OF IDEOLOGY

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ROUGH DRAFT

Introduction

We have, in a prior pamphlet,[1] already recalled the twofold origin of this series consecrated to dialectical materialism: the revolutionary Maoist practice centralized around the group for the foundation of the Marxist-Leninist Union of Communists of France (UCFML), on the one hand, and a series of courses held between 1969 and today, on the other.

The question of ideology is the most striking example of a theoretical question put to the test, and divided, by the real movement. In Althusser's formulations, prior to May '68, ideology was stamped with a seal of infamy, marking it as that which is opposed to science. In the immediate aftermath of May '68, however, the political limits of the mass movement were transfigured by an exaltation of their ideological bearing. This is an age when the scribes of the bourgeoisie speak of a crisis of civilization, and when the proletarian Left announces that we now stand on the stage of the masses' ideological revolutionarization.

In this sense, the present intervention into this [8] problem implicitly carries the balance of the period that has elapsed. It supports itself on its strongest point (the mass critique of revisionism, and in particular the denunciation of Althusser) in order to rectify its weak points (the adoption of a mass viewpoint indifferent to class analysis).

This is why the mass/class dialectic is the book's true centre of gravity. It is armed with this dialectic that one can correctly, without conceding anything at all to revisionism, invade [*investir*] and ruin the last strongholds of "ultra-left" ideology: Deleuze with his desire, Glucksman with his gulag.

The assembly [*ensemble*] of critical balance yields two ideas which, at least in their formulation, may seem novel:

— the existence in every revolutionary mass revolt, regardless of the epoch under consideration,

[1] Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction*, Paris, Maspero, 1975.

of egalitarian, anti-proprietary and anti-statist aspirations, to which we will here give the name, "communist invariants";

— the recognition of the proletariat as a logical power.

These ideas, again, are largely at the stage of being theoretical hypotheses and must be tested in fields other than that of the laws internal to the process of ideological scission. We accord a particular importance to the critical vigilance of the readers on these two points.

As in all the pamphlets, we have tried to make the references to the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao Tse-Tung easily manageable. Whenever possible, we refer the readers to the most current editions of selected works (noted SW): [I SHOULD GO THROUGH THE TEXT AND DO THIS. MAYBE USE MARXISTS.ORG INSTEAD, SINCE THE AIM IS TO MAKE THE TEXTS AS AVAILABLE AS POSSIBLE]

[NOT MUCH POINT REPEATED THE ORIGINAL LIST OF TEXTS. READERS THAT CARE WILL CONSULT THE FRENCH TEXT]

For all other references, we give the necessary specifications in the footnotes.

We will add that a reading of Engels' book, *The Peasant War in Germany*, makes for a useful counterpoint to the present pamphlet.

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Chapter 1: Ideology and Ideological Struggle

A. Class Struggle in Philosophy

Marxist philosophy is easy to recognize; it sets itself apart from the outset. How does it do this? By way of two characteristics:

The Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism has two prominent characteristics. One is its

> class nature: it openly avows that dialectical materialism is in the service of the proletariat. The other is its practicality: it emphasizes the dependence of theory on practice, emphasizes that theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice.[2]

But are they really so prominent, these two characteristics? One could object that bourgeois ideology, too, founds itself on practice (exploitation and oppression), which it serves to perpetuate. As for cloaking the interests of the class it legitimizes behind the veil of the universal, well, that happens to be a particular speciality of the exploiters' *philosophy*. In any case, (political) bourgeois ideology, even when it is liberal, is usually quite transparent. The way in which it defends property, free enterprise and parliamentarianism [14] against 'totalitarian collectivism' and 'single party dictatorship' is about as brazen as it gets.

Can we really believe, even for a second, that, in philosophy, the exploiting classes ignore their own class-interests? Is there anything unclear about Aristotle's theory of the slave as an 'animate tool', the mirror image [*symétrique-équivalent*] of the tool conceived as an 'inanimate slave'? What do we find there if not the frankest possible distillate of what the slave's master demands him to be? Against the debauchery of the "humanist imaginary" and "unconscious inscriptions" within which some would quarantine the operations of ideological propaganda, J. Rancière is not wrong to recall that the bourgeoisie—aside from being, themselves, the ones who produced the theory of class struggle and all that immediately depends upon it, as Marx has noted—proclaims as crudely as it can what it thinks its workers should be, and how they might most agreeably keep *to their place*, and how they are 'human' only in eclipses, and cease to be so at once, the second the proletariat has the audacity to find the quarters it's lodged in to be somewhat cramped.

See how, at the end of the Commune, at the height of the massacre of the Parisian workers, A. Dumas (the younger) showed himself to be an excellent materialist philosopher, as much with regards to the 'practical origins' of thought, as to that which is in the service of his class. Readers of Figaro, behold! A dialectic of death, of life, of identity and difference culminates in this vigorous and transparent

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2 Mao Tse-Tung, "On Practice," in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1971, p.67

statement: "We will say nothing of the female communards, out of respect for the women they resemble when dead." [CITATION?]

A dominant class knows perfectly well what to expect from its ideology, and from its ideologues.

But then, might it not be the [15] dominated classes who tumble into mystification? Couldn't we, perhaps, say that because of unshakeable mechanisms of unconscious ideological subjection [l'assujettissement], the exploited submit themselves to the subjective identification that their exploiters offer them?

On this account, against the legions of the Roman State, Spartacus led an entire mob of individuals obstinately convinced of being 'animate tools'. As for Thomas Müntzer, it's clear enough that all around him we find subjects machinated into the conviction—into which Luther "interpellated" them—of doing "the devil's work." (It's no stranger than imagining (as the Neo-Reichians still do to this day) the masses of people welded together under fascism through an exultant self-identification as the female harem [*collective*] of the phallic Führer.)

And so it follows that nothing remains for the peasants but to await in prayer, in the ideological prayers of their sham subjectivity, the fate that the ideologue, Luther, called upon his flock to prepare for them:

> Whosoever can, should smite, strangle, and stab [the rebels], secretly or publicly [...] just as one must slay a mad dog [...]. Slit their throats! Slaughter them! Strangle them! If you should fall in battle, a holier death you should never have! For you would die in obedience to the word of God (*Romans*, 13:5 and following) and in the service of love, to save your fellow man from Hell and the Devil's claws.[3]

Is this not, again, that excellent philosophy? Are we not as close as can be to the protestant origins of bourgeois humanism? It is true that for their part, as if their 'ideological assignment' had

3 Luther, pamphlet of April [WAS IT MAY?] 1525, entitled: 'Against the Murderous, Thieving Peasant Hordes'.

instantaneously dissolved, the German peasants formulated their own philosophy in twelve points, with a precision that speaks volumes about the cumulative, internal and enduring [*permanent*] character [16] of their insurrectionary understanding, and set forth such trifles [*bagatelles*] as the abolition of serfdom, the cessation of tithing, and the revision of the feudal tax all fell to the ground [*proposait des bagatelles, comme l'abolition du servage, la cessation du paiement de la dîme et la révision du cens frappant la terre*]. [CHECK]

A precision also attested to by the fact that no peasant, however 'ideologically interpellated' by religion he may be, denied that he had failed; "to establish a new order in the world", as Luther demanded, is the "mandate, the power and the right of God, as it is now that of the lords."[4] [CHECK]

And even if we are ignorant of the philosophy of Spartacus, we can make a safe bet that its First Article would be the liberation of slaves, from which we may infer that the theory of 'animate tools' found few takers among slaves. [AWK]

What's the point of all this? It's to broach the question of the class struggle in philosophy in light of an indubitable, but often forgotten, principle: the exploiters know perfectly well where their interest lies, and act or speak in its name. And the exploited of every century know who exploits them and how. The exploited forge their consciousness in the everydayness of exploitation itself, and not in the meanderings of the imaginary. Just as Marx said, "in ordinary life every shopkeeper is very well able to distinguish between what somebody professes to be and what he really is."[5]

The objective maxim that governs practical class relations, and which traverses them all, philosophy included, is: 'Where there is oppression, there is revolt.' The oppressed want to overthrow the exploiters; the exploiters shatter every resistance. Everything they think cannot but reflect this fundamental necessity. What follows is that the singularity of [17] Marxist philosophy is neither in its conscious relation to the class struggle, nor in its connection to social practice, or, more precisely, to political struggle.[6] Even less does it represent a 'real' which it opposes to the 'imaginary' of prior philosophies.

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4 Letter from Luther to his brother-in-law, April 1525.

5 Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, International Publishers, p.67 [BIBLIO INFO]

6 Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, Spinoza, Rousseau, Hegel, etc., are *all* theoreticians of politics, and many of them were practicioners of the same.

The truth is that every layer of gloss on ideology as 'imaginary representation', every discourse aiming to tie Marxism to the theory of the unconscious by way of ideological phantasmatics [*la phantasmatique idéologique*] or the theory of the subject, ends up stubbornly obfuscating the question.[7] This obfuscation prevents us from seeing that what's essential in Mao's statement is concentrated in the words 'to serve' and 'openly', and in what these words imply for the age of proletarian revolutions. It neither the deployment of its class being [*être de classe*] nor the historical particularity of its content that distinguish Marxist philosophy. What does is its explicit positioning of itself at the revolutionary service of the proletariat, organized as a class in order to carry out its dictatorship. The distinctive essence of this philosophy is not that it is a *class* philosophy—that much is true of any philosophy whatsoever. *Its distinctive essence is that it is, openly, a party philosophy*. Dialectical materialism is not the first 'class' philosophy in history—even less is it the [18] first philosophy which 'proceeds from practice'. No, it is the first *organized* philosophy, the first *philosophy of organization*.

And so it follows that the opposition between dialectical materialism and bourgeois philosophy is in no way an opposition between a philosophy 'conscious' of its class interests and a philosophy 'unconscious' of them. One must be uniquely entrenched in the dubious problematic of 'the subject-effect' [« *l'effet-de-sujet* »] to propose, as Pêcheux does, that 'the bourgeois forms of political practice [...] are "spontaneous" forms, in which the class interests of the bourgeoisie express themselves *blindly*'[8]! The other side of this assertion is: 'Proletarian political practice is not *the activity of a subject* (who would be the proletariat).'[9]

Thus, the bourgeoisie is the blind subject of its politics, and the proletariat is the seeing non-subject of the same! V*oilà!* Here is where we are lead by the foreclosure of the essential point, which is that the proletariat is precisely the first exploited class to constitute itself as a subject, in the concentrated form of

7 Among these obstinate attempts, Michel Pêcheux, who, true enough, has become something of a fossil, left beneath the sedimentations issuing from May '68, once again offers a quite laborious tableau: 'The relation between the *unconscious* (in the Freudian sense) and *ideology* (in the Marxist sense) thus *starts* with the clarification, we will see, provided by the fundamental thesis according to which *ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*.' (M. Pêcheux, *Les Vérités de La Palice*, Maspero, 1975.) Note that, for Pêcheux, such a 'clarification' does *nothing but* start. [AWK]

8 M. Pêcheux, *Les Vérités de La Palice*, p. 187.

9 Ibid., p.191.

its party. And the first, moreover, to produce a philosophy which, because it is a party philosophy, because it joins in solidarity [*fait corps*] with the organized service of the proletarian revolution, can, as Mao remarks, 'openly' practice the three general characteristics constitutive of every philosophy and every ideology: its practical origins, its class content and its political finality.

'Openly' means: in the grip of the party, in effective and continued allegiance to the proletariat's combat organizations. Henceforth, philosophy shall no longer be the (classed) opinion of an individual, but the collective doctrine of a movement, the cement of both its insurrection and the State [19] that its victory will erect.[10] This is not a passage from the imaginary to the real, but from a subjective vassalage to an organized collective service, plunged into its partisan calling.

We must have done with the "theory" of ideology "in general" as imaginary representation and interpellation of individuals as subjects. Not since *The German Ideology* has Marx's materialism tolerated such exegeses. Let's recite once again that ultra-famous text:

> The dominant ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.[11]

The dominant ideology, says Marx, is the reflection of a class's practices of domination. It *expresses* those 'material relationships'; it is not a specific *function*, operating in the element of the unconscious.

Ideology is essentially reflection, and in this sense, far from being an agent of dissimulation, it is *exactly what it looks like*: it is that in which the material order (which is to say, the relations of exploitation) is effectively enunciated, in a fashion that is approximate, but nonetheless real. Why would one want to obstinately substitute, for this simple and powerful idea, a doctrine of the unconscious and the subject? As

10 We must therefore reclaim and defend the idea that dialectical materialism is, ineluctably, not only a party philosophy, but a State philosophy, *the* philosophy of the State of the proletarian dictatorship. The new constitution of the Chinese State makes no secret of this: 'Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Tse-Tung Thought constitute the theoretical foundation upon which our State guides its thinking' (Article 2) [CANNOT FIND THIS QUOTE IN THE CONSTITUTION!!]. 'Openly', this time, means: Yes, every philosophy, our own included, repudiates pluralism and cements a power.

11 Marx & Engles, *The German Ideology*, trans. Christopher John Arthur, International Publishers, 1970, p.64 (translation modified).

a matter of fact, this substitution itself amounts to an expression of class forces. There is always [20] an essential connection between the deliberate obfuscation of the question of ideology and the refusal to take a side in the most obvious class divisions. Marxist-Leninism or revisionism, USSR or China, Maoist organizations or PCF: these are "expressions" of a struggle to the death, global and national, stripped of every ambiguity by these great lines of demarcation (those which are of most concern to philosophy). But it is just our theoreticians of ideology as an "imaginary place" [« *lieu imaginaire* »] and as the "interpellation of Subjects" [« *interpellation en Sujet* »] who turn their backs on the clarity of this struggle, and who distort the historical summons to choose. Because they insist on sanctioning the bourgeois crookedness of the PCF and the unions (who all proclaim themselves Marxist-Leninist) Althusser, Pêcheux, and many others, have need of a tedious sophistication regarding the roots of ideologies. This is their own expression, by confused means, of "material relations", which become for them nothing but shooting stars and bad dreams.

Behold Pêcheux: "We cannot shy away, behind (rather ponderous) formulas of absence, from elaborating a conceptual articulation between *ideology* and the *unconscious*: we are again at the level of theoretical 'lures', traversing obscurity."[12] [CHECK ENGLISH TRANS OF PECHEUX]

But these shadowy lures, they're quite clearly the ideological reflection of the opportunism and conspiratorial uncertainty amidst which the Althusserians and their satellites bide their time, under the watchful eye of their shepherd, Marchais [*sous la houlette de Marchais*].[13]

To get to the heart of the question, we must first of all simplify it, and so repeat [*refaire*], on our scale [*à notre échelle*], [21] the gesture by which Marx and Engels, with reference to the "Young Hegelians", threw light on "the tragicomic contrast between the illusions that these heroes have about their achievements, and the actual achievements themselves."[14]

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12 M. Pêcheux, *op. cit.* What's perfectly clear for Pêcheux, on the other hand, is that Brejnev's USSR is a socialist country: "[B]eginning in the 1960s, researchers from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries began to develop the study of semiotics" [SEE TRANS.] (ibid., p.10). Socialist, Brejnev [BREJNEVIST?], and, to top it off, a semiotician. What a guy! [CHECK]

13 [The reference is to Georges Marchais, leader of the French Communist Party (P.C.F.) from 1972 to 1994.]

14 Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, [PAGE REFERENCE NEEDED].

For if the Young Hegelians took themselves to be fighting against the illusions of consciousness, their successors, our Young "Marxists", have not won us an inch of ground by inviting, from the summit of their knowledge, the "subjected" [*« assujetties »*] masses to fight with all their heart against the illusions of the unconscious.

B. The Revisionist Theory of Ideology

1. Criticism of a Self-Criticism

One might get the impression that to attack the Althusserian concept of ideology today is to beat a dead horse[15]: firstly, because the mass movement itself, just after May '68, had already taken aim at the famous opposition: science/ideology; secondly, because many others—Jacques Rancière in particular—have already done quite a good job at systematizing this critique. And finally, because after having been called upon (in 1969) to explain himself on these points, Althusser (in 1974, but better late than never) produced what he himself called "Elements of Self-Criticism".

The extreme importance that the concept of self-criticism has for Marxist-Leninists is well-known: "Conscientious practice of self-criticism is still another hallmark distinguishing our Party from all other political parties."[16]

[22] Its very importance, however, gives us all the more need to withdraw the concept of self-criticism from just any old display of regrets about what one has previously thought or done—even if

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15 [The French saying reads, "c'est se donner le vain plaisir du coup de pied de l'âne". The "pied de l'âne" (the "ass's kick") refers to Jean de la Fontaine's fable, "Le lion devenu vieux" ("The Lion Grown Old"). The fable reads:

> The Lion, terror of the forests,
> Burdened with age and mourning his bygone prowess,
> Was, in the end, attacked by his own subjects,
> Grown strong through his weakness.
> The Horse came up to him and gave him a kick;
> The Wolf came to bite him and the Ox gouged him with his horns.
> The miserable Lion languished, saddened and sullen;
> Mutilated by age, he could scarcely roar,
> But was awaiting his end, without complaint,
> When he saw that even the Ass had come to his den:
> "Ah! It's too much," he told his guest; "I will indeed die;
> But to suffer your blows would be to die twice over."]

16 Mao Tse-Tung, "On Coalition Government," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. III, Peking, People's Publishing House, 1965, p.316

those regrets are accompanied by apparent rectifications. [CHECK] Here lies the interest in examining Althusser's "self-criticism": it will permit us to shed light on the real process of self-criticism. With respect to this real process, Althusser's self-criticism is, in fact, a significant counter-example. Here, again, an essential Marxist-Leninist concept finds itself divided between its authentic signification and its misguided revisionist regurgitation [*dévoiement*].

Althusser's self-criticism displays five convergent characteristics. It is arrogant, idealist, irresponsible, hypocritical and metaphysical. It is not a question of insults, here, but—epistemologically speaking—of concepts. Allow us to demonstrate.

(a) *To choose the stakes of the self-criticism on one's own, while taking no account of existing criticism: Arrogance.*

Althusser situates the central point of his self-criticism on the question concerning the relations [*rapports*] between science and philosophy. He accuses himself, with all sorts of precautions, of having confounded "break" [*« coupure »*] (which designates the historical constitution of a new science) with "rupture" [*« rupture »*] (which hinges on a change of position of a class within the field of philosophy). It is for this confusion that he reserves the name, "theoreticist deviation". Althusser points out, moreover, that he was the first to spot his own errors. He had never read any "true criticisms, ones that really got to the root of things [*allant au fond*], that were coherent, and therefore truly illuminating and convincing".[17]

It's clear what Althusser means here by 'coherent criticism'. To put it plainly: I, [23] Althusser, don't understand any criticism that isn't formulated inside my own coherence, in my own language. In other words, the only criticisms that make sense to me are the ones I address to myself. Althusser is the Cyrano de Bergerac of self-criticism:

had you had the necessary wit,

17 L. Althusser, *Eléments d'autocritique,* Hachette, 1974, p.41. [CF. EXISTING ENGLISH TRANSLATION]

To serve me all the pleasantries I quote

Before this noble audience. . .e'en so,

You would not have been let to utter one--

Nay, not the half or quarter of such jest!

I take them from myself all in good part,

But not from any other man that breathes![18]

The truth is that the Maoists, and after them the avant-garde of the Youth Movement, had already accused Althusser of theoreticism in the course of the May '68 rupture; that by 'theoreticism' was understood, quite precisely, the very impossibility that Althusser encountered: that of correctly articulating questions about science and ideology onto those which concern the class struggle. True, too, is that in 1974 Althusser says nothing more than this, but rather, under the cover of "coherence", dilutes and separates these essential criticisms from their concrete historical situation. All the same, we must recall that, well before 1968, "*le movement d'établissement*" in the factories, by which the UJCML attempted to practice a new fusion of Mao Tse-Tung Thought with the real Workers' Movement, went hand in hand with a vigorous critique of Althusserian theoreticism, which had left its mark on the organization's foundational period.

Self-criticism is necessarily arrogant when it is defined as a sort of coming to terms with oneself [*rapport à soi*], as an intellectual confession. True self-criticism is always dialectically articulated onto criticism. This is just what gives it its historical content, and which makes it a moment of liaison with the masses, a moment internal to the process of knowledge.

Under the cover of self-criticism, Althusser once again finds means of attesting to his contempt for the mass movement: by his lights, when this movement unanimously accused him of theoreticism, it [24] was neither coherent, nor profound, nor convincing. And so, Althusser's self-criticism turns into its

18 [Edmond Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac,* trans. Gladys Thomas and Mary F. Guillemard, Project Gutenberg, Scene 1.IV. This passage concludes a monologue in which Cyrano defends himself against the Viscount's quip that his "nose is... hmm... it is... very big" with a virtuosic catalogue of wittier insults. The French text quoted by Badiou and Balmès reads: "*Je me les sers moi-même avec assez de verve / Mais je ne souffre point qu'un autre me les serve.*"

opposite: an arrogant criticism of the correct ideas of the masses.

(b) *To refer the self-criticism, not to the real movement, but only to the insufficiencies of one's own thought: Idealism.*

What rendered untenable Althusser's positions on ideology as the element of error and the imaginary, as opposed to scientific truth, was certainly not the movement of these concepts themselves. It was the appearance, in the revolutionary tempest of May '68, of a mass ideological struggle that made the opposition between Marxist-Leninism and modern revisionism into an authentic historical force. [TENSE? PAST OR PRESENT?] On that score, the class roots of that opposition had nothing to do with epistemology; their testbed [*plan d'épreuve*] was rather to be found in the concrete development of popular struggles. In other words, what cast the entirety of Althusserian discourse onto the side of the revisionist counter-revolution from the outset, what thereby exposed its reactionary potentials to the eyes of the future, was a radical transformation of the historical situation and its structuring class relations. No self-criticism can avoid quarantining itself in idealism if it does not, from the beginning, find a foothold in that transformation and draw from it all the lessons the mass movement has thought through and practiced.

Not only does Althusser fail to include any grasp of the class situation's upheavals in his self-criticism, but in order to back up the claim that his 'rectification' should unfold in the sphere of pure ideas, he goes so far as to deny, purely and simply, that the conjuncture has truly changed:

> The 'conjuncture' has, at least in some of its apparent aspects, changed in the last ten years, and, on these [25] accidental points, the front of the theoretical struggle has shifted, as has the front of the political struggle. Their ground, for all that, remains obviously the same.[19]

Althusser dates this assertion: June, 1972. The period during which, according to him, the conjuncture changed only in appearances—the foundation remaining invariant—stretches from 1962 to 1972: the apparent changes contained in this period, as a matter of fact, include the Sino-Soviet rupture, the Cultural

[19] Ibid., p.43. [CHECK ENGLISH TRANS., AND MATCH]

Revolution, May '68, the military turn of the situation in Vietnam, the fall of de Gaulle, etc. If all of those events—first among them, the struggle to the death between Marxist-Leninism and modern revisionism—are nothing but appearances, well, then it's not totally impossible that the only genuinely decisive 'transformation' might have been Althusser's discovery of the distinction between cut [*coupure*] and break [*rupture*].

(c) *To fail to clearly indicate those before whom one performs the self-criticism, and the practical process in which it is inscribed: Irresponsibility.*

Althusser likes to make it known that he has always been a member of the PCF. For our part, we would like to know what relation his self-criticism bears towards his membership in that organization. Materialist self-criticism should not only embrace the concrete situation that it's a part of, but clearly designate the place from which it operates, and the transformations it has in store. Althusser soliloquizes to the wings [*proceder à la cantonnade*]. The most we can gather is that this self-criticism is warmly dedicated "to Waldeck Rochet, who admired Spinoza, and who spoke with me at length one day in June, 1966". In this dedication we can feel all the pleasure the master takes in sharing with us the news of this philosophical get-together, up there with the revisionist mandarins [*bonzes*]. That Waldeck Rochet is mentioned here only as an admirer of Spinoza does not, however, let us see just what Althusser's self-criticism has to do with the Waldeck Rochet of 1968, who exhorted his troops to crush the leftists, who spit on the Chinese people, and lent his support, in *L'Humanité*, to the denunciation of the German Jew, Cohn-Bendit.

(d) To dissimulate a part of one's thought: Hypocrisy.

No one is unaware that, backstage, Althusser made it known to all with ears to hear that the Chinese revolutionary experience merits attention, and that Brejnev's USSR is not, in fact, a socialist paradise. One could even think that certain aspects of his self-criticism are not without connection to the Cultural Revolution and Mao Tse-Tung's repeated exhortation: "Never forget the class struggle."

In his self-criticism, Althusser's principal warning to himself is that he has indeed forgotten it. In

phrases calculated to the millimetre, Althusser even lets those who know how to listen in on the possibility that, if they look closely enough, they just might find that something interesting *did* happen in China between 1965 and 1969.

These precautions, these silences, these systematic refusals to publically carry his political convictions through to the end are the exact opposite of what make a creative self-criticism possible.

Mao Tse-Tung demands of communists that they apply "such good popular Chinese maxims as: Say all you know, and say it without reserve."[20]

Althusser, plainly, has little taste for popular Chinese maxims.

(e) To self-criticize in appearance, but without fundamental rectifications: Metaphysics

Everyone knows that the real dialectic of self-criticism involves rectification. Rectification is the process by which the old state of affairs, that criticism divided, is transformed in the element of self-criticism. What, in this instance, was the old state of affairs?

It was the Althusserian doctrine of ideology, a doctrine that reduced ideology to a mechanism of illusion without taking stock of the real class content of which every ideological formation is just the contradictory expression. Any fundamental rectification would demand of Althusser, not a simple displacement of ideological agency [*l'instance idéologique*] with respect to its external correlates (science and philosophy), but a complete reforging [*refonte*] of the very definition of ideology, a reforging that makes evident:

- ideology's relation to the real historical phenomena of exploitation and oppression;
- the divided, conflictual, and developing [*en devenir*] character of the ideological sphere. In other words, the necessary subordination of the definition of ideology to the reality of the class struggle.

  But, making peripheral alterations to thevalences [*formes de liaison*] of ideological agency

[20] Mao Tse-Tung, "On Coalition Government," in Selected Works vol. III [CITATION INFO]

(break/rupture [*coupure/rupture*]), Althusser leaves the concept of ideology in general as functional illusion and subject-effect completely unaltered [*invariant*]. [AWK!] Better still, he reinforces it, in extolling Spinoza as having formulated the first theory of ideology (as if this could be done independently of any reference to real class relations) and thus having enumerated ideology's three formal characteristics: "1. its 'reality'; 2. its internal 'inversion'; 3. its 'centre': the illusion of the subject."[21]

Recalling Althusser's expressions, we will say that, in way that is "coherent", "convincing", and "gets to the root" [*« qui aille au fond »*], Althusser hasn't rectified anything at all.

A self-criticism did not take place. On with the criticism.

2. Criticism, tout court.

When we turn to the article, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," where Althusser's final formulation of the concept of ideology is to be found, we see that three characteristics of his project immediately stand out:

1. Althusser endeavours to produce a general concept of ideology and an analysis of its mode of functioning [*mode de fonctionnement*] that would be explicitly independent of a particular ideology's concrete content, and therefore its class nature. Ideology's eternal essence would rather be sustained by: (a) the radical, transhistorical opposition between science and ideology, and (b) the thesis of the ideological function's perpetuity "in a classless society no less than in a classed society [*société de classe*]".
2. From the point of view of its function, Althusser assigns to ideology in general the function of keeping each individual in his place in the relations of production. As Rancière has pointed out, this amounts to saying that Althusser assigns to every ideology the function belonging to the ideology of the dominant class: a remarkable theoretical image of the characteristically revisionist repression of the masses.

[21] Althusser, *Eléments d'autocritique*, p.72 [FIND TRANS. CITATION]

3. Althusser outlines an analysis of what is, for him, the essence of the ideological function, and which can be summed up in two propositions:
   - Ideology is the representation of the imaginary relation that individuals bear towards social practices.
   - Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.

It is precisely this Althusserian project towards a general theory of ideologies that must first of all be criticised.

The project clearly depends on a structural theory of agencies [*instances*], and not on a dialectical theory of contradictions. Marxist theory would be the theory of a social whole, an articulation of agencies whereby each could be as such [*en tant que telle*] defined as a combinatory term. What is at stake here is, in effect, a formalist and sociologistic conception of Marxist theory, one that would yield a transhistorical analysis of its objects without having to go over the determinate class contents of the agencies under consideration. This is in no way the project that Marx himself took up: even if it contains general concepts, *Capital* is by no means a *general theory* of modes of production—however much Althusser wishes it to be so.[22]

In fact, Marxist theory is always concerned with a particular historical periodization. Whatever may be its level of generality, its target and its content are always fixed in a concrete situation. Marxist theory always develops with an eye to practically intervening in those situations, and it's only from this point of view that it develops as a theoretical field [*corps*]. With Marx, one will not find forms or agencies that can be detached from their class content.

And so it will come as no surprise that Althusser's formalist project is neither materialist nor dialectical.

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[22] The concept of "mode of production" is a goldmine for deviations of the structuralist type. It is all too easy to perform a purely combinatoric rendition of this concept, taking it in isolation and expunging it of the dialectic of forces to the profit of an articulation of places. (On force and place, see our pamphlet, *Theory of Contradiction*. [FOOTNOTE ALSO THEORY OF THE SUBJECT])

(a) Not Materialist

The inevitable effect of Althusser's project is the *rupture of every internal relation between ideology and its material base*. This is apparent in his definition of ideology as the "representation of the imaginary relation that individuals bear towards social practices". There's something remarkable about this definition, in the way it folds the ideological imaginary back on itself, redoubling it. Ideology is not the reflection of real relations, but the reflection of the social imaginary of subjects: image of an image, it is deprived of any real reference. It can therefore function as a closed mechanism, monolithically [*massivement*] opposed to science. For this is the objective he's after, an objective tailored to the revisionist ideology of experts: in the redoubling of the unreal (representation of an imaginary), the real vanishes. Nowhere given to the practical consciousness of subjects, it is accessible only to the distinguished and discrete procedure [*démarche*] of science. The consciousness of being exploited and the rebellion against exploitation are here unthinkable, and without any relation to the act of seizing upon and knowing objective class relations.

We can see perfectly well how one might object: if ideology is not the image of an image, or the sealed foreclosure of the real, it is nevertheless tied to phenomena of misrecognition [*méconnaissance*]. What are we to make of the process of *false consciousness* that points to [*spécifie*] dominant ideological representations?

Well, let's look more closely at Engel's most explicit text on this point:

> Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motivating forces [*forces motrices*] impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors. He works with mere thought material which he accepts without examination as the product of thought, he does not investigate further for a more remote process independent of

> thought; indeed its origin seems obvious to him, because as all action is produced through the medium of thought it also appears to him to be ultimately based upon thought.[23]

Engels in no way says that the *content* of ideology is imaginary. He indicates only that the *motivating force* [*force motrice*] of the thought is not internal to the thought itself. That which governs ideas splits away from [*se divise d'avec*] ideology as its real dialectical correlate: the historical practice of class. To use our own categories (Cf. A. BADIOU, *Theory of Contradiction*), Engels reminds us that if the *place* of ideology is the order of representations (it is a matter of intellectual "processes" and "materials"), its *force* is real, practical. We must divide the *energetics* of ideology from its representative form: thought is the place of ideas, not the principle of their movement (the Platonic metaphor of the suprasensible as the Place of Ideas is the idealist metaphor par excellence: it hypostasizes the function of placement where thought sustains itself [*se tient*], and separates it from the material force that traverses it and governs its movement). This is why Engels opposes the local *mediation* of thought (the human act works "through the intermediary of thought") to the real foundation of all transformation in the sphere of ideas. The force of my ideas is something that traverses me, something eminently unfolding history's exteriority and interpellation. Nothing has its source in thought alone. Thought is *without force.* It is a place of passage and of placement for the massive energies of history—and *that* is what ideology misrecognizes, that, the forgetting of which engenders *false consciousness.*

It does not at all follow that ideology belongs to the closed order of the imaginary. Just the opposite: ideology is, through and through, set in motion by real "motivating forces", and it is this reality that it reflects and has at its disposal, even if only in the element of false consciousness. In other words: what is illusory is not the ideas themselves, which couldn't come from anywhere else but the real, but the representation of their autonomy. Ideological illusion is just philosophical idealism: to affirm the existence

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[23] Engels, "Letter to F. Mehring," [RETRIEVED FROM MARXISTS.ORG: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm] [TRANS. MODIFIED: FIRST OCCURRENCE OF "MOTIVE" CHANGED TO "DRIVING FORCE" TO APPROXIMATE THE FRENCH "FORCE MOTRICE", AND EVOKE B'S CONCEPT OF 'FORCE']

of a force intrinsic to thought—there, where thought splits away from the material forces that prescribe its movements [*là où la pensée se divise d'avec les forces matérielles qui lui prescrivent son mouvement*]. *What follows is that illusion and false consciousness concern the form of representations, and not their content.* That a small-time union boss might hold the sincere conviction that he speaks in the name of the working class, and even has the backing of a cheap Marxism, when he bends over backwards to liquidate a mass revolt, that's false consciousness—but only so far as the formal side of the question goes. The truth is, our little revisionist is invested by the force of the bourgeois class, which his thought *quite adequately* reflects. The imaginary is in this case assignable only to the supposedly doctrinal, deductive, 'Marxist' form of his liquidating sermon. At bottom the sermon's representational system is, even if performed in a phony Marxist idiom, a concentrated expression of the interests of a workers' aristocracy, and its historical genesis, and there is nothing imaginary about that. The CGT mandarin's [*bonze*] oration gives us access to its real: true bourgeois, and necessarily so, because the force that governs it is the corruption of sector of the working class by decades of colonialism, of chauvinism, and respectful allegiance to the French State. A phony Marxism, moreover, because our union boss spawns from a long line of degeneracy, stakes a claim to a certain heritage, and addresses himself to workers next to whom this very heritage is his only force—and so he must speak its language in order to practice its disavowal.

We Maoists are often telling the workers that they have a spontaneous tendency to let the blah-blah-blah of the union bosses [*syndical*] run like tepid water: Listen to them! Listen carefully! They *tell* you what they are. They *tell* of the force and the class they're coming from [*don't ils procèdent*]. They are powerless to prevent themselves from thinking highly of their corruption. [*Ils ne peuvent pas s'empêcher de penser tout haut leur corruption*.] Be it from a strictly militant point of view, one must hold firmly to this principle: ideas, even if *placed* in the element of false consciousness,

- denote practical and historical realities and class relations, not imaginary relations;
- are governed by forces external to thought, and not by the laws of the imaginary, so far as their processes of transformation are concerned.

Deny these theses, and you dilute all the force of revolutionary Marxism, which aims at the materialist articulation of superstructure and infrastructure, and combats the adversary's ideology on the basis of the class relations that that ideology expresses and means to perpetuate.

One could say that Althusser advances an ideological conception of ideology, ideological in the strict sense of believing in the functional autonomy of ideas.

(b) Not Dialectical

An altogether crucial point: in the context of its Althusserian description, it is impossible to understand *what the internal law governing changes in the ideological relations between forces might be*; in order to understand this, it is necessary to construct a separate theory of the transformative efficacy of the ideological sphere. From the outset (his "Marxism and Humanism" article), Althusser theorises the function of ideology (a) in classed societies, and (b) in classless societies (and at the time he meant the USSR, whose revisionist mythology he unflinchingly accepted). But not for a second is it a question of ideological struggle, contradiction, or revolution. But that is dialectical materialist thought's point of departure. For Marxists, the theory of ideology is always a theory of ideological *transformations* rather than states. It demands that ideology be seized *as a contradictory process*, and seized in its internal reference to real transformations.

Like everything, ideology should be grasped as the development of a scission [*en tant que devenir d'une scission*].

In *Capital*, Marx points out that simple ideological *analysis*, the mere reduction of ideology to the real kernel it expresses, is a simple but insufficient task. The scientific method demands that we seize the movement by which ideology is engendered on the basis of the material realities of history:

> It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one. The weak points in the abstract materialism of natural science, a materialism

> that excludes history and its process, are at once evident from the abstract and ideological conceptions of its spokesmen, whenever they venture beyond the bounds of their own speciality. [MARX, CAPITAL, CH. 15, § 1, FN. 4] [CHECK CITATION]

From this we may conclude that when Althusser indeed "makes no case for historical development" [CHECK] in his Spinozistic theory of ideology, he has ventured beyond the bounds of his "speciality", so long as his "speciality" is not exactly Marxism.

To seize ideology as a process, and not as a closed, imaginary mechanism, that is Marx's scientific directive, whose direction Althusser reverses. No theory of ideology can exempt itself from the general dialectical law that one must account for the development of forces in conflict: ideology is intelligible only as a space of struggle, anchored in the expression of lacerated material relations [*de rapport matériels eux-mêmes déchirés*].

For example, when Engels analysed the Protestant ideology, he showed *in the first place* that the heresy is connected to the ascension of the bourgeoisie. The scission in religious ideology translates the pressure of real class relations. One can easily demonstrate that the Protestant contents related back to the interests of the bourgeois class. But Engels above all shows that the heretical ideology was *itself divided* from the start. Its unification was only ever transitory, tethered to a class alliance between the urban bourgeoisie and the peasants. There was thus a double division, entirely expressive of the class struggle: there was a certain alliance between bourgeoisie and plebeians (both urban and rural) against the landed aristocracy, but there was an internal scission, implicating contradiction and coexistence, between a heresy that was moderate and bourgeois, and another that was plebeian and revolutionary. The intrication of those dialectical processes constituted the *reality* of the ideological sphere.

Certainly, there was a clash between systems of imaginary representations in all this, since, as a consequence of historical conditions, the ideological struggle took place in the element of religion, but those representations were referred back to real class contents: the theological contents of the predictions

of Thomas Müntzer, for example, served to envelope the aspirations of the plebeian class.[24]

Engels concludes that all changes in ideological matters result from class relations. But only the changes matter: Marxist theory, as a dialectical—and revolutionary—theory, is by necessity a theory of processes and not a theory of states or figures. It is, consequently, a theory of contradictions, of processes of division and struggle. A Marxist theory of ideology necessarily has its centre of gravity in a theory of ideological contradictions, a theory of the divided character of ideological representations. The concept of division is inherent to the general concept of ideology. Althusser, by contrast, theorises ideology in terms of its closed simplicity, the self-identity and transhistorical essence.

One can clearly see where the difficult for Althusser lies: to seize ideologies as processes of scission one must take up the point of view of a class: it is, in fact, *from the viewpoint of the oppressed classes that the experience of divided ideology is produced* [*se fait*]. The dominant class practices and imposes its own ideology as the dominant ideology, which it presents as unique and unifying. It is the dominated classes who demonstrate the mystificatory character of a unifying ideology, and who do this on the basis of insurrectionary [*révoltées*] class practices, *irrepresentable in the dominant ideology*. Any project of forming a general theory of ideology that does not inscribe its division in the very essence of the phenomenon warrants the suspicion that it has not taken up the point of view of the oppressed. The totalitarian simplicity of ideology, for Althusser, works [*fonctionnant*] on the force of its imaginary internal mechanisms, organized by the State as a function external to the class contradictions, rending unthinkable the existence and specificity of the prolerian ideology's concrete forms of manifestation. Revisionism, the point of view of the bourgeoisie lurking beneath gaudy Marxist regalia [*sous les oripeaux marxistes*], reveals itself, here and everywhere, in the evacuation of the dialectic.

C. The Spontaneous Class Struggle

From where must one begin in order to dialecticize the question of ideology and restore its

[24] (On all this, cf. ENGELS, *The Peasant War in Germany*, especially Part II.)

relationship with real social conditions? The antidote to Althusser's speculative themes is to be found in the point of view of the workers and the people. We will take as a guiding thread the viewpoint of the exploited classes—and first and foremost, their *experience*, their immediate practices: the origin of all knowledge, knowledge about ideology included.

The real relations of exploitation and oppression are practiced and sustained by individuals. Regarding them, individuals have constant empirical knowledge [*en ont en permanence la connaissance sensible*], and, in addition, unequally systematic representations. These representations are fluctuating and divided. Their historical reality is just that process of division. What is the general content? It bears on the divided nature of the real relations. Ideological space always presents itself as the divided representation of a division. The "nuclear" conflict hinges on a representation of social relations as either essentially antagonistic or essentially non-antagonistic. The practical effects of these systems of representation are fundamentally different. For example, the factory worker is gripped by real relations of exploitation, and *every* worker has some experience of this situation. But the representation he may have of this state of affairs is variable, and is a function of the concrete situation: either the idea that those relations are necessary (even if they involve certain difficulties and tensions) predominates, or else the dominant representation is one according to which those same relations are traversed by contradiction, by a relation of struggle, of confrontation, and not of collaboration and harmony. This division and this variation are a constant practical reality, which manifests in degrees of acceptance or revolt in the immediate class-practices of the individuals concerned. The strong-headed, the brownnoser, the union member, the rebel, the Laodicean: so many immediate ideological types that concretize the spontaneous process of ideological confrontation, and which gather around themselves the collective forces of that process.

Why speak of *representation* with respect to these types? The term "representation" here designates a spontaneous process of systematization of real relations, of which there always exists a practical, immediate, ineffaceable understanding, which bears on those relations' essential characteristics: exploitation and oppression (an immediate understanding which is the basis of communists' fundamental confidence in

the masses).

How is spontaneous ideological conflict deployed? The dominant class always proposes systematized—sometimes highly systematized—representations, whose essential feature is class-collaboration. It isn't that the exploitative classes ignore class conflict—one sees quite well that this is their constant and principal concern. But that which they understand themselves to be systematizing is the legitimate perennity of their reign, and so they categorically deny that the contradictions of class are preparing their ruin. It is not the existence of divergent interests that the dominant ideology seeks to annul. The slave-owner cannot pretend that the slave loves servitude: the proof of this is that enfranchisement was legislated, and conceived explicitly as a reward and a promotion. The lord condescends to hear certain peasant grievances, and the boss negotiates periodically with the unions.

In reality, the fact that every ideology is rooted in practice, and links up with some empirical evidence, assigns material limits to ideological mystification. From this we can distil the following: the dominant ideology, in order to organize the masses, cannot ignore their everyday experience of class oppression. All of its effort therefore presses towards reabsorbing, *not the contradiction, but its antagonistic character*. To present the antagonistic contradiction that governs the movement of history as a simple natural difference that structures the "eternal" identity of what, truth be told, is merely a moment of this history: *that* is the purpose of every dominant ideology.

But that is still not enough: the thought of difference carries the permanent menace of contradiction. To do right by the ineluctable, spontaneous demand for the reduction of differences (the weak form of the practice of antagonism), every dominant ideology guarantees that beyond concrete differences endures—if only in the form of a promise—an abstract equality. Even Plato tries to establish that each and everyone participates in the world of Ideas, and—a remarkable thing—it is a slave he has rediscover for himself the truths of mathematics.[25] Likewise, to the guarantee it accords to hierarchical social order (an order of natural differences that descends to us from the wisdom of God), feudal religious

[25] Plato, *Meno*.

ideology matches an egalitarian promise: the one reserved for the souls at the Last Judgment. And everybody knows that the bourgeois juridical ideology completes its doctrine of social arbitration between different "partners" with an (altogether theoretical) absolute equality before the law and before power (universality of suffrage).

And so, to encircle and exorcise real antagonism, the ideology of the exploiting classes organize a twofold postulation of unity:

(a) Every apparent antagonism is at best a difference, and at worst a non-antagonistic (and reconcilable) contradiction.

(b) Every difference is in itself inessential: identity is the law of being, not, of course, in real social relations, but in the ceremonial register of regulated comparisons before destiny, before God, before the municipal ballot-box.[26]

And so it isn't just any old imaginary that's put to work in the anti-dialectical representation of the real borne by the exploiters' ideology: it is an imaginary of reduced contradiction, a protocol of difference and identity that invests and dissolves the contradictions' antagonistic element.

It is this very protocol that attacks, in its turn, the spontaneous struggle of the exploited: revolt is in effect *irrepresentable*, because it affirms antagonism in practice, and demands concrete equality at the very heart of the social relations. It cannot be represented, even by the exploiters. They have no other recourse than to proceed with a severe restriction upon who in the social apparatus might count as a rightful claimant [*Ceux-ci n'ont d'autre recours que de procéder à une sévère restriction des ayants droit de leur dispositif*]: every rebel is a dog, since taking him for a man would be to re-introduce antagonism into difference. As a result, destiny becomes vengeful, God calls for extermination, and the law becomes a law of exception. Exception: *that* is the dominant ideological designation for revolt.

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[26] The dominant ideology's third procedure is the externalization of the antagonism: to the supposedly unified body politic [*corps social*] a term "outside of class" [*hors-classe*] is opposed, and posited as heterogeneous: the foreigner (chauvinisme), the Jew (anti-Semitism), the Arab (racism), etc. The procedures of transference are themselves riveted [*chevillées*] over an exasperation of the principal contradiction.

Contradictorily, in order to so much as think itself, revolt must produce an inversion and reversal of values: for it, it's the differential identity of the dominant ideology that's the exception, and it is *antagonism* that is the rule. It is equality that's concrete, and hierarchy exists abstractly. As Engels remarked, the exploited, in order to concentrate their insurrectionary energy, should deny their attachment to the existing order to the point where they strip themselves of everything that order still concedes to them:

> In order to develop its revolutionary energy, to become conscious of its own hostile attitude towards all other elements of society, to concentrate itself as a class, it must begin by stripping itself of everything that could reconcile it with the existing social system; it must renounce the few pleasures that make its wretched existence in the least tolerable for the moment.[27]

Egalitarianism and plebeian asceticism are decisive weapons in the effort to attack and break down the hierarchical and unified system of dominant ideological differences. By their light the dominant ideological apparatus loses all of its natural value, and violently fissures [*se scinde*]. It no longer looks like the unified reflection of a necessary world, but like an impostor, permanently destined to reduce the novelty of thought that the revolt, itself, engenders. That which presented itself as unifying simplicity and the progress of the spirit is no longer anything more than one of the terms, ancient and condemned, of an irremediable antagonism.

This is why it is absolutely impossible to comprehend just what ideology might be without including in this comprehension the movement by which it appears in its historical division, and which is the insurrectionary movement of the ideological struggle.

It is because there exists, in the dominant ideology, an *irrepresentable* practice (the revolutionary class revolt) that that ideology is intelligible as a *representation*.

It's from the point of view of that which falls outside of itself that an ideology comes to be *known* in its dialectical particularity and its class foundation. In its collective novelty, the non-representable yields an adequate representation of all the fallacious representations.

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[27] Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, International Publishers, p.30 [BIBLIO INFO]