



**Louis Althusser**

## **Essays in Self-Criticism**

*Translated by Grahame Lock*

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**Remark on the Category:  
"Process without  
a Subject or Goal(s)"**

This formula ["process without a Subject", "process without a Subject or Goal(s)"] has everything required to offend against the "evidence" of common sense, that is (Gramsci) of the dominant ideology, and thus without any trouble at all to make some determined enemies.

For example, the objection will be raised that "the masses" and "classes" are, when all is said and done, "made up of" *men* ! And that, if Man (a category which is then simply declared to be . . . an "abstraction", or, to add weight, a "speculative abstraction") cannot be said to make history, at least *men* do so -- concrete, living men, human subjects. In support of this idea Marx himself will be cited as witness, his testimony being the *beginning* of a little remark in the [Eighteenth Brumaire](#) : "Men make their own history . . ." With the backing of evidence and quote, the conclusion is quickly drawn: history has "subjects"; these subjects are obviously "men"; "men" are therefore, if not the Subject of history, at least *the subjects* of history . . .

This kind of reasoning unfortunately only stands up at the cost of confusions, sliding meanings and ideological word-games: on Man-men, Subject-subjects, etc.

Let us be careful, therefore, not to play with words, and let us look at the thing a bit closer.

In my opinion: men (plural), in the concrete sense, are necessarily subjects (plural) *in* history, because they act *in* history as subjects (plural). But there is no Subject (singular) *of* history. And I will go even further: "men" are not "the subjects" *of* history. Let me explain.

To understand these distinctions one must define the *nature* of the questions at issue. The question of the constitu-

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tion of individuals as historical *subjects*, active *in* history, has nothing in principle to do with the question of *the* "Subject of history", or even with that of the "*subjects* of history". The first question is of a *scientific* kind: it concerns historical materialism. The second question is of a *philosophical* kind: it concerns dialectical materialism.

First question: *scientific*.

That human, i.e. social individuals are *active* in history -- as *agents* of the different social practices of the historical process of production and reproduction -- that is a fact. But, considered as *agents*, human individuals are not "free" and "constitutive" subjects in the philosophical sense of these terms. They work in and through the determinations of the *forms of historical existence* of the social relations of production and reproduction (labour process, division and organization of labour, process of production and reproduction, class struggle, etc.). But that is not all. These agents can only be agents *if they are subjects*. This I think I showed in my article on "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". [See [Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays](#), London NLB, 1971] No

human, i.e. social individual can be the agent of a practice if he does not have the *form of a subject*. The "subject-form" is actually the form of historical existence of every individual, of every agent of social practices: because the social relations of production and reproduction necessarily comprise, as an *integral part*, what Lenin calls "(juridico-) *ideological social relations*", which, in order to function, impose the subject-form on each agent-individual. The agent-individuals thus always act in the subject-form, as subjects. But the fact that they are necessarily subjects does not make the agents of social-historical practices into the *subject* or *subjects* of history (in the philosophical sense of the term: *subject of*). The subject-agents are only active *in* history through the determination of the relations of production and reproduction, and in their forms.

Second question: *philosophical*.

It is for precise ideological ends that bourgeois philosophy

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has taken the legal-ideological notion of the *subject*, made it into a philosophical category, its number one philosophical category, and posed the question of *the Subject* of knowledge (the *ego* of the cogito, the Kantian or Husserlian transcendental subject, etc.), of morality, etc., and of *the Subject of* history. This illusory question does of course have a purpose, but in its position and form it has *no sense* as far as dialectical materialism is concerned, which purely and simply rejects it, as it rejects (for example) the question of God's existence. In advancing the Thesis of a "process without a Subject or Goal(s)", I want simply but clearly to say this. To be dialectical-materialist, Marxist philosophy must break with the idealist category of the "Subject" as Origin, Essence and Cause, *responsible* in its internality for all the determinations of the external "Object",<sup>[1]</sup> of which it is said to be the internal "Subject". For Marxist philosophy there can be no Subject as an Absolute Centre, as a Radical Origin, as a Unique Cause. Nor can one, in order to get out of the problem, rely on a category like that of the "ex-Centration of the Essence" (Lucien Sève), since it is an illusory compromise which -- using a fraudulently "radical" term, one whose root is perfectly conformist (*ex-centration*) -- safeguards the umbilical cord between Essence and Centre and therefore remains a prisoner of idealist philosophy: since there is no Centre, every *ex-centration* is superfluous or a sham. In reality Marxist philosophy thinks in and according to quite different categories: determination in the last instance -- which is quite different from the Origin, Essence or Cause *unes* -- determination by Relations (*idem*), contradiction, process, "nodal points" (Lenin), etc.: in short, in quite a different configuration and according to quite different categories from classical idealist philosophy.

Naturally, these philosophical categories do not only concern history.

But if we *restrict* ourselves to history (which is what concerns us here), the philosophical question presents itself in the following terms. There is no question of contesting the

1. The category of "process without a Subject or Goal(s)" can therefore take the form: "*process without a Subject or Object*".

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gains of historical materialism, which says that individuals are agent-subjects *in* history under the determination of the forms of existence of the relations of production and reproduction. It is a question of something quite different: of knowing whether history can be thought philosophically, in its modes of determination, according to the idealist category of the *Subject*. The position of dialectical materialism on this question seems quite clear to me. One cannot seize (*begreifen* : conceive), that is to say, *think* real history (the process of the reproduction of social formations and their revolutionary transformation) as if it could be reduced to *an* Origin, *an* Essence, or *a* Cause (even Man), which would be its Subject -- a Subject, a "being" or "essence", held to be *identifiable*, that is to say existing in the form of the *unity* of an *internality*, and (theoretically and practically *responsible* identity, internality and responsibility are constitutive, among other things, of every subject), thus accountable, thus capable of *accounting for* the whole of the "phenomena" of history.

The matter is quite clear when we are confronted with classical idealism, which, within the openly stated category of liberty, takes Man (= the Human Race = Humanity) to be the Subject and the Goal of history; cf the *Enlightenment*, and Kant, the "purest" philosopher of bourgeois ideology. The matter is also clear when we are confronted with the *philosophical* petty-bourgeois communitarian *anthropology* of Feuerbach (still respected by Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts*), in which the Essence of Man is the Origin, Cause and Goal of history.

But the same position evidently takes on a more deceptive air in the post-Husserlian and pre-Kantian (Cartesian) phenomenological interpretations, like those of Sartre, where the Kantian Theses of the Transcendental *Subject*, unique because one, and of the Liberty of *Humanity*, are mixed up and "squashed together", and where the Subject is multiplied within a theory of the *originating* Liberty of an infinity of "concrete" transcendental subjects (Tran Duc Thao said, explaining Husserl: "We are all, you and I, each one of us, 'transcendental egos' and 'transcendental equals' ['*egos*' and '*egaux*']", which brings us back to the

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Thesis that "men" (the concrete individuals) are *the* subjects (transcendental, constitutive) of history). This is the basis of Sartre's special interest in a "little phrase" from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, and a similar phrase from Engels, which fit him like a glove. Now this position -- which brings the Kantian categories *down* to the level, no longer of an anthropological philosophy (Feuerbach), but of a vulgar philosophical psycho-sociology - - not only has nothing to do with Marxism, but actually constitutes a quite dubious theoretical position which it is practically impossible to *conceive* and to defend. You just have to read the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which announces an Ethics that never appeared, to be convinced of this point.

In proposing the category of the "process without a Subject or Goal(s)", we thus draw a "demarcation line" (Lenin) between dialectical-materialist positions and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois idealist positions. Naturally, one cannot expect *everything* from a first intervention. This "demarcation line" must be "worked on". But, as Lenin said for his part, a demarcation line -- if it is correct -- is in principle sufficient, just as it is, to defend us from idealism and to mark out the way forward.

These philosophical positions are of course not without their consequences. Not only, for example, do they imply that Marxism has nothing to do with the "anthropological question" ("What is man?"), or with a theory of the realization-objectification-alienation-disalienation of the *Human Essence* (as in Feuerbach and his heirs: theoreticians of *philosophical* reification and fetishism), or even with the theory of the "excentration of the Human Essence", which only criticizes the idealism of the Subject from within the limits of the idealism of the Subject, dressed up with the attributes of the "ensemble of social relations" of the sixth *Thesis on Feuerbach* -- but they also allow us to understand the sense of Marx's famous "little phrase" in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*.

This comment, in its *complete* form, reads as follows: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it out of freely chosen elements (*aus freien Stücken*), under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circum-

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stances (*Umstände*) directly encountered (*vorgefundene*), given by and transmitted from the past." And -- as if he had foreseen the exploitation of these first five words, and even these "circumstances" from which Sartre draws out such dazzling effects of the "practico-inert", that is, of liberty -- Marx, in the Preface to the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, written seventeen years later (in 1869, two years after *Capital*), set down the following lines: "I show something quite different (*different* from the ideology of Hugo and of Proudhon, who both hold the individual Napoleon III to be the [detestable or glorious] *cause* "responsible" for the *coup d'état*), namely how the *class struggle* (Marx's emphasis) in France created the circumstances (*Umstände*) and the relations (*Verhältnisse*) which allowed (*ermöglicht*) a person (a subject) so mediocre and grotesque to play the role of a hero".

One must read one's authors closely. History really is a "process without a Subject or Goal(s)", where the given *circumstances* in which "men" act as subjects under the determination of social *relations* are the product of the *class struggle*. History therefore does not have a Subject, in the philosophical sense of the term, but a *motor* : that very class struggle.

1 May 1973

## 1. The "Break"

The "break" is not an illusion, nor a "complete myth", as John Lewis claims. I am sorry: I will not give way on this point. That one must explain the "break" without reducing it, I have just admitted. But look at the situation: I reduced the "break" to a simple rationalist-speculative antithesis; but most of my critics *reduced it to nothing* ! They rubbed it out, obliterated it, erased it, denied it. And how passionately they carried out this work of proscription and destruction! Let us be explicit: there really does exist, in the history of Marx's theoretical reflection, something like a "break", which is not a nullity, but of vital importance for the history of the whole labour movement. And between those who recognize the fact of the "break" and those who want to reduce it to nothing, there exists an opposition which, it must be acknowledged, is ultimately *political*.

Let us look at this question a little more closely.

It is clear to every reader who knows the theoretical works which preceded those of Marx -- and which one can list (following Lenin) as: German Philosophy, including the Philosophy of Law and of History; English Political Economy; and French Socialism (utopian or proletarian) -- it is clear and undeniable, because empirically verifiable by a process of comparison (as long as what is analysed is not this or that isolated formula, but the structure and mode of functioning of the texts) that, with *The German Ideology*, something new and unprecedented appears in Marx's work, something which will never disappear. An historical event in the strong sense, but one which concerns the field of theory, and within theory what I called, using a metaphor, "the opening of the Continent of History". Thus, using metaphors which we shall retain (and we must retain both, and play on the distinction between them),<sup>[1]</sup> we may speak of this

1. And later create more "correct" ones, and play again on the distinction between them and make it function. Because in philosophy you can only think -- *i.e.*, adjust existing, borrowed categories and produce new ones within the terms required by the theoretical *position* taken up -- *by the use of metaphors*.

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event as the "opening of the Continent of History", or (and) of the irruption, of the sudden appearance of the Continent of History *within* scientific theory.

In fact, something radically new -- though in an often very unstable form, clumsy in working out its new object and terminology,<sup>[2]</sup> or even still trapped in the old philosophical category,<sup>[3]</sup> and yet terribly anxious to make its appearance in the world -- really did arrive on the theoretical scene: it had never been seen before, it was in fact unprecedented, and, as we now know, with the benefit of hindsight, it was destined to remain there.

This thesis, which my critics have not spared, I maintain. It is of course very schematic, both in the form in which I originally had to present it and in the form in which I now take

it up again. It would need to be backed up by lengthy research and analysis, for which it is only the hypothesis. But none of the objections which have been raised to the thesis, even among the more or less serious ones, seems to me to have weakened it in principle. Because, bare and schematic as it was, it did in the last resort simply register a fact.

What I said was that it is possible to locate, even among the ambiguities and hesitations of *The German Ideology*, a set of fundamental theoretical concepts, which cannot be found in Marx's earlier texts, and which present the special characteristic of being able to function in quite another manner than in their prehistory. I will not enter here into a study of these new concepts, whose novel organization gave them a quite new meaning and function: mode of production, relations of production, productive forces, social classes rooted in the unity of the productive forces and relations of production, ruling class/oppressed class, ruling

2. Cf. the term "*Verkehrsverhältnisse*", which, in *The German Ideology*, is the theoretical centre around which all the new concepts gravitate: yet which itself "turns" around a so far absent concept, which has not yet been produced in its definitive form: the concept of *relations of production*.

3. Cf. the "division of labour", which, in *The German Ideology*, in fact functions as a substitute for the concept of *alienation*. Thus the theory of the individual, of the human "personality" and of communism which is found in this text.

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ideology/oppressed ideology, class struggle, etc. To take only one example, which can be proved beyond doubt by a process of comparison, I repeat that the theoretical system of the *1844 Manuscripts* rested, in contrast, on three basic concepts: Human Essence/Alienation/Alienated Labour.<sup>[4]</sup> And it should be noted that the "mode of functioning" of this new system or

4. John Lewis, like so many other critics, may well object that one can find in the *1844 Manuscripts* most of the concepts of Classical Political Economy -- for example: capital, accumulation, competition, division of labour, wages, profit, etc. Exactly. These are concepts of Classical Political Economy, which Marx borrows *just as* he finds them there, without changing them one iota, without adding to them any new concept, and without modifying anything at all of their theoretical organization. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx actually speaks of the Economists as having said *the last word* on Economics. He does not modify their concepts, and when he criticizes them, he does so "philosophically", therefore from outside, and in the name of a philosophy which admits its inspiration: "*Positive criticism [of political economy] owes its true foundation to the discoveries of Feuerbach*", author of a "*real theoretical revolution*", which Marx then considered decisive (Cf. the *1844 Manuscripts*, Moscow 1967, pp. 19-20).

To measure what we might call the difference, we need only to consider the break with Feuerbach which took place a few months later (see the *Theses on Feuerbach*), and to note this fact: nowhere in the *Manuscripts* does the entirely new triadic conception appear, which forms the basis of the hitherto unknown theoretical system that begins to come into view in *The German Ideology* -- Mode of Production, Relations of Production, Productive Forces. The appearance of this new system produces, from the moment of *The German Ideology*, a new arrangement of the concepts of Classical Political Economy. They change their place, and also their meaning and function. Soon, the "discovery" (Engels) of surplus-value, placed in the centre of the theory of the capitalist mode of production (surplus-value = capitalist exploitation = class struggle) produces a complete upheaval among these concepts. A quite different form of the *critique* of Political Economy then appears, which bears no relation to the (Feuerbachian) "philosophical critique" of

the *Manuscripts*, a critique based not on "Feuerbach's great discoveries", but on the reality of the contradictory process of the capitalist mode of production and of the antagonistic class struggle of which it is the site, that is, both cause and effect. The Critique of Political Economy (sub-title of *Capital*) now becomes a denunciation of the economism of Classical Political Economy, of political economy as such (which does not take account of relations of exploitation and class struggle) -- and at the same time it becomes an *internal* account of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, a critique of the capitalist mode of production from the standpoint of its own tendential laws, which announce its future disappearance under the blows of the proletarian class struggle. All this can be proved, textually.

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conceptual apparatus proved to be quite simply *different* (without any relation in its "nature", without either a continuity or an "inversion") from the "mode of functioning" of the earlier systems. Because what we are seeing here is a "change of terrain" (I proposed, early on, the use of this important metaphor), therefore a "new terrain" on which the new concepts, after much elaboration, can lay down the foundations of a *scientific* theory, or (another metaphor) "open the road" to the development of what will, irresistibly, become a science, an unusual science, a *revolutionary science*, but a theory which contains what we recognize in the sciences, because it provides *objective knowledge* [*connaissances objectives*]. As a matter of fact, it is possible on this new terrain to pose, little by little and for the first time, by using the new concepts, the real problems of concrete history, in the form of scientific problems. It is possible to produce (as Marx does in *Capital*) proven theoretical results, that is, results which can be verified by scientific *and* political practice,<sup>[5]</sup> and are open to methodical rectification.

Now, the historical appearance<sup>[6]</sup> of this new Scientific Continent, of this new apparatus of fundamental theoretical concepts, went together -- as you can see empirically in Marx, even if the process is clearly contradictory -- with the theoretical *rejection* of the old basic notions and (or) of

5. This little "and" (scientific *and* political practice) naturally poses important problems which cannot be dealt with here. The problems and their solution can be ascribed to what is called the "union" or "fusion" of the Labour Movement with Marxist theory: Lenin, Gramsci and Mao have written crucial texts on these questions.

6. A moment ago I drew a contrast -- in order to bring home the "reduction" which I had made -- between the simple "theoretical fact" of the "break" [*coupure*], and the "historical fact" of the break [*rupture*] between Marxism and bourgeois ideology. But, considered in itself, the break is also an historical fact. Historical: because we have the right to speak of *theoretical* events in history. Historical: because it is a case of an event of *historical importance*, of such great importance that we could, supposing that such a comparison makes any sense, talk of Marx's discovery as the greatest event in the history of knowledge since the "appearance" of mathematics, somewhere in Greece associated with the name of Thales. And we are as yet far from having appreciated the full importance of this theoretical event and of its political consequences.

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their organization, which were recognized and rejected as *erroneous*.

Caution: we have reached a very sensitive theoretical and political point.

This process of explicit *rejection* begins in 1845 in *The German Ideology*, but it is

disguised by its very general and abstract form, which contrasts "positive *science*", dealing in empirical realities, with the mistakes, the illusions and dreams of *ideology*, and very precisely of philosophy, which is at this time conceived of simply as ideology: better, as ideology *par excellence*. But in 1847, in [\*The Poverty of Philosophy\*](#), the "settling of accounts" takes place directly on the new scientific terrain, and it is the pseudo-scientific concepts of Proudhon -- who three years earlier, in *The Holy Family*, had been celebrated as the scientific theoretician of the proletariat -- which now have to pay the price.

What is decisive in all this is the manner in which the accounts are settled. We no longer have a philosophical "critique", which works in part, or *can* in case of need work by "inversion";<sup>[7]</sup> we have instead the scientific denunciation of errors as errors, and their elimination, their removal pure and simple: Marx *puts an end* to the reign of conceptual errors, which he can call errors because he is advancing "truths", scientific concepts. This very special way of "settling accounts" is repeated again and again. It reappears throughout Marx's work, in *Capital* and later (*cf.* the showers of

7. Self-criticism on the question of the "inversion". In my first essays I tended to reduce philosophy to science, and, in consequence, I refused to recognize that the figure of the "inversion" had its place in the history of philosophical relations. I began to rectify my position in an article of February 1968, "Marx's Relation to Hegel" [contained in the collection *Politics and History*, NLB, 1972; Translator's note]. It must be said, however, that philosophy is not (a) science, and that the relation between philosophical *positions* in the "history" of philosophy does not reproduce the relation between a body of scientific *propositions* and their (pre-scientific) prehistory. The "inversion" is *one* of the necessary forms of the internal dialectic between philosophical positions: but only in certain well defined conditions. For there exist many other forms of the same relation, given other conditions. To recognize only one form ("inversion") is to be caught in speculative idealism. Materialism takes very seriously the plurality of forms of relation, and their determinate conditions.

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criticism directed at the Social-Democratic leaders for their theoretical *errors*, contained in the Gotha Programme, and at Wagner for the Hegelian theoretical nonsense which he talked about the concept of value and its "division" into exchange-value and use-value). It is repeated in Lenin (polemic with the Narodniks, the "romantics", with Rosa Luxemburg over *Capital*, with Kautsky on the State and Imperialism, etc.), in Gramsci (polemic with Bukharin over historical materialism, etc.), and in Mao. It never comes to an end. A science (Lenin repeats it again and again when he talks about historical materialism) never comes to an end.

But every science<sup>[8]</sup> begins. Of course, it always has a prehistory, out of which it emerges. But it does emerge, in two senses: in the ordinary sense, and in another sense, its own special sense, which distinguishes it above all from the philosophy with which it coexists within theory, but also from other realities, like the practical and theoretical ideologies.

It emerges in the ordinary sense: this means that it is not born out of nothing, but out of a process of labour by which it is hatched, a complex and multiple process, sometimes brightened by a flash of lightning, but which normally operates blindly, in the dark, because "it" never knows where it is headed, nor, if ever it arrives, where it is going to surface. It is born out of the unpredictable, incredibly complex and paradoxical -- but, in

its contingency, necessary -- *conjunction* of ideological, political, scientific (related to other sciences), philosophical and other "*elements*", which at some moment<sup>[9]</sup> "*discover*", *but after the event, that they needed each other*,

8. What follows should not be understood as a relapse into a theory of *science* (in the singular), which would be quite speculative, but as the *minimum of generality* necessary to be able to grasp a concrete object. *Science* (in the singular) does not exist. But nor does "production in general": and yet Marx talks about "production in general", and deliberately, consciously, *in order* to be able to analyse concrete modes of production.

9. Not necessarily at any precise moment (though, in exceptional circumstances this just could be: certain scientists, following Pascal, talk about their "night", that is, about the sudden proof which comes at "daybreak" when they are suddenly blessed with "sight"), but at a moment which can still be roughly fixed in historical time and its periods.

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since they come together, without however recognizing one another, in the theoretical shape of a new-born science. This is the first sense in which a science emerges from its prehistory, like everything that comes into the world, from atoms to living things and to men, including the code for their genetic reproduction.

But a science also emerges from its prehistory in its own special way: in quite another manner which, at least in theory, is proper to itself, since it distinguishes it, among other things, from the way in which a philosophy "emerges" from *its* history. In this second sense, you can almost say that a science emerges from its prehistory in the same way as Marx emerged from the room of the Communist Weitling, with the famous remark: "Ignorance will never be an argument!", taking hold of the door and slamming it. Rejecting all or part of its prehistory, calling it erroneous: an *error*. And, at least in the very beginning, it is not too bothered with the "detail". It hardly matters that its judgement is, strictly speaking, "unjust" -- it is not a question of morality. And it hardly matters -- on the contrary! -- that ideologists arrive on the scene much later, when it is clear that this fatherless infant can no longer be got rid of, and provide it with an official genealogy which, in order to conjure the child away,<sup>[10]</sup> looks into its prehistory, chooses for it and imposes on it *The father who had to have this child* (to keep it a bit quiet). It hardly matters -- or, on the contrary, it matters very much! -- that genuine scholars, rather heretically of course, come on the scene very much later to re-establish the existence of lines of descent so complex and so contingent in their necessity that they force the conclusion that the child *was born without a* (single-identifiable) *father* : but one must

10. Thus the bourgeois ideologists: they have discovered that Marx is nothing else *than* Ricardo, that *Capital* is nothing else *than* the chapter of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* on *Sittlichkeit* (family apart): Civil Society + State, inverted (of course). "Find the lady", says the conventional Wisdom of detective novels. When the slogan is "find the father", it is obviously out of interest in the child: in order to make it disappear. Lenin, at all events, without going into detail, said, as if in passing, that Marxism had *three* "sources", no less! -- a way, which has hardly been understood, of rejecting the question of THE father.

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nevertheless accept the evidence and try to take account of this fact. Every recognized science not only has emerged from its own prehistory, but continues endlessly to do so (its prehistory remains always contemporary: something like its *Alter Ego* ) by *rejecting* what it considers to be *error*, according to the process which Bachelard called "the epistemological *break* [*rupture* ]".

I owe this idea to him, but to give it (to use a metaphor) the sharpest possible cutting-edge, I called it the "epistemological break [*coupure* ]". And I made it the central category of my first essays.

What a fuss I raised! The use of this expression caused a real Holy Alliance to be formed against me; it united first those -- bourgeois -- who will defend to the death the Continuity of History, of which they are the masters, and of Culture, which provides them with the facade that they need in order to believe in their empire and its uninterrupted future; it also included those Communists who know that according to Lenin, all the resources of human knowledge are required in order to construct socialism once the revolution is made, but who think -- like the Marxists of the Gotha Programme -- that it is not worth risking the loss of their political allies for a few "displaced" scientific concepts in the unity platform; and it included too those more or less anarchist elements which, using different political arguments, accused me of having introduced "bourgeois" concepts into Marxism, because I talked about it in terms of a "break".

But I shall continue to defend my theses, while of course rectifying them, at least until others -- better suited and thus more correct -- are proposed. I repeat: I shall continue to defend them, both for clear political reasons and for compelling theoretical reasons.

Let us not try to fool ourselves: this debate and argument are, in the last resort, political. This is not only the case with my openly bourgeois critics, but also with the others. Who, really, is naïve enough to think that the expressions: Marxist *theory*, Marxist *science* -- sanctioned, moreover, time and time again by the history of the Labour Movement, by the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao -- would have produced the storms, the denunciations, the passions which

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we have witnessed,<sup>[1]</sup> if nothing had been at stake except a simple quarrel over words? This is not a debate about philology! To hang on to or to reject these *words*, to defend them or to destroy them -- something real is at stake in these struggles, whose ideological and political character is obvious. It is not too much to say that what is at stake today, behind the argument about words, is *Leninism*. Not only the recognition of the existence and role of Marxist theory and science, but also the concrete forms of the fusion between the Labour Movement and Marxist theory, and the conception of materialism and the dialectic.

I know that it is not always easy to be fair. I agree that the ideological struggle is often confused, that the camps in this struggle are partly mixed up, and that arguments sometimes go on above the heads of the combatants. I recognize that not everyone who declares himself for one side really takes up all its positions, and that he may while trying for one result produce another. The attacks against the idea of a Marxist *science* may even, as a result of certain of the arguments used, knock down by *ricochet* certain definite errors. Let us say that public positions must always be judged against the system of positions

actually held *and* against the effects they produce. For example, to look at only one side of the question, you may declare yourself for Marxist theory and yet defend this theory on the basis of *positivist*, therefore non-Marxist positions -- with all the consequences. Because you cannot really defend Marxist theory and science except on the basis of dialectical-materialist (therefore non-speculative and non-positivist) positions, trying to appreciate that quite *extraordinary*, because unprecedented, reality: Marxist theory as a *revolutionary* theory, Marxist science as a *revolutionary* science.

What is really unprecedented in these expressions is the combination of the terms "revolutionary" and "theory" ("Without an objectively/revolutionary/theory there can

11. Need it be recalled that these are not recent . . . That long before the arrival of Raymond Aron, Benedetto Croce (and he was not the first) denied all *scientific* value to *Capital*? That (without going back to Stirner's "anti-theoretical" reactions) the "left" critique of the idea of a *Marxist* science can already be found in the young Lukàcs, in Korsch, in Pannekoek, etc.?

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be no objectively/revolutionary/movement": Lenin), and, since science is the index of objectivity of theory, the combination of the terms "revolutionary" and "science". But in these combinations, which, if taken seriously, upset the received idea of theory and of science, the terms "theory" and "science" nevertheless remain. This is neither "fetishism" nor bourgeois "reification", nor is it a slip of the pen. Politically and theoretically, we cannot do without these words: because until it is proved otherwise, within the bounds of existing practices *we have no others, and we have no better*. And if Marx, Engels and Lenin, throughout their political battles and theoretical work, never abandoned them as guides and as weapons, that is because they considered them indispensable to their political and theoretical struggle: to the revolutionary liberation of the proletariat.

We therefore have the right, and the duty, to speak (as all the classics have done) of Marxist *theory*, and, within Marxist theory, of a *science* and a philosophy: provided that we do not thereby fall into theoreticism, speculation or positivism. And, to touch immediately on the most delicate point: yes, we have the right, as far as theory is concerned, and the duty, politically, to use and defend -- by fighting for the *word* -- the philosophical category of "science", with reference to Marxism-Leninism, and to talk about the foundation by Marx of a *revolutionary science*. But we must then explain the reason for, the conditions and sense of this unprecedented combination, which brings about a decisive "shift" in our conception of science. To use and defend the word "science" in the context of this programme is a necessity, in order to resist the bourgeois subjective idealists and the petty-bourgeois Marxists who, all of them, shout "positivism" as soon as they hear the term, no doubt because the only picture they can conjure up of the practice and history of a science, and *a fortiori* of Marxist science, is the classical positivist or vulgar, bourgeois picture. It is a necessity if we want to resist the petty-bourgeois ideologists, Marxists or not, who like to weep over the "reification" and "alienation" of objectivity (as Stirner used to weep over "the Holy"), no doubt because they attach themselves without any embarrassment to the very antithesis which

constitutes the basis of bourgeois legal and philosophical ideology, the antithesis between *Person* (Liberty = Free Will = Law) and *Thing*.<sup>[12]</sup> Yes, it is quite correct for us to speak of an unimpeachable and undeniable *scientific* core in Marxism, that of Historical Materialism, in order to draw a vital, clear and unequivocal line (even if you must -- and you must indeed -- continue forever to "work" on this line, to avoid falling into positivism and speculation) between: *on the one hand* the workers, who need objective, verifiable and verified -- in short scientific -- knowledge, in order to win victory, not in words, but in facts, over their class opponents; and, *on the other hand*, not only the bourgeoisie, which of course refuses Marxism any claim to be scientific, but also those who are willing to content themselves with a personal or fake theory, put together in their imagination or according to their petty-bourgeois "desire", or who refuse the very idea of a scientific theory, even the *word* "science", even the word "theory", on the pretext that

12. One only has to open a textbook of law or jurisprudence, to see clearly that Law [*Droit*] -- which, uniquely, works as one with its ideology, because it needs it to be able to "function" -- and therefore legal ideology, is, in the last instance, and usually surprisingly transparently, the basis of all bourgeois ideology. One needs a Marxist lawyer to demonstrate it, and a Marxist philosopher to understand it. As far as philosophers in general are concerned, they have not yet cut through the fog that surrounds them, and they hardly suspect the presence of Law and of legal ideology in their ruminations: in philosophy itself. However, the evidence is there: the dominant classical bourgeois philosophy (and its by-products, even the modern ones) is built on legal ideology, and its "philosophical objects" (philosophy has no object, it has *its* objects) are legal categories or entities: the Subject, the Object, Liberty, Free Will, Property (Properties), Representation, Person, Thing, etc. But those thinkers, those Marxists, who have recognized the bourgeois legal character of these categories and who criticize them, must still find their way out of the trap of traps: the idea and programme of a "*theory of knowledge*". This is the keystone of classical bourgeois philosophy, which is still dominant. Now unless (like Lenin and Mao) we use this expression in a context which indicates *where to get out of the circle*, in the philosophical rather than the scientific sense, then the idea may be taken as constitutive of philosophy, and even of "Marxist philosophy", and you remain caught in bourgeois ideology's trap of traps. For the simple *question* to which the "theory of knowledge" replies is still a *question of Law*, posed in terms of the validity of knowledge.

every science or even every theory is essentially "reifying", alienating and therefore bourgeois.<sup>[13]</sup>

And I should add: we also have the right to speak about an "epistemological break" and to use this philosophical category to mark the historical-theoretical *fact* of the birth of a science, including, in spite of its unique character, Marxist revolutionary science, by the visible symptom of its emergence from its prehistory, its *rejection of the errors* of that prehistory. On condition, of course, that what are only effects are not taken for the cause - - but instead that the signs and effects of the "break" are considered as the theoretical phenomenon of the appearance of a science in the history of theory, which brings up the question of the social, political, ideological and philosophical conditions of this irruption.

13. One day it will be necessary to clear up the problem of the theory which serves as a philosophical *alibi* for all this "reification" literature: the theory of commodity fetishism in Book I, Part I of *Capital*. Meanwhile it may be hoped that all those who, in spite of their aversion to the idea of Marxist *science* and even Marxist *theory*, nevertheless go out of their way to call themselves Marxists, will not satisfy themselves with the bad passages from Reich (who also wrote some good ones) and Marcuse (who did not) and others, but will take the trouble to read Stirner, a real man of the (Parisian) moment, and Marx's reply to him in *The German Ideology*. These are texts which, on the question of "theory", do not lack a certain bite.

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## 2. "Science and Ideology"

Now this is the very point at which I must -- since no-one else has really rendered me the service --<sup>[14]</sup> declare my *theoreticist* error: on the question of the "break".

In the end, and in spite of all my precautions, I conceived and defined this "break" in the rationalist terms of science and non-science. Not openly in the "classical" terms of the opposition between *truth and error* (of a Cartesian type, reproducing an antithesis "fixed" from its origins, from Platonism onwards). Not in terms of an opposition between *knowledge and ignorance* (that of Enlightenment philosophy). But, if I may say so, worse: in terms of an opposition between *science* (in the singular) and *ideology* (in the singular).

Why was this worse?

Because in this way a very important but very equivocal -- and thus misleading -- notion was brought into play, based on its contrast with that of science, a notion which appears in *The German Ideology*, where one and the same term plays two different roles, designating a philosophical category on the one hand (illusion, error), and a scientific concept on the other (formation of the superstructure): the notion of *ideology*. And although *The German Ideology* encourages this confusion, Marx did after all overcome it, and so made it easier for us to avoid the trap. But this equivocal notion of ideology was brought into play *within the rationalist context* of the antithesis between truth and error. And so ideology was reduced to error, and error called ideology, and this whole rationalist game was given a fraudulent Marxist appearance.

I do not need to say what this led to, ideologically and

14. It may be that someone has done it, and that I simply have not heard. My excuses. In what I have been able to read, I have often come across absolute condemnations, very strong reservations and also some severe but correct remarks: and yet no coherent criticism which goes to the root of the matter, nothing really enlightening and convincing. But perhaps I have simply been deaf and blind . . .

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practically.<sup>[15]</sup> And in fact this disguise, which disguised *nothing*, did have its consequences. But Marxism, although it is rational, is not Rationalism, not even "modern" Rationalism (of which some of our predecessors, before the war, dreamed, in the heat of the struggle against Nazi irrationalism). And, in spite of everything which I said in another connexion about the basically *practical*, social and political function of ideology, because (encouraged by *The German Ideology*) I used one and the same term in two senses, the importance which I placed in its first use, a philosophical and definitely rationalist one (= the exposure of illusions, of errors) caused my interpretation, objectively, to fall into theoreticism on this point.

Nevertheless, and even in the equivocal terms of *The German Ideology*, this disguise of error as ideology could take on and in fact did take on another meaning. Ideology was only the Marxist "name" for error. But even in *The German Ideology*, which itself carried out this reduction, you could feel that behind the contrast between "positive truth" and ideological illusion, a quite different break with the past -- not simply theoretical, but political and ideological, and on a quite different scale -- was making its appearance and working itself out. This break was the one which Marx made not with ideology in general, not only with the existing ideological conceptions of history, but with *bourgeois* ideology, with the dominant, reigning *bourgeois* conception of the world, which held sway not only over social practices but also within the practical and theoretical ideologies, in philosophy, and even in the products of Political Economy and utopian socialism. The fact that this domination was

15. I will mention only one name as an example and as an exemplary case: that of Lysenko. And with it, his deceptive contrast: "bourgeois science/ proletarian science". In short, two memories of a certain period (to say no more). A number of my critics, Communists and others, understood very well *at the time* (1960-65) when I published my first essays, that even at the very modest level at which they intervened political questions were *also* at stake. Certain were quite correct, at least at the time. For what is often forgotten is that the "conjuncture" has changed in the last ten years, in some of its least apparent aspects, and, in its contingent respects, the front of the theoretical struggle has moved, just like the front of the political struggle. But the basis has remained largely unchanged.

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not absolute, but the result of a struggle against survivals of the feudal conception of the world and against the fragile foundations of a new, proletarian conception of the world -- this too is a fact of vital importance for understanding Marx's position. *For he was only able to break with bourgeois ideology in its totality because he took inspiration from the basic ideas of proletarian ideology, and from the first class struggles of the proletariat, in*

*which this ideology became flesh and blood.* This is the "event" which, behind the rationalist facade of the contrast between "positive truth" and ideological illusion, gave this contrast its real historical dimension. I certainly "sensed" that what was at stake in this debate was the break with *bourgeois* ideology, since I set to work to identify and characterize this ideology (in terms of humanism, historicism, evolutionism, economism, idealism, etc.). But for want of understanding at that time the mechanisms of ideology, its forms, its functions, its *class tendencies*, and its necessary relations with philosophy and the sciences, I was not really able to clarify the link existing between, on the one hand, Marx's break with bourgeois ideology, and on the other hand, the "epistemological break".

This latter "break" is not an illusion.

Behind this disguise of error as ideology, there stood a fact: the declaration of opposition between truth and error which is objectively one of the symptoms of the birth, of the appearance of a science (when this really is what has taken place). Whatever has been claimed, there is no doubt that I did not hold to a "non-dialectical" opposition between science and ideology: for I showed that this opposition was recurrent, therefore historical and dialectical, since it is only if the truth has been "discovered" and "acquired", and then alone, that the scientist can look back from this established position towards the prehistory of his science, and declare that it consists in part or whole of error, of a "tissue of errors" (Bachelard), even if he recognizes within it partial truths which he exempts or anticipations which he retains (for example: Classical Political Economy, utopian socialism). But this very exemption is only possible because the partial truths and anticipations of its prehistory are now recognized and identified as such, on the basis of the

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finally discovered and established truth. "*Habemus enim ideam veram . . .*" (Spinoza). It is just because (*enim*) we possess (*habemus*) a true idea that . . . that we can also say: "*Verum index sui et falsi*"; what is true is the sign both of itself and of what is false, and the recognition of error (and of partial truths) depends on starting from what is true.

It is still the case, however, that in reducing and extending the "break" to this simple opposition between science and ideology -- even if I did call it recurrent, even "perpetual" and "endless" -- I uncritically adopted the point of view which "science" (in the singular) holds about itself (and, all too clearly, not only about itself!); or rather -- since this formula is still idealist -- I adopted the point of view which the "agents" of scientific practice hold about their own practice and the history of its results; or rather -- since this formula is even now still idealist -- [16] the point of view of the "spontaneous philosophy of scientists" (Lenin) who see, in the beginnings of a science, only the finished contrast between before and after, between the truth (or truths) discovered and the errors rejected. Now I have since (in a Philosophy Course for Scientists, 1967) tried to show precisely that this "spontaneous philosophy of scientists" is not spontaneous, and does not at all derive from the philosophical imagination of the scientists as such: for it is quite simply the repetition, by these scholars and scientists, of Theses of contradictory tendencies developed publicly by philosophy itself -- that is, ultimately, by the "philosophy of philosophers".

I did, then, note the existence of the "break", but since I treated it in terms of the

Marxist disguise of error as ideology, and -- in spite of all the history and dialectics which I tried

16. Cf. on this subject all the ambiguities which arise -- like a bird at the footsteps of the huntsman -- from the simple use of Bachelard's formula: "*les travailleurs de la preuve*", especially when they are gathered into the "*cit  des savants*". But the "*cit  des savants*" only exists in the bourgeois division between manual and intellectual labour, and in the bourgeois ideology of "science and technique" which helps this division to function by approving it and justifying it from a simply bourgeois point of view. The proletarian point of view on the question is quite different: the suppression of the "*cit  des savants*", the "union" of the scientists with the workers and militants, and onwards to communist forms of the division of labour totally unknown and unimaginable from the bourgeois viewpoint.

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to "inject"<sup>[17]</sup> into it -- in categories which in the last resort were rationalist, I could not explain what was the basis of this break; and if, deep down, I sensed it, I was incapable of grasping it<sup>[18]</sup> and expressing it.

Thus in fact I reduced the break between Marxism and bourgeois ideology to the "epistemological break", and the antagonism between Marxism and bourgeois ideology to the antagonism between science and ideology.

This false position, like any correct one, had its consequences. It might not have done so if I had been satisfied with limiting its expression to a few phrases. But I was naive enough (or logical enough) to make a theoretical argument out of it, and to insert it into a line of argument rigorous enough for me to have to pay the price.

I theorized this "error" of the rationalist opposition between science (truths) and ideology (errors), in spite of all kinds of necessarily inoperative reserves, in terms of three figures which embodied and summed up my theoreticist (*i.e.* rationalist-speculative) tendency:

1. A (speculative) sketch of the theory of the difference between science (in the singular) and ideology (in the singular) in general.
2. The category of "theoretical practice" (*in so far as*, in

17. For the inevitable -- and inevitably negative -- results of the attempt to "inject" dialectics into all kinds of theses and theories, compare Marx's experience with Proudhon: "I tried to inject him with the Hegelian dialectic . . ." Without success. Indeed, if we take the word of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, criticizing *The Philosophy of Poverty*, we should perhaps even speak of a catastrophe! The dialectic cannot be "injected", nor, following the technical metaphor strictly, can it be "*applied*". Hegel pointed this out forcefully. On this point at least we must follow Hegel. On this point -- which still leaves others to be debated -- Marx and Lenin are Hegelians. One cannot talk of the injection or application of the dialectic. Here we touch on a very sensitive philosophical point (indicated by two simple words). In philosophy "*lines of demarcation*" meet and intersect at *points*, which thus become sensitive points: an encounter at the crossroads.

18. I say: incapable of *grasping* it. Because it is not possible, if you want to do serious work, to remain satisfied with general and established formulae, which, parasitic on others, give you the impression and conviction of being on the right road and of having found just the right word for the thing.

the existing context, it tended to reduce philosophical practice to scientific practice).

3. The (speculative) thesis of philosophy as "Theory of theoretical practice" -- which represented the highest point in the development of this theoreticist tendency.<sup>[19]</sup>

Of course, this last thesis on philosophy was not without its secondary effects on the Marxist conception of *science*,

19. You only need to bring these three theses together to understand the term by which I have named my deviation: theoreticism. Theoreticism here means: primacy of theory over practice; one-sided insistence on theory; but more precisely: *speculative-rationalism*. To explain only the pure form: to conceive matters in terms of the contrast between truth and error was in fact *rationalism*. But it was *speculation* to want to conceive the contrast between established truths and acknowledged errors within a General Theory of Science and Ideology and of the distinction between them. Of course I am simplifying and forcing things to the extreme, reasoning them out to their ultimate conclusions -- for our analyses never actually went so far, certainly not reaching these conclusions. But the tendency is undeniable.

It was organized, as is often the case, around the manifest form of a word, whose credentials seemed beyond doubt: *Epistemology*. Thus we went back to Bachelard, who makes constant use of the term, and also to Canguilhem who, though we did not notice it, uses it very little. We (especially I) used it and abused it, and did not know how to control that use. I point this out because a whole number of our readers jumped on to this, reinforcing by their own philosophical inclinations the theoreticist tendency of our essays

What did we understand by *Epistemology*? Literally: the theory of the conditions and forms of scientific practice and of its history in the different concrete sciences. But this definition could be understood in two ways. In a *materialist* way, which could lead us to study the material, social, political, ideological and philosophical conditions of the theoretical "modes of production" and "production processes" of already existing knowledge: but this would properly fall within the domain of Historical Materialism! Or in a *speculative* way, according to which Epistemology could lead us to form and develop the theory of scientific practice (in the singular) in distinction to other practices: but how did it now differ from philosophy, also defined as "Theory of theoretical practice"? We were now within the domain of "Dialectical Materialism", since philosophy was and is nothing but Epistemology. This was the crossroads. If Epistemology is philosophy itself, their speculative unity can only reinforce theoreticism. But if Epistemology is based on Historical Materialism (though naturally possessing a minimum of concepts which are its own and specify its object), then it must be placed within it; and, at the same time, the illusion and deception involved in the very project must be recognized. It follows (as we have since pointed out) that one must give up this project, and criticize the idealism or idealist connotations of all Epistemology.

of historical materialism, not so much because of the use to which I put the distinction (correct in principle) between science and Marxist "philosophy" as because of the way in which I treated this relation (philosophy being, ultimately, treated as theory like science, made of the same stuff, with the added capital letter: Theory). Very unfortunate consequences resulted as far as the presentation of the *modality* of Marxist science, of Historical Materialism, was concerned -- especially in *Reading Capital*.

It was no doubt on this occasion that the accidental by-product of my theoreticist tendency, the young pup called structuralism, slipped between my legs . . .

### 3. Structuralism?

It must be admitted that it thus became tempting to flirt (*kokettieren*), not with the structure and its elements, etc. (because all these concepts are in Marx), but for example with the notion of the "effectivity of an absent cause" -- which is, it must be said, much more Spinozist than structuralist! -- in order to account at one and the same time for Classical Political Economy's "mistakes", for the Relations of Production, and even for fetishism (but I did not do so: the theory of fetishism always seemed to me ideological) -- and to herald, by the term *structural causality* (*cf.* Spinoza), something which is in fact an "immense theoretical discovery" of Marx but which can also, in the Marxist tradition, be termed dialectical *materialist* causality. Provided that their critical effects are kept under control, these notions are not entirely useless -- an example is the notion of the "absent cause".<sup>[20]</sup> But we were not always able to restrain ourselves,

20. In three senses:

1. *Political*. For example, it is difficult to "put your finger" on "the" cause of what some have called "Stalinism" and others "the personality cult". The effects were certainly present, but the cause was absent;
2. *Scientific*. Supposing that, by scientific analysis, "the" cause was found, and that we call it (in order to call it something) the "Stalinian deviation", even so this cause is itself only one link in the dialectic of the class struggle of the Labour Movement in a situation dominated by the construction of socialism in one country, itself a moment of the history of the International Labour Movement, in the world-wide class struggles of the imperialist stage of capitalism, the whole thing being determined "in the last instance" by

the "contradiction" between the Relations of Production and Productive Forces.

But it is also not possible to "put your finger" on this contradiction, determinant "in the last instance", as *the cause*. One can only grasp it and understand it within the forms of the class struggle which constitutes, in the strict sense, its *historical* existence. To say that "the cause is absent" thus means, in Historical Materialism, that the "contradiction determinant in the last instance" is *never present in person* on the scene of history ("the hour of the determination in the last instance never strikes") and that one can never grasp it directly, as one can a "person who is present". It is a "cause", but in the dialectical sense, in the sense that it determines *what*, on the stage of the class struggle, is the "decisive link" which must be grasped; [*cont. onto p. 127. -- DJR*]

3. *Philosophical*. It is true that the dialectic is a thesis of *the* "absent" *cause*, but in a sense which must be understood as quite distinct from the supposed structuralist connotation of the term. The dialectic makes the reigning cause disappear, because it destroys, surpasses and "transcends" *the* mechanistic, pre-Hegelian category of cause, conceived as *the* billiard ball in person, something which can be grasped, cause identified with substance, with *the* subject, etc. The dialectic makes mechanical causality disappear, by *putting forward* the thesis of a quite different "causality".

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in certain pages of *Reading Capital*, in that Spring of 1965, and our "flirt" with structuralist terminology obviously went beyond acceptable limits, because our critics, with a few exceptions, did not see the irony or parody intended. For we had in mind quite another Personage than the anonymous author of structuralist themes and their vogue! We shall soon see who.

There were however certain indications in our essays which might have given cause for reflexion. I have for example always wondered how structuralism could swallow and digest categories like "determination in the last instance", "domination/subordination", to mention only these. But what did it matter? For flagrant reasons of convenience, we were called "structuralists", and it was in a coffin marked "structuralism" that the great family of Social-Democrats from all parties and lands solemnly bore us to our grave and buried us, in the name of Marxism -- that is, of *their* Marxism. The spadefuls of earth -- of "history", of "practice", of the "dialectic", of the "concrete", of "life", and of course of "Man" and "Humanism" -- fell thick and fast, For a funeral, it was a nice one. With this rather special characteristic: that the years have passed, but the ceremony is still going on.

I will say no more about these episodes, for while they are not lacking in interest (it still remains to show why), they can distract us from the essential point, and for a very simple reason. This is that the criticisms which were then addressed to us put things in the wrong order: they called us structuralists, but they said little about our theoreticism. In a sense, they certainly did bury something: the main deviation, theoreticism, was buried beneath a secondary deviation (and problematic), structuralism. And it is easy

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to understand why: the point is that the Marxist thesis of theoretical anti-humanism, the formulation of which may have "overlapped" with *certain* good "structuralist" (anti-psychologistic, anti-historicist) reflexes of some important thinkers (Saussure and his school), who of course were no Marxists, came directly into conflict with their humanist ideology. What our critics, fascinated by the pseudo-antagonism between structuralism and humanism, and fixed within an antithesis which suited them, could neither see nor

understand, was that certain demarcation lines can overlap in this way, can meet at certain sensitive points; that in the philosophical battle you sometimes have to take over a certain key point occupied by others (who may be enemies) in order to make it part of your own defensive positions (it may then change its significance, because it will then be part of a quite different system); that this integration procedure is not guaranteed by anyone in advance, and that it involves risks, precisely those risks to which Marx draws attention when, in Book I of *Capital*, he "flirts" with Hegel and his terminology. That is why things must be put back in their proper order. With hindsight, and benefiting from the criticisms which were made of me (I did not ignore them: some were very much to the point) and from further thought, I believe that six years later I can stand by the terms of my brief but precise self-criticism of 1967 and identify a fundamental *theoreticist* (= rationalist-speculative) deviation in my first essays (*For Marx, Reading Capital*) and also, in *Reading Capital*, its circumstantial by-product, a very ambiguous "flirtation" with structuralist terminology.

But since the question of structuralism has arisen, I should like to say a few words about it.

This very French speciality is not a "philosophers' philosophy": no philosopher gave it its name, nor its seal, and no philosopher has taken up its vague and changing themes in order to create the unity of a systematic *conception* out of them. This is not an accident. Structuralism, born of theoretical problems encountered by scientists in their practical work (in linguistics from the time of Saussure, in social anthropology from the time of Boas and Lévi-Strauss, in

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psychoanalysis, etc.), is no "philosophers' philosophy", but a "philosophy" or "philosophical ideology of scientists". That its themes are vague and changing, that their boundary is very ill-defined, does not mean that its *general tendency* cannot be characterized: as rationalist, mechanistic, and above all *formalist*. Ultimately (and this can be seen in certain of the texts of Lévi-Strauss, and among linguists or other philosophizing logicians) structuralism (or rather: certain structuralists) tends towards the ideal of *the production of the real as an effect of a combinatory of elements*. But of course since "it" uses a whole lot of concepts drawn from existing disciplines, we could not honestly accuse structuralism of being the first to use the concept of structure!

At this point it is important to remember that structuralism is not a completely worked-out philosophy, but a jumble of vague themes which only *realizes* its ultimate tendency under certain definite conditions. According to what you "understand" by structuralism (*e.g.*, anti-psychologism), according to what you see in it when you come up against concepts which it has in fact borrowed, and according to whether you follow the extreme logic which inspires it, either you are not a structuralist or you are one more or less, or you really are one. Now no-one can claim that we ever gave way to the crazy formalist idealism of the idea of producing the real by a combinatory of elements. Marx does speak of the "combination" of elements in the structure of a mode of production. But this combination (*Verbindung*) is not a formal "combinatory": we expressly pointed that out. Purposely. In fact this is where the most important demarcation line is drawn.

For example, there is no question of deducing (therefore of predicting) the different

"possible" modes of production by the formal play of the different possible combination of elements; and in particular, it is not possible to construct in this way, a priori . . . the communist mode of production! Marx constantly uses the concepts of position and function, and the concept of *Träger* ("supports"), meaning a support of *relations*: but this is not in order to make concrete realities disappear, to reduce real men to pure functions of supports -- it is in order to make mechanisms intelligible by grasping them

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through their concept, and *beginning with these* (since this is the only possible way) to make intelligible the concrete realities which can only be grasped by making a *detour* through abstraction. But just because Marx uses the concepts of structure, elements, point, function, *Träger*, relations, determination by relations, forms and transformed forms, displacement, etc., that does not make him a structuralist, since he is not a *formalist*. Here the second demarcation line is drawn.

Marx's concepts are actually used and confined within precise limits; and they are subjected to other concepts which define their *limits of validity*: the concepts of process, contradiction, tendency, limit, domination, subordination, etc. Here a third demarcation line is drawn.

For there are those who have said, or will one day say, that Marxism is distinguished from structuralism by *the primacy of the process over the structure*. Formally, this is not false; but it is also true of Hegel! If you want to go to the heart of the matter, you must go much deeper. For it is possible to conceive of a *formalism of the process* (of which the bourgeois economists offer us daily a caricature), therefore a structuralism . . . of the process! In truth what we need to look at is the strange status of a decisive concept in Marxist theory, the concept of *tendency* (tendential law, law of a tendential process, etc.). In the concept of tendency there appears not only the *contradiction* internal to the process (Marxism is not a structuralism, not because it affirms the primacy of the process over the structure, but because it affirms the primacy of contradiction over the process: yet even this is not enough) but something else, which politically and philosophically is much more important -- the special, unique status which makes Marxist science a *revolutionary science*. Not simply a science which revolutionaries can use in order to make revolution, but a science which they can use because it rests on *revolutionary class theoretical positions*.

Of course we did not see this last point clearly in 1965. Which means that we had not yet appreciated the exceptional importance of the role of the class struggle in Marx's philosophy and in the theoretical apparatus of *Capital* itself. It

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is a fact: although we suspected that Marxist science was not "a science like the others", we did finally treat it as "a science like the others", thus falling into the dangers of theoreticism. But we were never structuralists.

