in which we still find ourselves today, Marxism, or something of Marx's discourse, produces this twisting effect, and the decisive concepts, above all those in *Capital* which explain the logic of exploitation, figure as foreign bodies in the space of the dominant ideology. Marxism's decisive concepts, which are not reducible to the effect of "consensus" of the dominant ideology, thus impose a perpetual work of refutation, interpretation, and reformulation.

This is why we must examine what it is in Marx's reference to the "proletariat" that disrupts the binary representations mentioned above, and thus liberates another field of investigation.

Marx's Theoretical Short-Circuit

This irreducible element, it seems to me, is the *short circuit* established by Marx's analyses between two "realities" that the whole movement of bourgeois thought, ever since the beginnings of the "transitional phase" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, tended on the contrary to *separate* from one another as much as possible—not only in theoretical discourses but above all by a multiplication of material institutions—the *labor process and the state*.

Bourgeois ideology elaborates a whole system of mediations between these two realities, each having its own history, its own "personnel," its own social finality. The law's resources play a critical role in these mediations, particularly the distinction between "public" and "private." The labor process is a private activity; its social function is only a result of this private activity, whether it is imagined as springing spontaneously from the division of labor and competition, or whether one establishes the necessity for regulatory intervention to limit the perverse effects of private initiative and to direct its ends. On the contrary, the existence of the state embodies a very different principle which expresses the necessity of a "totality," a central power and a common law, and which is organized according to various "political" modalities. The distance between these two extremes is insurmountable on account of an unavoidable institution called *property*.

Indeed, property is part of both realities, but according to two modalities that are irreducible to one another. On the one hand, property "commands" labor (as Adam Smith puts it) in order to provide for human needs. On the other hand, it receives a legal sanction, but its meaning is reversed: instead of "commanding" the existence of individuals, it appears as a faculty or capacity that *belongs to them*, as subjects of the state, citizens, or public individuals.

The importance of political economy as a tendentially dominant form of dominant ideology stems in particular from the fact that, through successive historical adaptations, it has made possible the practical organization of this disjunction and given it a "scientific" foundation. Political economy either encloses the equation of property and labor within the area of production (thus making "productive labor" the origin of property in general, which in turn allows for the justification of the organization of labor according to the owners' interests and logic), or it introduces more mediations to reach this justification—for example, utility, the relationship of equilibrium between production and consumption, etc.—thus widening its conception of the market. Under these circumstances, it is easy to see why the assumptions of classical liberalism (including its conception of the individual), which find their permanent verification in economic reasoning, have never presented any difficulty—in fact, quite the contrary—to the continuous extension of the state apparatus. On the other hand, it is easy to understand why Marx's endeavor, which started in 1843 as an attempt at a "critique of politics," was to become very quickly a "critique of political economy," the effect of which is not to confirm but to contest and *invalidate this separation* which political economy establishes (even though a whole part of the Marxist tradition has always misunderstood this).

It is in fact an essential part of the construction of the economists not to ignore such notions as "classes" and "class struggles," but to confine them to a single side of the separation: *labor and economics unite, politics divides* (or vice versa, depending on whether one believes in the omnipotence of "needs" or in the omnipotence of the "group"). It is therefore important to insist on Marx's constant assertion that "no credit was due to (him)" for having introduced the concepts of classes and class struggle.¹¹ What characterizes Marx's endeavor is that he reunited the two aspects against the evidence of bourgeois society, while drawing the utmost consequences from the first social struggles caused by the industrial revolution, and while anticipating to an amazing degree the future history of capitalism. Marx's endeavor is also characterized by his introduction of the political notion

of antagonism *within* the analysis of the labor process itself (instead of keeping it on the margins, to the side of its consequences), and his making such notions the principal explanation for its historical tendencies. Marx paradoxically thought that the existence and the very identity of classes is the tendential effect of their struggle, thus opening up the historical question of their overdetermined transformation. Then, at the cost of subverting the meaning of the notions of “labor” and the “state,” labor, with its own complexity, becomes the fundamental social relation, outside of which all political relations would remain unintelligible, whether conceived as contractual or as “pure” power relations.

I speak of a short circuit because Marx’s critical endeavor, if it obviously opens up a whole field of analyses which was mysterious until then, also forces us to think against the self-evidence of social representation, to deny in a way the institutional distance that separates the “base” of the social organism from its “summit.” However, this formulation is not simply an invention of mine; it seems to me to be the most rigorous way to read the provocative statement in which Marx himself explains how he conceived the object of “historical materialism”:

The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labor is pumped out (*ausgepumpt*) of the *immediate* producers determines the relationship of domination and servitude, as this grows *immediately* out of production itself and reacts back on it in turn as a determinant. On this is based the entire configuration of the economic community arising from the actual relations of production, and *hence* also (*damit zugleich*) its specific political form. It is in each case *the immediate relation* of the owners of the conditions of production to the *immediate producers*...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 the state in each case.¹²

The important word is “immediate”: the labor relation (as a relation of exploitation) is *immediately* economic *and* political; the form of the “economic community” and that of the state “grow” simultaneously out of this “basis.” There can therefore be no ambiguity: if there are “mediations,” neither do they take place *between* pre-existing economic and political spheres, nor does one originate from a pre-existing other. Rather, the formation and the evolution of each of them occurs from their permanent common basis, which precisely explains the “correlation” that remains between the two. In

other words, the relations of the exploitation of labor are both the “seed” of the market (“economic community”) and the seed of the state (sovereignty/servitude). Such a thesis may seem blunt and debatable when looked at from a static perspective, if one reasons only in terms of given structures, and “correspondences” between these structures (or institutions). However, the thesis gains a singular explanatory power if the notion of “determination” is given a strong sense, that is, if it is considered as a leading thread to analyze the tendencies of transformation of the market and the bourgeois state in the last two centuries or, better yet, following the best “concrete analyses” of Marxism, to analyze the critical conjunctures which punctuate this tendential transformation and which precipitate its modifications.

In such conditions, what does “antagonism” mean? Without attempting to summarize the theory of exploitation, a task that would be both enormous and useless, a few of its notable characteristics can be pointed out to the reader.

What Marx calls exploitation is a process with two sides, neither of which has a privileged position over the other; they are designated by the two correlative terms *surplus labor* and *surplus value* (*Mehrarbeit/Mehrwert*). Surplus labor is the “concrete” organization of the expenditure of social labor-power, or the differential between necessary labor and unpaid labor, between the productivity of labor and the length of the working day/intensity of labor, which increases through the various stages of the industrial revolution. Surplus value is the “abstract” movement of the valorization of value, or the differential in the increase of capital. This is the “discovery” of the *Grundrisse*, given a “shape” in *Capital*. Marx calls this movement a “self-movement” of capital, but one should not be deceived by this word: “self-movement” is not a “supernatural power” (Marx) of capital, but a result. It is the effect of a social relation in which labor-power is treated as a “commodity,” and occurs only to the extent that it can be so treated (for it does resist). In other words, self-movement presupposes a series of unstable *conditions*, some created in the sphere of production (labor discipline and habits, a hierarchy of skills and salaries, etc.), and others created “outside” of this sphere, in the “social” space supervised by the state. In the last analysis, all of these conditions exist only through class struggles, and all are eminently “political.” It is then easy to see why, as capitalism developed and these conditions led to sharper conflicts and “regulatory” interventions by the state, they were progressively *recognized* as “political.”

I have elsewhere called attention, following others, to the terminology Marx uses to describe the state “machinery” as well as the “machinery”

established by the industrial revolution (or rather by the succession of industrial revolutions) to “pump out” labor-power. “The central machine (is) not only an *automaton*, but also an *autocrat*,” writes Marx as he interprets Ure, “the Pindar of the automatic factory” (*Capital*, vol. 1, 544-45). This identity in terminology makes it possible, strictly speaking, to describe the compulsion to surplus labor as a “despotism of capital,” but it undoubtedly poses a problem.¹³ At the same time, however, this identity in terminology advances a double characteristic of capitalist relations of production which confirms their nature as indiscriminately “economic” and “political,” or rather, as we can now write it, as *neither economic nor political* in the sense given to these categories by bourgeois ideology.

The first characteristic is that there is no “pure” process of exploitation: there is always some domination involved. In fact, the idea of “pure exploitation,” the purely calculable difference between the value of labor-power and capitalizable surplus value, is nothing but an illusion resulting from the contractual form in which the “seller” and “buyer” of labor-power “exchange” their respective “properties.” This point is very clearly explained in Marx’s analysis of wages. But if this illusion expresses the *effectivity* of legal forms, which precisely prevents any consideration of the law itself as an illusion, it cannot, however, continue very long in the face of a reality inseparably composed of legal norms and power relations, and in which law and violence are constantly exchanging roles. It is in exactly the same way, at least in principle, that they exchange roles and pass into one another at the level of what is commonly referred to as “the state” or “political life.”¹⁴

The other characteristic is essential to understand the novelty of Marx’s concept of “social relation,” the way in which this concept escapes the antitheses of nature and history, or nature and institution, like that of social “mechanism” and “organism” (or as is fashionable to say nowadays, “individualism” and “holism”). All these classical antitheses, in fact, presuppose that the social relation is conceived as a *communal bond*, even if this bond is capable of existing in two contradictory forms, one of which would be “correct,” “true,” or “essential,” whereas the other would be “false,” “perverted,” or “alienated.” In other words, these antitheses presuppose that the social relation is a bond between men that unites them or divides them as a function of the relation they have to a common idea (essence, origin, destination, species, descent, etc.).

In opposition to this conception, as Althusser has shown,¹⁵ the analysis of exploitation implies that any social relation must be the organization of a material constraint upon social groups defined as a function of the nature

of this constraint. Just as there is no “pure exploitation,” there is no “pure antagonism” without materiality (that is, without unevenly distributed techniques and means of power). A discussion of the more or less necessary role Marx assigns to “violence” in his explanation of history and in his definition of revolutionary practice can begin from this point: this violence should no longer take on a metaphysical significance.

Marx’s short circuit is the discovery of an immediate relationship, a correlation which develops historically through economic and political mediations between the form of the labor process and the state. Then the implications of the concepts of the *proletariat*, of “proletarian politics,” and “proletarian revolution” can appear more clearly. The proletarian condition and proletarian demands are directly perceived, in the space of the dominant ideology, as “nonpolitical,” even if in order to obtain such a result a whole arsenal of forms of state action must be deployed. The details of this are now, one hundred years after Marx, much better known, thanks to a series of works by both Marxist and non-Marxist historians. The class struggle and the working-class movement have considerably displaced this boundary, a boundary which is imaginary in its justifications but very real in its effects. Nevertheless, there is *always still*, on the side of labor, of the production and reproduction of labor-power, a sphere that is defined as “nonpolitical,” which the state, in order to function as a ruling-class state, must keep “outside” of politics.

One can even wonder whether the counterpart of the gains of the working-class movement on this point has not been a permanent reconstitution of the “nonpolitical” sphere under new forms (precisely statist or “technocratic” forms). It is also possible to wonder whether this factual division (kept alive by a series of “cultural” as well as economic and institutional gulfs, a series which is inscribed in the organization of space and the organization of individuals’ time) does not represent the bourgeois form of a much older division between the rulers and the ruled (which would justify Marx for having sought to include the capitalist mode of production within the schema of a hypothetical evolution of “class societies” since antiquity). In any case, the horizon of working-class struggles can only be formulated in these conditions in terms of a *politics of labor*, in three senses: (1) the political power of the workers (or better, of citizens inasmuch as they are workers); (2) the transformation of the forms of labor through political struggle; and (3) the transformation of the forms of “government” by the recognition of labor-power’s capacities to expand (unlike productivism, which represses such capacities).

In creating this short circuit, Marxism thus produces not so much a “reversal,” as the classical metaphor would have it, as a displacement of the representations of the “social.” It deprives the notion of *property* of its central function (which it keeps, in a negative sense, in most of the socialist ideologies of the nineteenth century) and it replaces the “vertical” axis of the society/state relationship with the transverse network of effects and conditions of the *relation of production*. At the same time, Marxism creates a zone of unbearable tension in the space of intellectual confrontations. As I said above, since it is itself caught in that ideological space, Marxism is unavoidably subjected to a force of reintegration and reinscription in the representations it contradicts. The history of Marxism and its “crises” is comprised of a continuous dialectic of a deepening of the break and of a formulation of the theoretical means needed to conduct the reinscription. This history of Marxism starts with Marx himself, and it would be easy to show here how the famous “topography” of 1859, the schema of correspondence between the base and the superstructure, responds to this necessity. What it boldly identifies on one side, in terms of conflict and antagonism, it in fact dissociates on the other, reintroducing the classical idea of a series of institutional “mediations” between the “economic” and the “political,” whose architecture would have to be “constructed.” It is also obvious that this construction responds to the need Marx felt to deduce from the concept of class struggle a representation of society as a “whole,” as an organism or a mechanism unified by *one* principle which would be, at the same time, *the* principle of its history. Quite independently of the ideological influences that might explain this “need” of Marxist theory (Hegelian philosophy of history, sociological evolutionism), one can say that it points out a true theoretical difficulty. Indeed, how can a social relation (the exploitation of labor) whose effects extend to *any* social practice be defined without identifying social practice *as such* with the development of this relation? On this point, we may not be any further along than Marx was. However, we may be more able to pose the problem, thanks to the very development of the contradictions of Marxism.

Classes and Masses: The Nonsubject of History

Perhaps we can now see with a new eye what at first seemed to be a paradox in the terminology of *Capital*—the eclipse of the word “proletariat” in the body of its analyses—and offer a new interpretation.

Capital is an *analytical* work which is presented in the form of a *narra-*

tive. Even if the narrative is not linear and has stylistic and logical breaks, a formal subject is necessary. This subject is “capital,” or more precisely what I referred to earlier as the “self-movement of capital,” capable of becoming an individual and collective character: “the capitalist.” It is striking that the reference to the “capitalist class” appears especially when Marx wants to show how the antagonism between capital and wage labor prevails over the competition between “individual” capitals. As for the concept of the bourgeoisie, it appears mostly to give the capitalist class an individuality from the standpoint of universal history (role of the bourgeoisie in the disintegration of the “feudal” mode of production, in the generalization of commodity relations and in the socialization of the productive forces, historical limits of this role). However, this presentation always presents the bourgeoisie as a “bearer” (*Träger*) of the relations of production, even when it intervenes as an organized political force, that is, as a state. The bourgeoisie’s historical individuality is thus presented only in accordance with the determinations conferred on it by the movement of “capital.” Such is the very specific point of view which is designated by the allegorical reference to the “capitalist.”

Under such conditions, the fact that the proletariat is not explicitly in question assumes diverse significations. The working class cannot be presented as facing capital symmetrically, as would be the case if the two terms were exterior to one another. Labor and, consequently, the totality of working-class practices linked to the expenditure and reconstitution of labor-power are *part of* the movement of “capital.” In fact, they constitute its concrete reality. This theoretical asymmetry (the abstractness of capital and the concreteness of labor) precisely expresses the “class point of view in theory.” The abstractions of “capital” and “the capitalist” appear as the theoretical condition which allows the concrete reality of wage labor to be discovered as the very object of investigation. The study of capitalism is not the portrait of the “bourgeois,” it is not even the portrait of the “capitalist,” it is the analysis of the process of exploitation, with all its conditions. This is why labor can stop functioning here, in contrast to political economy, as a central but undifferentiated concept and become a contradictory process. Second, the duality of the object of *Capital* (*neither* purely economic, *nor* purely political) would lead Marx to an insoluble dilemma if he were forced to personalize the proletariat at the same time as he developed its concrete analysis. Such a historical “character” would have had to define itself once again as either an “economic” or as a “political” entity. The proletariat would have had to define itself either as the *other* (or the adversary) of *capital*, or as the *other* (or adversary) of *the bourgeois state*, whose empirical

manifestations and developed forms are different, even though they evolve in correlation. We know that, historically, Marx takes the term “proletariat” from a tradition that sees class antagonism as a *political* struggle. On the contrary, the term does not have a significant existence among economists.¹⁶

However, I would like to suggest here that if the proletariat is concretely present in *Capital* but without a unique signifier, it is because it always appears in the analysis in at least two modalities that cannot be simply and purely identified. To return to categories whose opposition we have already encountered, let us say that it appears both as a *class* and as the *masses*.

It would seem that this polarity is always linked to the approach of the problem of the revolution, or the revolutionary movement. In *The German Ideology*, at the limit, only the bourgeoisie is a “class”; the proletariat, on the contrary, is defined as a “mass,” as the last product of the decomposition of society. This definition precisely makes it the agent for a *communist* revolution in which no “particular” interest (no “class interest”) need be advanced. At the other end of the development, Engels’s texts, which attempt to elaborate a definition of the “proletarian worldview” and answer the question of the “driving forces” of historical transformation, are based entirely on the pair formed by classes and masses. The proletariat becomes an effective revolutionary class when it organizes itself as a mass movement, which raises the problem of its own “consciousness” or “ideology.”

Between these two extremes, some of Marx’s concrete analyses, linked to the strategic evaluation of the conjuncture, are organized directly around this problem. Such is the case of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, in which, as has long been noted, there is a true breakdown of the concept of “class” at the very moment that the problem of “class consciousness,” or more precisely of the passage from “class in itself” to “class for itself,” is posed. Not only do the “two-class” or “three-class” schemas explode in a series of subdivisions, but there also appears the astonishing idea that crisis (and revolutionary) conjunctures are those in which classes decompose as social groups defined by simple and distinct “interests” with a direct expression, or a direct political representation, especially in the form of well-defined parties. Marx declares at the same time that these conjunctures are also those during which the course of history “accelerates.” These are periods during which the polarization of society into opposing camps in the class struggle really manifests itself. Then the conclusion must be drawn that the revolutionary polarization does not *directly* develop from the existence of classes, but rather from a more complex process (Althusser would call it overdetermined) whose raw material is composed of mass movements, practices, and

ideologies. Marx does not exactly say that “classes make history,” but that “the masses (or people *en masse*) make history.”

If reference to the definition of the mode of production makes it possible to develop an apparently simple and specifically “Marxist” definition of the fundamental *classes*, the same is not true with respect to the *masses* (or the classes as they concretely exist in history and politics as masses). To stay only with the work of Marx and Engels (since it is a known fact that the problem has never ceased to haunt Marxism, from Lenin or Luxemburg to Mao), it is obvious that their usage of this term is not so different, most of the time, from the usage of their contemporaries, whether writers, historians or political ideologues.¹⁷ This term notoriously keeps oscillating between the description of a social *condition*, in which the “communal bonds” of traditional societies are collapsing and a radical isolation of individuals is emerging, and the description of a *movement*, in which the diversity of conditions is covered over by a common “consciousness” or ideology which aims at the transformation of the existing order. In other words, on the one hand there is extreme disorganization; on the other, the utmost historical organization: the atomization of individuals versus the thrust of collective power.

I shall argue that in *Capital*, whether consciously or not, Marx attempted to overcome this dilemma, which obviously remains very abstract, but is also very typical of the opposite “fears” of the ruling classes and their intellectual elites. The description of the working class, in which he tried to integrate all possible information, aims both at characterizing a class structure “typical” of capitalism, *and* at explaining in reference to immediate actuality the process which tends to transform a more or less standardized “proletarian condition” into a mass movement.

The first aspect is organized around the notion of the *wage system*, or the capitalist relation defined as the “sale and purchase” of labor-power. This is incontestably the prevalent aspect in the general exposition of the mechanism of the valorization of value, and what makes it possible to affirm that “only variable capital (i.e. living labor) produces surplus value.” It is thus closely linked to the representation of labor-power as a “commodity.” But as it goes along, it takes on a series of assumptions or theoretical simplifications. An example is the justification of the reduction of “complex labor” to “simple labor” on the basis of a historical tendency toward uniformity and the interchangeability of workers, allegedly empirically verifiable—the Marxian variation of the idea of an “atomistic” or “individualistic” society. Another, more important example, despite the allusion to a “historical and

moral element" in the determination of the value of labor-power (*Capital*, vol. 1, 275), would be the return to the economists' conception directly equating the value of this labor-power and the value of the "necessary" means of subsistence (that is, a quantitative theory of "real wages," rather than a historical investigation of the "making of the working class").

On the contrary, the second aspect implies the development of a whole series of historical analyses that take the concept of labor-power even further from the simple notion of a commodity. Here, the wage system is not a simple form any more; it is diversified and evolving. In the capitalist labor process, depending on the period at stake, depending on the branches of production which are unevenly affected by the technical division of labor and by mechanization, labor-power is not *only* a commodity (even as a "use value," or as a quality): labor-power also represents the division between manual and intellectual labor, the hierarchical combination of "skilled" and "unskilled" labor, the use of men, women, or children, and the attraction or repulsion of immigrant manual workers (the Irish in Britain providing the classic example). The *use* of this labor-power is not mere "consumption." It is unavoidably the *management* of these differences, and consequently management of the conflicts which these differences bring about both among the workers themselves and between the workers and capital, or, rather, its representatives. The analysis of labor-power undertaken here and the historical analysis of working-class struggles (on the length of the work day, the disappearance of skilled labor, "technological" unemployment, and the use of machines as a means to intensify labor) have a completely identical object.

It may be added that all these analyses are linked to Marx's use of the concept of "population." Marx had read very closely not only Malthus but also Quêtelet.¹⁸ It is true that if the idea of a "law of population" of the capitalist mode of production were to be understood as a regulatory mechanism, it would again lead to a negation of the historical conjuncture. The fact that this idea cannot be dissociated from the study of the "industrial reserve army of the unemployed," which is not, as we know, limited to cyclical unemployment, is already enough to distinguish them. From this point of view, the concept of population in Marx is the mediation *par excellence* between the idea of "class" and the idea of "mass." And I could go so far as to say that "population movements" are the main basis of explanation for "mass movements." But then the eccentric location of the term *proletariat* in *Capital*, precisely where this problem of population movements is made completely explicit, becomes extraordinarily pertinent.

Let us try to specify not only the interest, but also the limitation of these analyses. Their interest lies in the fact that they allow us to dismiss the problematic of the "subject of history," without either rejecting the idea of practice as a moment of the transformation of social relations, or adopting the thesis of an indefinite reproduction of the mode of production as a constant system. As a matter of fact, the idea of the proletariat as a "subject" supposes an identity, whether spontaneous or acquired as the result of a process of formation and coming to consciousness, but always already guaranteed by class condition. The fact that the proletariat, which is both a "class" and the "masses," is not a subject, that it never coincides with itself, does not mean that the proletariat never presents itself or acts *as a subject in history*. However, this revolutionary action is always tied to a conjuncture, lasting or not, and only exists within its limits. This thesis opens up two practical questions: (1) what are the conditions and forms through which such an effect can occur? and (2) what enters a mass movement, from a determinate class condition, that makes it capable of being recognized practically as the expression of this class? Conversely, this thesis dismisses the speculations and puerile controversies concerning the irreducible difference between the "ideal proletariat" and the "empirical proletariat." It admits that the emergence of a revolutionary form of subjectivity (or identity) is always a partial effect and never a specific property of nature, and therefore brings with it no guarantees, but obliges us to search for the conditions in a conjuncture that can precipitate class struggles into mass movements, and for the forms of collective representation that can maintain, in these conditions, the instance of class struggles within mass movements. There is no proof (rather, quite the contrary) that these forms are always and eternally the same (for example, the party-form, or the trade union).

However, it is obvious that neither Marx himself, nor Lenin, Gramsci, or Mao escaped the representation of the proletariat as *the subject of history*. They are still read as if they were the perpetrators *par excellence* of this concept. There are several reasons for this, the most immediate of which is that they saw in the form of the party not only a *conjunctural* form of organization for the class struggle, but *the essential* form to guarantee the continuity of the class struggle and to overcome the vicissitudes of the history of capitalism and its crises, both heading toward the proletarian revolution or the seizure of power, and beyond this revolution. Under these conditions, it turned out to be extremely difficult, not to say impossible, to maintain the critical distance between the theoretical and strategic "centers" of the working-class movement.¹⁹ This led, on the one hand, to the illusion

of mastering the meaning of history or coinciding with it, and, on the other hand, to the illusion that the unity of the organization represented, *by itself*, the unity of the working class. In both cases this illusion was maintained only by a headlong plunge into the organization's construction of an imaginary representation of the "proletariat," and thus into an exercise of compulsion (first upon the organization itself) in order to conjure away the menacing irruption of the real.

The second reason is the impossibility Marx and Engels felt of thinking the dialectic of classes and masses *in terms of ideology* or ideological structures and not in terms of "consciousness" or "self-consciousness." Marx and Engels were never able to formulate the concept of *proletarian ideology* as the ideology of *proletarians*: neither as a problem of working-class ideology (national, religious, familial, legal), even when they were confronted with the question of the English "labor aristocracy" or with that of "state superstition" in the German working class, nor as a problem of the organizational ideology of the proletarian party (particularly the Social-Democratic Party). But this incapacity itself leads us to another aporia of Marxism. If it is useless to pose the problem of proletarian ideology in a critical way, is this not because, for Marx and Engels, the problem is tendentially without an object? "Classes" and "masses" are only provisionally distinct; the empirical complexity they show will soon be no more than a relic. In the end we are told that this divergence only characterizes precapitalist societies, or the "transition" to capitalism, but that it no longer exists once the capitalist mode of production functions on its own foundation and extends to the whole "world market." The thesis of the "simplification of class antagonisms" by capitalism can be recognized here, a thesis foreign to the profound logic of *Capital*, but essential to the philosophy of history presented in the *Manifesto*. This thesis implies both a reduction of all social antagonisms to a single fundamental conflict, and the continuous radicalization of that conflict.²⁰

Now this thesis is, in turn, only an extreme formulation of what I will call the *ahistorical historicism* or "historicity without history" in Marx's thought, but which this time is concerned equally with whole sections of the theory of *Capital*. This means that the cost of the critical recognition (against political economy) of the *historicity* of capitalism (of the fact that capitalist relations are neither "natural" nor "eternal" but the product of a determinate genesis and subject to internal contradictions) is paradoxically an incapacity to think and to analyze capitalism's own *history*.

This incapacity plunged Marx and Engels into unresolvable contradic-

tions concerning "revolutions from above." In the end, as Gramsci saw very well, the whole bourgeois nineteenth century can be characterized as a revolution from above, or a "passive revolution" carried out by "enlightened conservatives," like Louis-Napoleon (Napoleon III), Disraeli, Bismarck, or Cavour, who took the first step toward what would eventually become the national-social state, i.e., the true form of bourgeois hegemony. These "revolutions," under their very eyes, began to give the state a direct role in controlling capital accumulation and, through the embryonic form of a "social policy," the very conditions of proletarianization. At the same time, Marx and Engels got bogged down in the idea that the bourgeoisie was in the course of becoming a "superfluous class." They also got bogged down in the idea that "the bourgeoisie cannot exercise political power itself," instead of wondering how the functions and the exercise of political power contribute to the constitution or reconstitution of a bourgeoisie.

This incapacity meant that Marx could never really think that, in the history of capitalism, or in *historical* capitalism, the relation between capital and wage labor actually takes on new forms. The fact that they are still based on the monetary accumulation of capital, commodity exchange, and the purchase of labor-power, and that this form is extended (leading to a generalized wage system and consequently a modified "law of population"), does not prevent these new forms from being qualitatively different from those brought about by the first industrial revolution. Today, everyone knows that the working-class organizations (trade-unionist and even political) not only are not exclusive of the capitalist relations of production, but indeed constitute an organic aspect of their modern form (which has nothing to do with the myth of the "integrated" working-class, symmetrical to the myth that the party or the trade union is by nature a revolutionary organization). The aporias about ideology, politics and organization, and history thus finally prove to be directly connected. I would suggest that this is the price that had to be paid for opening the new continent of thought (as Althusser would say): the introduction of "classes" and "masses" (above all, proletarian classes and masses) not only as the object, but also as *agents* of history in their own right.

7. It is well known that the inscription of this right was and continued to be the object of the most heated confrontations, both between the partisans of “order” (who immediately obtained its suppression in 1795) and those of the “continuous revolution” (who in 1793 sought to emphasize its decisive function), and between the supporters of a juridical logic (it would be “contradictory” for a constitutional state to codify its own negation) and those of a social logic (it would be “contradictory” for individuals who are collectively sovereign not to affirm that any government, any institution exists relative to their freedom). The inscription of “resistance to oppression” among the fundamental rights thus entirely confirms that the modality with which we are dealing here is that of the unity of opposites.
8. This is very much the way John Rawls is proceeding—so it seems to me—when, after having first “lexically ordered” his “two principles of justice” (the first, the principle of equal liberty; the second, the principle of difference), he goes on to reformulate the second as a principle of “fair opportunity,” which alone is to give practical content to the otherwise formal notion of equality involved in the first principle (see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972], sections 11–13, 31ff., 82). My attention was first drawn to the similarity between the formulation I use (“the proposition of equal liberty”) and Rawls’s “principle of equal liberty,” of which I was unaware, by Jacques Bidet (see his *Théorie de la modernité* [Paris: P.U.F., 1990]). But both formulations have precedents in the nineteenth century, notably in a famous passage of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (1840), part 2, chapter 1. In fact, all this is simply the continuation of a much older and decisive “signifying chain,” which traces back to the Roman notion of *aequa libertas* (cf. Cicero, *De Republica*, I, xxxi).
9. Marx did not quite understand this since he saw *community* as being entirely in the revolutionary camp, on account of his being a communist prior to being a socialist.
10. Cf. the studies of Jacques Rancière, most recently *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

Chapter 3 • Fichte and the Internal Border

1. It is Fichte (even more than Herder) who serves Louis Dumont (following so many others) as an example to elucidate the difference between French and German “subcultures” (and thus, whether he wants it or not, of the difference between the “Latin” and “German” characters) as “variants” of “modern individualism.” See “A National Variant, I: German Identity: Herder’s *Volk* and Fichte’s *Nation*,” in *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 113–32.
2. In 1915 the German General Staff had printed hundreds of thousands of copies of *Addresses to the German Nation* in order for each German soldier leaving for the front to have one in his pack. Von Moltke is reported to have exclaimed, “Take Fichte into the trenches!” This story takes on its complete signification in light of the fact that Fichte unsuccessfully solicited the King of Prussia for a position as “preacher in the army” during the national war against Napoleon.
3. See, once again, Dumont, for whom the immemorial battle of egalitarianism and hierarchy is waged in Fichte at every moment (whence its “dialectic”).
4. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, 5th ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1978), 207; *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. R. F. Jones and G. H. Turnbull (Chicago: Open Court, 1922), 223–24. Page numbers for all further citations will be given parenthetically in the text: the German edition first, followed by a slash and the English

- translation.
5. Fichte places himself here in a long tradition, marked by the texts of Saint-Pierre and Rousseau, but he precisely inverts their conclusions.
6. Fichte, *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat* (1800), in *Ausgewählte politische Schriften*, ed. Zwi Batscha and Richard Saage (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 59–167.
7. It should be recalled that in Kant’s work, beyond any evolution in its themes, “cosmopolitanism” presents one constant: the strict association of the two forms of commerce (circulation of commodities *and* circulation of ideas, thus the free circulation of men as merchants *and* as intellectuals) as the natural (but not sufficient) condition of universal peace. See my article, “Ce qui fait qu’un peuple est un peuple: Rousseau et Kant,” *Revue de synthèse* 110 (1989): 391–417.
8. Frederick II, who claimed not to know the German his subjects spoke, had had the “universality of the French language” proclaimed by the Academy of Berlin; see the complete history of this decisive episode in the constitution of “linguistic nationalism” in Germany in Ferdinand Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1935), tome VIII.
9. Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Germanien und Europa* (1802), cited by Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat: Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates*, 4th ed. (Munich and Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1917), 94, note 2.
10. Jean Lerond d’Alembert and Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres* (1751–1767, reprint New York: Pergamon Press, n.d.), 5 vols., s.v. “Nation,” 2:1003.
11. It is at exactly the same moment that Friedrich Schlegel publishes the inaugural work of historical philology, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (Heidelberg: Mohn und Zimmer, 1808).
12. Cf. Renée Balibar, *L’institution du français: Essai sur le colingisme des carolingiens à la république* (Paris: P.U.F., 1985).
13. Cf. the “fragments” of a political text from 1813, responding to the king of Prussia’s appeal to the people, “Aus dem Entwurfe zu einer politischen Schrift im Frühlinge 1813,” *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 7: 546–73.

Chapter 4 • The Vacillation of Ideology in Marxism

1. Cf. Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985).
2. I leave aside the question of Marx’s retrieval of the term “ideology” from the French sensualist ideologues and the distortion it undergoes in the process. The most complete study I know of on this point is that of Patrick Quantin, *Les origines de l’idéologie* (Paris: Economica, 1987).
3. There is one notable exception to this schematic account: the reference made in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in *Karl Marx, Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975), 426, to “ideological forms,” identified with “social consciousness.” This text is explicitly retrospective, alluding in particular to *The German Ideology*, whose persistent trace it carries.
4. Marx is neither the first nor the last philosopher to take up the problem of the production of idealities, or the process of idealization, in this overdetermined form (see Spinoza before him and Freud after). It is remarkable that these three intellectual efforts, clearly related but formulated within entirely different concepts, have essentially surfaced *independently* of one another. Marx read Spinoza closely in his early years, but by way of an astonishing quid pro quo, inscribed him within the tradition of the *Aufklärung*, and in

- his struggle against romantic pantheism, he sees in Spinoza only an apology for rationalism and democracy. On this point see Alexandre Matheron, "Le *Traité théologico-politique* vu par le jeune Marx," *Cahiers Spinoza* 1 (1977): 159–212.
5. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975—), 5:49. All further citations will be given in the text.
 6. Both Marx and Engels bear witness to the true answer: we have seen this proletariat radically stripped of ideology. See the Dedication to Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, *Collected Works* 4:298: "I found you to be more than mere Englishmen, members of a single, isolated nation, I found you to be *Men*."
 7. I am thinking of a contemporary example, Michel Foucault's "episteme," and more generally of the universals of the culturalists. The common ancestor of all these notions is, of course, Hegel's concept of the *Zeitgeist*.
 8. Marx, preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 426.
 9. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Revolutions of 1848*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1974), 86. All further citations will be given in the text.
 10. Indeed, Marx, who is faithful on this point to his own German ideology, suggests that the proletariat alone can save the classical culture of humanity (Homer, Dante, Shakespeare) from its degeneration into bourgeois philistinism. See S. S. Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976).
 11. See Marx and Engels, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League (March 1850)," in *Revolutions of 1848*, 319–30, and Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, in *Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1974), 123.
 12. The then-dominant model in Marx's thought regarding this strategy is that of a "permanent revolution" which offers the long-term transformation of bourgeois revolutions into proletarian revolutions and the short-term transformation of the radical democratic program into the communist program (because the polarization of the class struggles annihilates the petty-bourgeoisie as an autonomous force). See Stanley Moore, *Three Tactics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), and my article, "Dictature du prolétariat," in *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme*, ed. Georges Labica and Gérard Bensussan (Paris: P.U.F., 1983), 266–74.
 13. Although the pairs abstract/concrete and thought/real are not strictly commutative, Engels's formulations on this are clearly more empiricist than those of Marx in the (unpublished) 1857 introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*, where it is the *scientific method*, inasmuch as it proceeds from the abstract to the "concrete in thought," that *seems* to engender the real, starting from the concept, and thus creates an idealistic illusion. In his critical reading of Hegel, Marx touches on the idea of the conditions and ideological effects inherent in scientific practice itself, but he does not use the term. See Marx, Introduction to *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973), 100–02.
 14. See Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, *Collected Works* 25:88–89. All further citations given in text.
 15. From the *Grundrisse* to the "Critique of the Gotha Program," by way of books 1 and 3 of *Capital*, Marx presents a similar critical analysis of the categories "freedom" and "equality" as an internal reflection of commodity production and circulation, which produces (for example, in the chapter on commodity fetishism) a comparison between legal and religious idealities (or abstractions) and a substitution of one for the other within history. However, what is never really clear in Marx is whether the law itself is ideological or whether a distinction ought to be made between law (property, contract, etc.) and legal ideology (freedom and equality).
 16. See the examples given in Ulrich Dierse, "Ideologie," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1972–1990), 3:131–69.
 17. The "terminological" problem that Engels comes across here is far from idiosyncratic. At the same time, French positivists like Littré also posit a substitution of "worldview" for "philosophy" in order to designate the form in which the positivist spirit stops being spontaneous and unconscious and becomes self-conscious and systematic. Cf. Ernest Coumet, "La philosophie positive d'Emile Littré," *Revue de synthèse* 103 (1982): 177–214.
 18. On the use of the term "Marxism" and on the ambivalent relations first Marx and then Engels had with it, see Georges Haupt's detailed account in "Marx and Marxism," in *History of Marxism*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm *et al.*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 1:265–89. On the "crisis of Marxism" after Engels's death, see Roberto Racinaro, *La crisi del marxismo nella revisione di fine secolo* (Bari: De Donato, 1978); Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Il partito e la formazione dell'ortodossia marxista," in *Storia del Marxismo*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm *et al.* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), 2:181–200.
 19. Cf. Engels's article, "Social Classes—Necessary and Superfluous," *Collected Works* 24:415–18.
 20. The first edition of Friedrich Albert Lange's *The History of Materialism*, which represents the union between "Marxist," "neo-Kantian," and "Darwinian" circles, was published in 1866. Engels rejects its epistemological theses, but borrows a scheme or rather a historical plan from it. It is only with Dilthey, at the end of the century, as we know, that the term *Weltanschauung*, of romantic origins (Schelling, Schleiermacher; Hegel to the contrary uses it very little) becomes the watchword of the philosophy of history and hermeneutics developed by the vitalist current of neo-Kantianism against the rationalist current (from Cohen to Cassirer).
 21. The idea of a history of thought, understood in this way, obviously leads to several interpretations or research programs: that of an empirical history of the sciences and their effects upon philosophy; that of a "history of the theoretical" of the sort proposed by Althusser in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), 49–51, reviving an expression of Hegel's; and, finally, that of a history of "class struggle within theory," ultimately considered by the same Althusser as the proper terrain of philosophy and which we will come across later on in taking up Engels's text. See "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon" and "Lenin and Philosophy," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 11–22 and 64–68, and "Reply to John Lewis" and "Elements of Self-Criticism," in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976), 37–39, 58–59, and 142.
 22. B. M. Kedrov's study, *La classification des sciences*, vol. 1: *Engels et ses prédécesseurs*, (Moscow: Editions du progrès, 1977), is unfortunately flawed by his persistent desire to present Engels's thinking in terms of "the Marxist solution" to "the problem of the classification of the sciences." It seems, by contrast, that there are some original ideas to be found in the highly documented study by Sven Eric Liedman, *Motsatsernas Spel: Friedrich Engels' filosofi och 1800-talets vetenskaper* ["The Game of Contradictions: The Philosophy of Friedrich Engels and the Sciences of the 19th Century"] (Lund: Bo Cavefors Bokförlag, 1977), 2 vols., but I have only been able to consult a short résumé of it in English.
 23. See Engels to Pyotr Lavrov, 12 November 1875, *Collected Works* 45:106–9, and "Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity," *Collected Works* 24:435.
 24. Georges Canguilhem, Georges Lapassade, Jacques Piquemal, and Jacques Ulmann, *Du développement à l'évolution au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: P.U.F., 1985) (reprinted from *Thalès* 11 [1960]), is far and away the most rigorous study of the history and concepts of evolutionism *before* and *after* Darwin. See Ernst Haeckel, *The History of Creation: or The Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes*, trans. E. Ray

- Lankester (London: Henry S. King, 1876), 2 vols.
25. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888), *Collected Works* 26:398. All further citations given in text.
 26. A striking illustration of this theme can be found in H. G. Wells, *A Short History of the World*, which tells the story of humanity starting from the formation of the solar system and ending with socialism.
 27. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 929.
 28. See Canguilhem, *Ideology and Rationality in the History of the Life Sciences*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988), as well as Yvette Conry, ed., *De Darwin au darwinisme, science et idéologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1983).
 29. See, in particular, “Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity,” *Collected Works* 24:427–35, which constructs a parallel between “modern ideologists,” those of the ancient world (philosophers and jurists), and those of the medieval world (theologians and clerics). All these texts were first published in *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky’s review and the bastion of orthodox “Marxism.”
 30. Let us judge here the extent of this progress in relation to Marx’s formulations in *Capital*, vol. 1 (610), where it is the sole regulative intervention of the state (factory legislation) that is given as society’s “conscious reaction” to its own “organism.”
 31. Gramsci, from this point of view, is not mistaken in posing together the problem of proletarian hegemony and that of the “crisis of the state” (ignored by Engels, if not by Lenin).
 32. Engels and Karl Kautsky, “Lawyer’s Socialism,” *Collected Works* 26:597–98 (translation modified). It is to the credit of Peter Schöttler, who gives us an illuminating analysis of it, to have brought to our attention the importance of this text. See his study, “Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky as Critics of ‘Legal Socialism,’” *International Journal for the Sociology of Law* 14 (1986): 1–32.
 33. One constantly comes across this denial of the existence of a legal ideology, articulated from very different perspectives. The most delicate position to discuss would, of course, be that of “juridical positivism” (Kelsen), which explicitly posits an opposition of the norms of positive law and “legal ideology,” against natural right. A recent example is in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, starting from his “pragmatic” analyses of the relations of communication in late capitalism. See, for example, *Instructions païennes* (Paris: Galilée, 1977), 55–56, “showing” that there is no bourgeois legal ideology because, generally speaking, there is no dominant ideology in capitalism; capital as such would be *indifferent to ideology* (to “semantics”), in contrast to archaic structures like the state, the party, the Church, and so on. Likewise *money*, as a *medium* of communication, would exclude ideology, even legal ideology (76).
 34. See Engels “[On the Association of the Future],” *Collected Works* 26:553.
 35. See my article cited above, “Dictature du prolétariat.” It is striking that, during this period, Engels is moved to say something new about the ancient city (in *The Origin of the Family*) which clarifies the “civic” sense of the idea of community present within the term “communism.” This clarifies the ulterior motive behind the curiously Aristotelian phrase in the *Critique of the Erfurt Program* (written against the anarchists), according to which “the workers are political by nature.” More than a nostalgic definition of politics, by way of the Greek example, it is a question of thinking the crux of the proletarian worldview in reference to what, throughout the entire classical tradition, symbolizes politics as such. Following on the analysis of the Greek city as the first form, in its contradictory development, of the fusion of politics and the state [*du politique et de l’étatique*] in the history of class struggle, it is a way of showing that, in the transition to communism, the critical stake of struggle is the possibility of dissociating politics from the state [*dissocier le politique de l’étatique*] by associating (or fusing) politics with labor, *praxis* with *poiesis*: two

- poles of a contradiction that cuts across all of history. See Etienne Balibar, Cesare Luporini, and André Tosel, *Marx et sa critique de la politique* (Paris: Maspero, 1979).
36. Engels, “On the History of Early Christianity,” *Collected Works* 27:457–61. Michèle Bertrand is one of the few in France to have studied this text, in *Le statut de la religion chez Marx et Engels* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1979).
 37. Gustave Le Bon’s *The Psychology of Crowds*, which Freud was to discuss (for lack of anything better?) in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, was also published in 1895. Labriola and Plekhanov, in particular, were quite preoccupied by the question of the relation between the “theory of ideology” and “social psychology.” Le Bon’s social psychology was to have a particular influence on Sorel. It does not consider itself to be “materialist” but “determinist” and, correlatively, is not founded on the class struggle but on “races.” See, despite its disputable method of pure “history of ideas,” the highly documented study by Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914: Les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978).

Chapter 5 • In Search of the Proletariat

1. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977). Hereafter cited in the text.
2. See my article, “Dictature du prolétariat,” in *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme*, ed. Georges Labica and Gérard Bensussan (Paris: P.U.F., 1983), 266–74, and my essay, “Etat, parti, idéologie: esquisse d’un problème,” in Etienne Balibar, Cesare Luporini, and André Tosel, *Marx et sa critique de la politique* (Paris: Maspero, 1979), 107–67.
3. Marx to Paul Lafargue, 19 April 1870, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975—), 43:490–91, emphasis added.
4. See the works of Elie Halévy and Charles Andler, and more recently of Bert Andreas, Henri Desroche, Jacques Grandjonc, Jacques Rancière, and Michael Löwy. The essential text is probably *The Doctrine of Saint-Simon: An Exposition* (1829), trans. George G. Iggers (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).
5. *Cinq études du matérialisme historique* (Paris: Maspero, 1974).
6. See “The Alleged Splits in the International,” *The First International and After*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1974), 314. This more than ambiguous phrase largely determines Lenin’s argument in *State and Revolution*. See my article, “Bakouninisme,” in *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme*, 85–91.
7. *Anti-Dühring*, *Collected Works* 25:268.
8. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Revolutions of 1848*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1974), 79.
9. On this point, see Oskar Negt’s excellent indications in “Il marxismo e la teoria della rivoluzione nell’ultimo Engels,” in *Storia del Marxismo*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm, et al. (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), 2:107–79.
10. See Henri Lefebvre, *De l’état*, vol. 2: *Théorie marxiste de l’état de Hegel à Mao* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1976), 272–93.
11. Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer, 5 March 1852, *Collected Works* 39:60–66.
12. *Capital*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1981), 927; translation modified, emphasis added.
13. Credit must be given to Mario Tronti, *Operai e Capitale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), and to Italian “operismo” for having stated in a very decisive way the political and technological unity of factory despotism. The Chinese cultural revolution, in its ascending phase, and the working-class struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, were to confirm the soundness of this point of view, but also to invalidate the “voluntarist catastrophism” which tended on such

- a basis to reduce society to the factory, and class politics to “workers’ self-organization.” See also the collection of texts edited by André Gorz, *The Division of Labor: The Labor Process and Class-Struggle in Modern Capitalism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1976), as well as Robert Linhart, *The Assembly Line*, trans. Margaret Crosland (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), and *Lénine, les paysans, Taylor: Essai d’analyse matérialiste historique de la naissance du système productif soviétique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1976).
14. Cf. my articles “Pouvoir” and “Appareil,” in *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme*, 707–12 and 49–56.
 15. See “Marx’s Critique,” in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), 165–81.
 16. A close confrontation would be very instructive in this respect between the text of *Capital* and that of J.-C.-L. Simonde de Sismondi’s *New Principles of Political Economy* (1819 and 1827), trans. Richard Hyse (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991). Marx transposes a whole series of formulations from Sismondi’s text. What characterizes Sismondi is his reformulation of the discourse of political economy in terms of a *capital/proletariat* antithesis. But this “proletariat” has a purely economic significance (see, for example, his definition of impoverishment as a “disproportion of relations,” resulting from the “wrong economic direction”). Cf. Jacques Grandjonc, *Communisme/Kommunismus/Communism: Origine et développement international de la terminologie communautaire prémarxiste des utopistes aux néo-babouvistes, 1785-1842* (Trier: Karl-Marx-Haus, 1989).
 17. A beautiful comparison between Marx’s use of metaphor—related to the idea of the role of the masses and the “deep” or “dark” side of history—and other nineteenth-century writers (Hugo, etc.) has been carried out by Pierre Macherey, “Autour de Victor Hugo: Figures de l’homme d’en bas,” in *A quoi pense la littérature?* (Paris: P.U.F., 1990), 77–95.
 18. Adolphe Quételet, *A Treatise on Man and the Development of his Faculties* (1835) (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1969). See the classical commentary by Maurice Halbwachs, *La théorie de l’homme moyen: Essai sur Quételet et la statistique morale* (Paris: Alcan, 1912).
 19. See Engels to August Bebel, 18–28 March 1875, *Collected Works* 24:67–73. See also my commentary in *Marx et sa critique de la politique*.
 20. I have resumed the discussion of this thesis in my essay, “From Class Struggle to Struggle without Classes?” in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991), 153–84.

Chapter 6 • Politics and Truth

1. The organizing “myth,” Sorel would say. But, conversely, does not every organization have its own working myth? Gramsci, in particular, asked this question.
2. The disappearance of the “leader/theoretician” in the form this historical character took from Marx to Mao Zedong, which seems irreversible, is a particularly pertinent index of the crisis of the party form in the workers’ movement.
3. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1981), 927.
4. Althusser had analyzed Engels’s theoretical construction (following the text of Engels’s letter to Joseph Bloch of 21 September 1890) in the appendix to his study on “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” the publication of which was delayed “to spare certain susceptibilities.” See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), 117–28.
5. Cf. Solange Mercier-Josa, “Esprit du peuple et idéologie,” in *Pour lire Hegel et Marx* (Paris:

- Editions sociales, 1980), 69–116. See my own commentary on the symmetry of the “great man” and the “masses” in Hegel, in “Marx, the Joker in the Pack (or the Excluded Middle),” trans. David Watson, *Economy and Society* 14 (1985): 1–27.
6. In this situation each word becomes a double-edged weapon. The notion of a “proletarian worldview” can act as an index for working-class ideologies (in the sense of practices rather than opinions) irreducible to the dominant ideology. See, in an analogous fashion, the opposition between “bürgerliche” and “proletarische Öffentlichkeit” proposed by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, against Habermas, in *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerliche und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972). But it can also prevent any critical elaboration of these ideologies upon themselves to the extent that, according to the logic of speculative empiricism, it posits these ideologies as direct “representatives” of the universal (and uses them to forge the ahistorical archetype of the worker). Conversely, it is not at all clear that the fact of speaking about *working-class ideology*, as Marx and Engels do not do, is enough to ruin the specular relation. “The worker” is a place in the capitalist labor process; in the guise of “giving the power” of words or ideas to the workers, such a notion perpetuates them *in their place* (even “puts” them in it, in the sense of “putting someone in his place”). It can thus be the instrument of a “new bourgeoisie” (including a new party bourgeoisie, subaltern but tenacious). To a large extent, this would explain how, in “really existing socialism,” workers could be dominated (and condemned to silence) *in their own name*.
 7. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975—), 6:174.
 8. Classical political theory from Machiavelli to Hobbes and Rousseau (with its conformists and its heretics) is an example of this vacillation of ideology from the theological to the juridical, with the moment of political recognition of the real state that it involves. This moment, however, is never “pure” (even in Machiavelli), since the untwisting movement of the theological cover is always already the twisting motion of the juridical cover.
 9. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” in *The First International and After*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage, 1974), 359.
 10. See Engels to Wilhelm Bracke, 11 October 1875, and to August Bebel, 12 October 1875, *Collected Works* 45:94–98.
 11. See the collection *Le retrait du politique* (Paris: Galilée, 1983), and particularly the essay by Denis Kambouchner, “De la condition la plus générale de la philosophie politique,” 113–58, which vigorously contests this possibility.
 12. *Collected Works* 25:268.
 13. This does not mean that proletarian ideology has become “dominant” in the modern state; but it undoubtedly has played a determining role in its transformations, both before and, even more, after the Soviet revolution, the lessons of which bourgeois capitalists have been assimilating and preaching against ever since. Every bourgeois state today, even in the “capitalist world,” is in a strong sense *postrevolutionary*. Negri is correct on this point; see *La classe ouvrière contre l’état* (Paris: Galilée, 1976).
 14. Of course it is *for us* that there is a contradiction in seeing Marx and Engels incapable of suspecting that the politics of class struggle—able to tear off the “masks” of religion and law—should also be, by another turn of reason’s screws, able *to engender its own masks*. As a consequence, *no absolute end* can be assigned to the dialectic of the relations between the dominant or state ideology and revolutionary ideology. As for the implications of such a position for a theory of discourse, see the studies of Michel Pêcheux: *Language, Semantics, and Ideology*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982); and (with Françoise Gadet), *La langue introuvable* (Paris: Maspero, 1981).
 15. Cf. “XXX,” “L’idéologie technocratique et le teilhardisme,” *Les temps modernes* 243