

***CAPITALISM AND COLLECTIVE ACTION: A MARXIST ACCOUNT OF THE
EROSION OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT IN LIBERAL CAPITALIST
CULTURES***

By

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ABSTRACT

The task of this thesis is to show that a renovated Marxism can offer a comprehensive explanation for the erosion of political commitment in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures. Post-Marxism forms the point of departure for the explanation to be developed. An evaluation of this work suggests that the problem is related to the forms of subjectivity instituted by neo-liberal capitalism. A renovated dialectical Marxism offers the means of filling the gaps in the post-Marxist account. Renovation requires a specific anti-economistic, anti-deterministic reading of two distinct but related strands of the Marxist corpus. The first of these is the theory of capitalism as total mode of life, as found in the work of Marx and Althusser. The second is the account of proletarian revolution developed by Marx and Gramsci. Both strands are read as accounts of subjectivity. The second is also read as an analysis of the constitution of collective political commitment. A comparison of the two will show that the subjects produced by neo-liberal capitalism are incapable of the kind of self-disciplined political commitment needed to undertake and complete demanding collective tasks. This conclusion is only possible, however, if a psychoanalysis rendered in historical institutional terms (mainly that of Freud and Lacan), is articulated to a renovated Marxism, as argued for by Althusser. In addition to the work of Althusser, that of Habermas on the bourgeois public sphere and Castoriadis on institutions suggest the means of articulating psychoanalysis to Marxism. The resulting theory offers a comprehensive explanation of the realities of contemporary social relations as instituted by neo-liberalism since the early 1980s, specifically as manifested in the erosion of political commitment.

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Chapter one

Introduction: the problem posed

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a Marxist explanation for the erosion of political commitment in liberal capitalist cultures.¹ In effect, the purpose is a dual one, in that the task of providing the explanation is linked to that of demonstrating the continuing relevance of Marxism as an explanation of such cultures. However, Marxism needs reinvigorating and replenishing if this relevance is to be demonstrated and if it is to be rendered fit for the explanatory task in hand. Before outlining the requirements of such a task, I must explore the nature of the problem to be addressed.

I

It has become a journalistic and political commonplace in recent years that populations in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures are resistant to contributing (in whatever form) to the advancement of collective purposes. The difficulty of carrying out programmes requiring collective political commitment, whether of a radical or reformist kind, has been identified and discussed by both radical and mainstream social scientists.² As committed a Marxist as E.M. Wood has recently come to the conclusion that the more capitalism is institutionalized the less likely is the kind of communal action required for revolutionary transformation.³ Bauman and Calhoun

1 By liberal capitalist cultures I mean contemporary apparently post-industrial (or de-industrializing) cultures whose earlier industrialization followed (up to a point) a free market model (the AngloSaxon cultures of England, United States and Australia). The concept of culture is used here to refer to the total way of life of a given population. This is culture as a particular way of relating to nature and other humans, or culture as all learned behaviour. This broad conception is considered to be of little use in the social sciences for two reasons: one, it is so all-encompassing as to lack any analytical purchase on the empirical world; two, the distinctive and insulated, autonomous cultures which its use presupposes are not to be found in the contemporary world. While these criticisms are well made, the inclusive conception remains useful for certain explanatory purposes, as I hope to show in this thesis. For a general account of the debates about culture, see Bauman (1973); Haferkamp (1989); Wuthnow et al (1984).

2 Bowring (1997) offers a useful survey which centres on Etzioni (1993). See also Boswell (1990); Lichterman (1996); Urry (1985).

3 See Wood (1991). Wood (1995) offers an excellent argument for the need for a revitalized Marxism, one, that is, drained of economic and technological determinisms. Geras (1990a) argues that the problem is exaggerated.

both offer well-argued cases against the Marxian revolutionary scenario and, indeed, the logic of E.P. Thompson's great work on this question is that it is economism - meaning individualized self-interested motivations for collective action - rather than revolutionary fervour that is to be expected from proletarians, as opposed to artisans.⁴ Turning to the contemporary period, the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe⁵ offers a refutation of the orthodox Marxist account of revolutionary action; one which requires us to interrogate the notion of economism and its myriad implications which informs the work of Bauman, Calhoun and indeed of Wood. The post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe will be the object of discussion in a later chapter. A discussion of this work will afford the opportunity to go beyond the kinds of explanations suggested by Bauman and Calhoun by alerting us to the importance of subjectivity. It will thereby open up the possibility of explaining the erosion of political commitment in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures; that is to say, in strongly individuated, fragmented cultures.

From theorists in the mainstream social sciences, the work of Mancur Olson, who takes the centrality of the calculating, self-interested subject as given, expresses most decisively the impossibility of effective collective action on the part of large or 'latent' groups, i.e. classes and nations, in the absence of coercion or selective incentives.⁶ Other commentators, such as David Selbourne, reject the givenness of such subjects and focus on the role of a discourse of rights in their constitution. Here the fragility of liberal democracies and the accompanying need for the education of citizens are stressed. Education for citizenship will inculcate 'a sense of place and time', a sense of 'the past human effort' which has brought us where we are today; it will be a 'collective moral education' of the 'next citizen body'.⁷ In other words, what is called for here is a kind of collective action oriented to the moral and cultural revitalization of the population as a community.⁸

In a recent contribution to this debate which emphasizes the need to enhance our capacity for collective action, (albeit one which refrains from offering solutions to the problem) John Dunn focuses on the problem of collective action as it pertains to the declining efficacy of the modern state's capacity for action. He sees the problem as one of an increasing gap between the undiminished powers of states and growing demands made on those powers. If there is a crisis of the nation state, he suggests, it emanates from the emergence of 'formidable new threats to human security' in the shape of ecological degradation and 'global economic dynamics' rather than a

4 See Bauman (1982); Calhoun (1982); Thompson (1968).

5 Laclau & Mouffe (1985); Laclau (1990).

6 Olson (1971).

7 These are statements made by Selborne during an interview on 'The World at One', BBC Radio 4, 22 October 1996. The systematic presentation of these ideas is to be found in Selbourne (1994).

8 See Bellah et al (1985); Etzioni (1993).

'transitory, quasi-cyclical decline in political self-confidence'. While Dunn also mentions the possibility that the debility of states may lie in the 'cognitive limitations' or 'intemperate and inveterate greed' of their subjects, he unfortunately fails to discuss these factors.⁹

What is notable about most of these recent analyses (hints in the Dunn article apart) is the reluctance to consider the role of the major economic and cultural changes which have marked the populations of these countries since the late 1970s and the political enhancement of the effects of these changes through the institutionalization of neo-liberalism.¹⁰ Analyses are partial, relating to specific spheres - the cultural, the familial, the political, the international or ecological - rather than to the combined effects of processes and activities in all of the spheres which make up the social totality in capitalist cultures. This partiality or incompleteness results in a failure to get to the root of the matter; it produces a focus on the symptoms, rather than causes, of the problem. We need to look elsewhere for a satisfactory account of some of the key causes for the depletion of contemporary states' capacities to pursue programmes requiring voluntary sacrifices on the part of their citizens. Mention of Olson above reminds us that there already exists a considerable body of literature on social movements and collective action in the modern world. This literature will offer clues about the constitution of political commitment. It is neither possible nor necessary to carry out a comprehensive review of this literature here.¹¹ Rather what will be needed is a general indication of the strengths and weaknesses of the most notable contributions in this area in relation to the task in hand.

The best of this literature adopts a clear historical sociological focus which encompasses different and related levels of analysis. Tilly is the exemplary figure here who, from his earliest work, appreciated, on the one hand, the significance of the 'lived experience' of groups involved and, on the other hand, the institutional effects of large-scale processes such as war, taxation and urbanization. The question of 'lived experience', as E P Thompson points out in a rather confused discussion of the topic, is crucial to rendering a satisfactory account of the preconditions for and characteristics of collective action, one which was not neglected by Marx himself.¹² Since this is a topic which has been neglected by a scientific, objectivistic Marxism (the 'Marxism of the parties' to borrow Wallerstein's term¹³) it is important to find the theoretical means of assessing its character and causal weight. In *The Vendée*, Tilly

9 Dunn (1994), pp. 11, 14.

10 But see Bowring (1997); Sandel (1984).

11 Melucci (1996) includes an extensive survey of the collective action literature. See also Eyerman & Jamison (1991); Traugott (1995).

12 For more on Thompson's difficulties with the concept of experience, see the debate in Samuel (1981).

13 Wallerstein (1991).

offers us a method of inferring the effects of social change on individuals at the level of 'lived experience' by means of the concept of 'community organization' and relates these effects to readiness to participate in collective action.¹⁴ 'Community organization' refers to the characteristics of social relations deriving from occupation, location in a social hierarchy and intensity and scope of involvement in the external world.

Another noteworthy contribution in this genre has been made by Calhoun (referred to above), whose objective is to assess accounts of collective action in terms of theories of community.¹⁵ His conclusion, based on an investigation of radical collective action in early nineteenth century England, is that such action requires a combination of affective, cognitive and organizational components which are found together rarely, if at all, in the modern world. This is because the affective component depends on the kind of communal group membership which either has disappeared or is fast disappearing in the contemporary world. Not only that, but the kinds of knowledge and organization required to provide the necessary scope and effectiveness for such action are such as to undermine such membership even where it does exist.

Tarrow adds an additional dimension to this body of work by focussing on the centrality of 'political opportunity structures' in facilitating or discouraging collective action. Here the state takes on great significance in terms of Tarrow's distinction between pre-modern forms of collective action 'embedded' in 'specific social structures' and a modern 'modular' 'general' 'indirect' and 'flexible' form which emerged in North America and Europe during the late eighteenth century.¹⁶ Particular structures, he argues, 'give rise to characteristic forms of collective action'. From a 'traditional repertoire' characterized by personalism and immediacy (e.g. violent attacks on particular individuals held to be responsible for a deplored state of affairs) context and issue specificity - and therefore inflexibility - we move to a modern repertoire characterized by generalizability or modularity, impersonality, organization and sustainability. Arising out of profound structural changes, the new form, unlike the old, has 'the capacity ... to produce sustained sequences of collective actions against powerful opponents that mark them off from the riots, charivaris and illuminations of the past'.¹⁷ Strikes and collective bargaining constitute important examples of such action.

This claim of Tarrow's is of particular interest if it is related to accounts of collective action which focus on the contemporary period. The work of Eder,

14 See Tilly (1964).

15 Calhoun (1982). These questions are pursued further in Calhoun (1991). Urry (1985) applies Calhoun's analysis to contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.

16 Tarrow (1994) p. 40.

17 Ibid. p. 46.

Melucci, Offe and Habermas,¹⁸ while differing in many key respects, shares an interest in (and in some cases a distrust of) kinds of social movements and collective action which eschew the modern forms of organization and mobilization discussed by Tarrow. Here, bureaucratic forms of collective action - whether Leninist or liberal democratic - are rejected.¹⁹ The kind of action which Tarrow identifies as modern is now seen as either expressive of or complicit with the peculiarly modern form of domination captured by the Weberian term 'rationalization'. What Melucci, for example, emphasizes is the concern of these contemporary groups to reinstate the conditions for direct, immediate, local, face-to-face relationships. The organizational form of these small groups is an expression of rejection of the instrumental rationality of dominant institutions; it expresses 'being' rather than 'doing'. Furthermore, this 'being' is a being marked by short-term, reversible commitments, multiple and challengeable leadership and ad hoc, temporary organizational structures. Hence the use of the term 'nomad' by Melucci. These groups are highly resistant to any attempts to 'solidify' or institutionalize a way of life or set of social relationships. Their members must be left free to remake or refashion themselves at will. Their action is limited action in limited areas for limited periods of time. Rejecting permanent organization and bureaucratic coordination as they do, they are easily marginalized or undermined by individualist and instrumentalist cooptation. In fact, to speak of collective action or social movement here may be misleading.²⁰ What we find instead are networks of multiple memberships with constantly changing means of identification. Neither in theory nor in practice is this kind of action to be equated with the 'anti-systemic' movements to be found reacting against capitalism during the nineteenth century and against colonialism during the 1950s.²¹ From the point of view of the 'nomads' whose movements are analyzed by Melucci, such action is in itself a form of domination. 'Nomads of the present' refuse to support bureaucratic action but also do not engage in communal action of the kind to be discussed further below. Their rejection of the former does not lead them into the kind of sustained and effective political commitment which is required for the attainment of challenging collective purposes.

Following this analysis, we may be led to the conclusion that the decline in collective political commitment of the kind with which this thesis is concerned, arises from a healthy critical attitude towards a modernity whose emancipatory face is merely a mask for inherent and unavoidable domination. This may be part of the story, but it is unlikely to be the most significant part. Post-Marxism offers us

18 See Eder (1985, 1993); Habermas (1981); Melucci (1989, 1996); Offe (1985).

19 Boggs (1986) offers a very useful overview of new kinds of radical action.

20 See Boggs (1986); Touraine (1988).

21 See Arrighi et al (1989).

reasons for looking beyond this kind of explanation, as will be seen, but post-Marxism itself does not go far enough for reasons which will be discussed. While all of the contributions looked at above help to fill gaps in our understanding of the nature of collective action, they neglect a fundamental level of explanation which it is the purpose of this thesis to develop by means of an enhanced account of Marxism. The argument to be made here is that a return to certain Marxist sources will allow us to make all of the arguments discussed above while at the same time indicating the remaining theoretical issues to be resolved.

What will be added to the indispensable contributions of the writers just discussed is a more theoretically informed and precise specification of the mechanisms which produce the specific kinds of subjects available (or not available) for political mobilization. This will be done by means of a return to the work of Marx and Gramsci on proletarian revolutionary action which is read here as an account of the constitution of collective political commitment. Collective action undertaken with a view to attaining demanding collective goals will be referred to from now on as transformative communal action. Transformative communal action is radically democratic collective action in which knowledgeable, self-disciplined, social subjects voluntarily and self-consciously engage so as to achieve collective purposes. This is a form of collective action which is contrasted with, at one extreme, the kind of communal action found in pre-capitalist cultures and, at the other extreme the impersonal, planned, bureaucratic action of which Weber speaks.²² Action of the latter kind is compatible - up to a point - with individualized self-interested collective action of the type mentioned above. By bringing out the assumptions informing the Marxian and Gramscian analyses of these matters, we may explore in greater and more theoretically informed detail the institutional context which made their shared notion of collective action both thinkable and apparently feasible. My argument will be that claims about both the need for and character of the collective action in question only make sense in relation to a specific conception of the human individual, i.e. the 'bourgeois subject'. The bourgeois subject is the introspective, apparently self-creating, self-activating, self-disciplined but also socially-oriented subject.²³ The availability of the theory and (to a certain limited extent) actuality of this bourgeois subject informs both Marx's critique of capitalism and his conception of the proletarian collective actor as a radically democratic formation. Insofar as this subject fails to materialize, then so will the kind of action looked for by Marxists and so will, too, the kind of political commitment with which this thesis is concerned. The argument will be that while early liberal capitalist institutions were (up to a point)

²² Weber (1991) , pp. 196 - 244.

²³ For more on this see Cascardi (1992); Habermas (1992); Touraine (1995).

productive of the bourgeois subject,²⁴ changes emerging from and necessary to the flourishing of capitalism produced quite different socially and cognitively debilitated subjects for whom sustained and dedicated attention to collective goals became difficult, if not impossible.

II

My claim is that Marxism offers us the best means of understanding the erosion of collective political commitment in liberal capitalist cultures. This is because Marxism affords the possibility of developing a rigorous and systematic account of the constitution of first, culturally specific capitalist forms of subjectivity and second, political commitment of the kind with which this thesis is concerned. Here Marxism is read as consisting of two distinguishable but related strands: first is the account of capitalism as mode of life or culture as offered by Marx and Althusser; second, the account of proletarian revolutionary action as offered by Marx and Gramsci. Both strands are read as accounts of subjectivity. A comparison of the two will show that the subjects produced by liberal capitalism are incapable of the kind of self-disciplined political commitment needed to undertake and complete demanding collective tasks.

It should be noted that Marxism will need to be refurbished and expanded if it is to fulfil the task undertaken in this thesis. The rationalism and economism which mark so many Marxist studies have had deleterious consequences for theories of collective action since they have marginalized or even effaced the importance of subjectivity and of the 'nonrational'. Put another way, they have marginalized or effaced the centrality of 'lived experience'.²⁵ Rationalism has marginalized the role of a felt sense of personal commitment to collective purposes and economism has hidden from view the importance of non-economic spheres of activity. What gets lost in these approaches is the realization that Marxism involves the study of social life as a constantly evolving stream of inter-related processes and relations which are both productive of and reproduced by subjects of a specific kind. Our social relations, subjectivities and purposes and our knowledge of these need to be understood historically and socially. Rationalistic, economistic Marxism is the product of the

24 But also, at the same time, and necessarily, the proletarian subject.

25 This orientation tends to express itself in a preoccupation with the concept of exploitation, at the expense of that of alienation or fetishism. See, for example, Roemer (1982, 1995); Wright (1978, 1993). Przeworski (1985), pp. 92 - 97 argues for methodological individualism as a means of dealing with the problem of subjectivity in Marxism. Wright (1997) offers an interesting contemporary example of an 'orthodox' exploitation-centred analysis which attempts to deal with the problem of 'consciousness'. In the absence of a dialectical method, Wright is left with the 'micro/macro' dichotomy as his only apparent resource. The result is the most banal kind of analysis. For an account of the emergence of orthodox or vulgar Marxism, see Colletti (1976ii). For a more general account of the problem of economism in Marxism, see Baudrillard (1975); Thompson (1978a).

very capitalism which it seeks to criticize. What this means is that we need to apply 'the materialist conception of history to the materialist conception of history itself', as Korsch once put it.²⁶

The application of Marxism to Marxism itself shows that many Marxists have failed to be sufficiently historical and dialectical in their work which has been informed by an analytic rather than dialectic ontology and method productive of an economistic and objectivist conception of materialism.²⁷ Such an approach falls into an 'objectivism' which takes subjectivity or 'consciousness' as a derivative phenomenon requiring no serious attention since its 'contents' can be read off from the real, lawful mechanisms which produce it. Hidden from the view of such Marxists is the possibility that supposed consequences or epiphenomena (for example, in relation to collective action, the 'lived experience' of actual members of the working class) can in their turn become causal. These shortcomings have proved crippling in relation to the task of understanding the preconditions for transformative communal action, or, for the constitution of political commitment. The rectification of these shortcomings will be effected in this thesis by articulating psychoanalysis to a materialist dialectical Marxism.

I now turn to give a summary account of the thesis which follows.

About the thesis

Having identified the problem and the inadequacies of existing accounts of the problem, I go on in chapter two to develop a non-reductive dialectical Marxist approach derived from the work of Marx himself²⁸ and supplemented by that of the Japanese Uno School of Marxism²⁹ and of Althusser.³⁰ As mentioned above, the method requires an historically-informed focus on capitalist cultures characterized as constantly-changing totalities of necessary and necessarily related processes, relations and practices. The Marxian conceptual distinction between transhistorical and historical abstractions will be of use in helping to maintain that focus. The method also requires a recognition of the significance of three different levels of analysis: of 'pure' capitalism, of stages of capitalism and of spatially-historically specific manifestations of capitalism in social formations. The utility of this move is clarified

26 Korsch (1970), p. 92. See also Callari & Ruccio (1996).

27 Cohen (1978) is one of the most sophisticated examples of this school of Marxism. See also Shaw (1978).

28 Marx (1973b, 1976).

29 Albritton (1986, 1991)

30 Althusser (1990i, 1990ii)

by means of the Unoist school of Marxism. Finally, Althusser's work on totality and contradiction affords the means of conceptualizing relations between the different spheres of capitalist cultures. This work also opens the way to the articulation of psychoanalysis to Marxism. For the moment, the utility of the Freudian conception of overdetermined causality and Althusser's use of the distinction between displacement and condensation should be noted.

Chapter three engages with the substance of the argument. It begins to show the relationship between forms of subjectivity and political commitment - by way of an exploration of the work of Laclau and Mouffe, whose post-Marxist analysis of radical collective action is read as an account of the erosion of political commitment in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.³¹ The important clues offered in this work include the subject effects of capitalism's peculiar and unprecedented structural 'looseness' and relatedly (at least by implication) the utility of psychoanalysis in explaining these effects. Here we will note the way in which the concept of overdetermination is adapted to account for different kinds of subject effects. These clues are followed up in subsequent chapters. Lacunae include the absence of an institutional analysis of the constitution of subjectivities, so chapter four makes good this deficiency through an examination of three different works concerned with institutions and subjectivity - works by Castoriadis,³² Habermas³³ and Althusser.³⁴

Castoriadis offers a basic and general framework for using the concept of institution. Habermas and Althusser enable us to consider institutionalization during two different capitalist stages - early liberal and organized capitalism respectively. This work also enables us to expand on the post-Marxist account of capitalism discussed in chapter three. Habermas's work shows how capitalism's 'decentred structure' or 'relative structuration' is institutionally expressed so as to produce apparently coherent active bourgeois subjects. Althusser's work on the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)³⁵ shows how the docile proletarian subjects required by organized capitalism may be constituted. Here again, we will note the significance of the psychoanalytic components in these accounts. Having brought together two different kinds of institutional analysis and discussed the contrast between bourgeois and proletarian subjects, we will be in a position to undertake an institutional account of 'pure' capitalism derived from Marx's *Capital I*.

The return to Marx will enable me, in chapter five, to begin the task of constructing the institutional framework which produces the fluid, unstable and atomistic subjects which post-Marxism sees as an obstacle to the constitution of a

31 Laclau & Mouffe (1985); Laclau (1990).

32 Castoriadis (1987).

33 Habermas (1992).

34 Althusser (1984i, 1984iii).

35 Althusser (1984i).

transformative communal actor. In this chapter Marx's *Capital 1* is read as an account of capitalism as culture; of capitalism as producer of social relations and therefore of subjects of specific kinds. This is a realist explanation of how capitalism would function given the complete and successful transformation of a population in line with its requirements.³⁶ Such a transformation would produce subjects marked by a peculiar kind of social and cognitive debility whose character is expressed in the individual/society and subjective/objective dichotomies.

Chapter six considers Marx's analysis of the overcoming of this debility in the emergence of transformative communal action. This is communal action as it would emerge out of pure capitalism. The argument here will be that, as *Capital 1* is an account of 'pure' capitalism, so the analysis of collective action offered in *The Communist Manifesto* (CM) is an account of 'pure' proletarian communal action. Here Marx sets out to show how the atomistic, self-interested subject instituted by liberal industrial capitalism gives way to the active social subject capable of intense and dedicated political commitment to collective (communal) purposes i.e. the subject capable of engaging in a form of association described by Marx as 'active union'. Having teased out some of the theoretical implications of this underdeveloped concept, I turn next to undertake its further development with the help of Gramsci's work.³⁷

Gramsci is faced with the problem of conceptualizing (so as to constitute) political commitment under conditions of the kinds of fragmentation and unevenness that mark social formations. The significance of his work here is that he analyzes the institutional means of reconstituting - under conditions of radical fragmentation - social relations which are experienced as morally imperative. Furthermore he discusses this in terms of the reconstitution of subjectivity (and therefore of social relations) through the reconstitution of knowledge. That is to say, he discusses knowledge from an institutional point of view. Unfortunately, he does not have available to him a psychology which would enable him to offer a systematic account of the mechanisms involved. The completion of his theory (and the completion of my argument) requires the systematic articulation of psychoanalysis to Marxism.

In chapter eight I turn to develop more systematically the psychoanalytic component of the theory, some of whose characteristics will have been suggested in earlier chapters. This component can be articulated to Marxism by means of the kind of analysis undertaken by Marx in relation to the classical political economists i.e. by showing the way in which Freud tends to conflate universal and historical abstractions, thereby naturalizing the state of affairs which he theorizes. Freud's theory of the Oedipal family completes Habermas's work discussed in chapter four: Lacan's theory of the decentred subject completes that of post-Marxism and

36 Outhwaite (1987).

37 Gramsci (1971, 1985, 1995).

Althusser. Finally, Freud's account of sublimation and of the origin of intellection and of the transition from primary to secondary process functioning will enable me to analyze, more rigorously and systematically than was possible in earlier chapters, the subject effects of pure capitalism as well as the social relations required for the institution of a transformative communal actor.

In the final chapter I return to the contemporary period so as to reevaluate the problem of political commitment - first discussed in chapter three - in the light of subsequent findings. It will be shown that Marx's account of 'pure' capitalism expresses most forcefully many of the realities of contemporary social relations as instituted since the early 1980s in liberal capitalist cultures. The fluid contemporary decentred subject, like the bourgeois and proletarian subjects who preceded him³⁸, is the overdetermined product of a multiplicity of institutional changes which render the experience of coherence, self-discipline and self-activation extremely difficult, or even impossible. Put another way, the debility described by Marx has been intensified during the contemporary disorganized stage of capitalism. At this point I shall hope to have made clear that what Laclau and Mouffe are discussing are, in effect, subjects governed largely by the primary process, subjects, that is, incapable of the delayed gratification and sustained direction of attention (and therefore sustained pursuit of specified goals) which characterize subjects governed by the secondary process. Since the Marxian and Gramscian conception of communal action requires such subjects, it seems that post-Marxism's claim about the difficulty (or even impossibility) of constituting such collective action (as well as more modest intra-cultural forms of political commitment) is correct, but not necessarily or solely for the reasons which it provides.

³⁸ As the use of the masculine pronoun is a theoretical necessity in the psychoanalytic parts of this thesis, this usage will be retained throughout in the interests of coherence and consistency.

Chapter two

Outline of method and approach

This chapter consists of three parts. The first part is an exploration of Marx's method for studying industrial capitalism.¹ The method is a materialist dialectical method related to the conception of capitalism as a totality or whole characterized by 'the concentration of many determinations' or as 'a unity of the diverse'. This totality, unity or whole is, furthermore, a contradictory and therefore dynamic unity of relations, processes and practices.² The second part expands on Marx's method with the aid of the Japanese Unoist school of Marxism.³ This school helps us to get at the source of the rationalism and economism characterizing orthodox or 'scientific' Marxism. One of its central claims is that *Capital 1* offers an account, neither of actually existing capitalism nor of the historical transition from feudalism to capitalism in England but rather of 'pure' capitalism as totality.⁴ *Capital 1* is a logical analysis involving a thought experiment which enables Marx to identify the real properties (or causal powers) of a capitalism undiluted by pre- or anti-capitalist social relations. If we are to avoid the rationalism and economism resulting from applying the resulting set of categories to the empirical realm, we must develop an intermediate level of analysis relating to stages of capitalist development. The third part takes up Althusser's expansion of the Marxian dialectical method in 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' (CO)⁵, 'On the Materialist Dialectic'(OMD)⁶ and *Reading Capital*⁷, an expansion which is undertaken with the explicit goal of combatting economistic and deterministic Marxism. Althusser insists on the necessity of conceptualizing capitalism as a mode of life or culture; as a totality or whole which has a uniquely fragmented structure. This structure is made up of instances or practices within and between which contradictory relations hold and to which linear or expressive conceptions of causality cannot apply. Althusser's contribution to the method adopted in this thesis is that, first, he offers a range of concepts which enable

1 Since this not a thesis about methodology, the subtleties, details and complexities of the debates which flourish around the question of Marx's method will not be dealt with here. A succinct account of these debates as they relate to the present work can be found in Kain (1986), ch. 1. The summation of my position is that I reject both 'continuist' and 'discontinuist' accounts of Marx's theoretical and methodological trajectory and reject in addition any notion of a radical split between a 'scientific' and 'critical' Marx (although such distinctions are certainly and usefully applicable to Marxists). See Gouldner (1980).

2 Marx (1973b), p. 101.

3 Albritton (1986, 1991).

4 See also Althusser & Balibar (1970), pp. 194 - 6; Althusser (1977i, 1990v); Colletti (1976i); Giddens (1973), ch. 1; Mattick (1993); Moseley (1993).

5 Althusser (1990i).

6 Althusser (1990ii)

7 Althusser & Balibar (1970).

us to think about relations between the fragments in a non-reductive way and second - and relatedly - he points towards the means of articulating psychoanalysis to Marxism.

I

Marx's method

In talking of Marx's method we need to be aware that Marx himself had very little to say about this.⁸ Method is related on the one hand to a theory and, on the other, to the specific object which the theory claims to analyze and explain.⁹ In this connection, Marx's own complaint about one interpretation of his work should be noted. Here is his response to the critic who

insists on transforming my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe [the section on primitive accumulation in Capital 1] into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed, in order to arrive ultimately at this economic formation which assures the greatest expansion of the productive forces of social labour, as well as the most complete development of man. But I beg his pardon. That is to do me both too much honour and too much discredit.¹⁰

There is no master key in the shape of a 'supra-historical', 'historical-philosophical theory' which will yield us understanding of all human phenomena. Marx's method of inquiry was developed to explore the nature of industrial capitalism as it emerged in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His project was a critical one of revealing the total cultural novelty of capitalism in terms of the kinds of social relations which it produced and required for its functioning. This revelation was intended to encourage the emergence of a transformative communal actor with the power to replace capitalism by a superior form of culture in which the human potential for freedom, creativity and sociality would be realized to its fullest and most diverse extent. The method which Marx developed to advance this project (and theory to which the method is necessarily or internally related) remains of vital importance in helping us to understand the character of the contemporary liberal

⁸ See Althusser (1990ii, 1996); Althusser & Balibar (1970); Bhaskar (1980); Carver (1975); Lukacs (1971i); Marx (1978), ch. 2; Meister (1990); Rattansi (1989); Tribe (1989).

⁹ Althusser (1990vi).

¹⁰ Letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, quoted in Shanin (1983), p. 136.

capitalist world which exemplifies those fundamental characteristics which Marx first identified and criticized. First, a word about the theory.

Marx's theory is both historical and materialist. It is historical in the fundamental sense that it claims human nature to be the constantly-changing cause and consequence of productive action on nature. It is materialist in the sense that it takes productive action on nature as its object of study. Production is used here in a broad sense to embrace all human activity. It therefore precedes the culture/economy split and necessarily embraces the conceptual or meaningful.¹¹ In other words, Marx's materialism is not a reductive or mechanical materialism. Rather it is a materialism of 'sensuous activity' or practices, therefore of a kind which transcends the misleading dichotomy of 'ideal' and 'material' whose origins are explored so revealingly in *The German Ideology*.¹² The object of study then becomes, not production somehow conflated with the 'matter in motion' of mechanical materialists, but rather real, concretely-existing individuals engaged in social relations and practices which are necessarily but not only material. From this point of view, cultures are conceptualized as modes of production or totalities consisting of logically and empirically interlinked (internally related) sets of relations, processes and practices grounded in the essentially human and constantly changing activity of production conceived in a broad sense. More specifically, the bourgeois mode of production is a radically new kind of totality which is characterized by the proliferation of ever-changing fragmentations relating to the kind of division of labour and differentiation of spheres which commodification requires.

The question of the 'completed bourgeois system' and its wholly novel character will be a central one in this thesis. For the moment, the cognitive significance of the emphasis on the totality, rather than on its parts, should be noted. Unlike other social sciences, Marxism, or historical materialism, wants to produce knowledge of the totality, rather than of specific aspects of the totality. It is therefore, as E.P. Thompson notes, 'the discipline in which all other disciplines meet.'¹³ If it is to fulfil its theoretical and political tasks it must be open to the findings of those other disciplines. Openness to psychoanalysis will be the key to completion of the present task. In order to understand what this openness means in methodological terms, I shall consider Marx's use of the work of the classical political economists.¹⁴

The economic categories developed by Smith and Ricardo offer Marx a means of approaching the bewildering complexity of the concrete world in a systematic

11 For more on this, see D'Amico (1981).

12 Marx & Engels (1976); See Sayer (1983), ch. 1. Jordan (1967) offers an exhaustive discussion of the differences between mechanical materialism and Marx's materialism, or naturalism, to use the term which Jordan prefers.

13 Thompson (1978a), p.70. See also Jameson (1983a).

14 See Kain (1986); Sayer (1983).

manner.¹⁵ This way of proceeding by means of an existing body of theory is present in Marx's work from the beginning: first capitalism as civil society and political state is explored through the work of Hegel and Bruno Bauer in the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' and 'On the Jewish Question' respectively;¹⁶ then capitalism as economic system is explored through the work of the bourgeois political economists (and of socialists such as Proudhon) in the *1844 Manuscripts*,¹⁷ *The Poverty of Philosophy*¹⁸ and the *Grundrisse*.¹⁹ Through a deconstruction of these theories (i.e. a revelation of their historical and class specificity and of the consequences of the failure on the part of theorists to notice this) Marx expects to move on to a fuller, more scientific account of capitalism. In order to understand why Marx considers pre-existing bodies of theory to be useful points of departure in developing a critical theory of capitalism, it will be necessary to say something about Marx's conception of praxis.²⁰

Marx on praxis

Praxis refers to human activity of a certain kind; activity, that is, informed by a clearly-conceived purpose or set of purposes. The concept is an expression of Marx's conviction that reality as sensuous human activity is always, in however minimal a sense, conceptual and that it produces (or at least can produce) out of itself thought which is active, that is, which is oriented in an active way to the world of which it is in some sense the expression.²¹ For Marx, knowledge of the world is obtained through an active process of engagement with that world, not through passive observation and absorption of that world as the eighteenth century mechanical materialists had maintained. Once gained, that knowledge can be used to reproduce or transform the world in question through praxis. In a sense which will be explored further below, there is a dialectical relationship between thought and reality.²² This is because human beings are creatures who are capable of forming purposes in relation to a pre-existing reality. They are capable of becoming actively conscious, not only of that reality, but of their own relationship to that reality. Self-consciousness is

15 In fact we can identify three starting points in Marx's analyses of capitalism: first, empirical reality as manifested in the Blue Books etc., second, Marx's own concepts, third, the categories of political economy. See Zelény (1980), ch. 4. See also Nicolaus (1973).

16 See Marx (1994).

17 Marx (1977).

18 Marx (1978).

19 Marx (1973b).

20 See Lukács (1971i).

21 Livergood (1967); Lobkowitz (1967).

22 The social scientist needs to maintain a distinction between the 'real' object and the object of knowledge; between the intransitive and transitive dimensions of the process of knowledge production. For more on this, see Althusser (1990ii); Althusser & Balibar (1970), pt. 1; Bhaskar (1978, 1989); Collier (1989). See also Horkheimer (1972ii, 1972iii).

expressed most systematically in philosophy. However, philosophy merely interprets the world. It confines itself to the level of contemplation and fails to engage with the actual. The role of science is to provide the kind of knowledge which will render new kinds of praxis possible; to change the world rather than merely to interpret it. It should be noted though that the advent of science heralds not the elimination but rather the transcendence of philosophy. Transcendence is here used in the Hegelian dialectical sense to refer to a process of simultaneous negation and preservation.²³ Marxian scientific concepts are also always philosophical or, put another way, science renders philosophy active rather than contemplative.²⁴

It follows from what has been said that for Marx, the development of knowledge is closely connected to real social movement. Movement or development within the world is necessarily bound up with human action (praxis) in the world and is therefore always in some sense categorial or conceptual development. Political economy is the theoretical expression of that movement in relation to the modern capitalist world. If one wants to understand that world then political economy is the place to begin:

[I]t is this political economy which has to be regarded on the one hand as a product of the real energy and real movement of private property (it is a movement of private property become independent for itself in consciousness - the modern industry as Self - as a product of modern industry - and on the other hand, as a force which has quickened and glorified the energy and development of modern industry and made it a power in the realm of consciousness.²⁵

In brief, political economy is both caused and causal. It is a reflection, from a specific point of view, on emergent entities in an existing reality, a reflection which first identifies and thereafter renders more systematic categories of persons, activities and processes in that reality. Historically, this particular theoretical rendering of an emergent state of affairs became the basis (necessary but not sufficient) for facilitating specific developments by eliminating or discouraging activities and processes which would have prevented their flourishing.²⁶ So political economy is knowledge which has served in the redirection, rather than merely reproduction, of an existing state of affairs. But it could only fulfil this function because it constituted reliable, or scientific knowledge.²⁷ So, for example, political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo produced scientific knowledge (i.e. knowledge of the real properties) of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English capitalism. They

23 See Nicolaus (1973), p. 32.

24 See Kosik (1976).

25 quoted in Kain (1986), p. 19.

26 See Corrigan (1980); Corrigan & Sayer (1985); Kanth (1986); Polanyi (1957).

27 See Cohen (1978), Appendix I.

began the important work of class analysis and of identifying the true source of value. Political economy expresses certain aspects of capitalism quite satisfactorily through the concepts of value, money, capital, labour and the commodity. These concepts are grounded in concrete developments in the England of the Industrial Revolution which is, as Marx notes, the locus classicus of 'the relations of production and forms of intercourse' corresponding to the capitalist mode of production.²⁸

However, the categories of political economy are marked by a kind of structural flaw or fundamental category error in that they consistently naturalize the historically specific social relations of capitalism. They do this by conflating transhistorical abstractions - labour, raw materials, tools - and historical abstractions - commodities, money, capital.²⁹ The effect of this conflation is that the socio-cultural and historical are naturalized and universalized, so that political economy can depict itself as having discovered the natural laws of economic production. Moreover, the unselfconscious use of the analytic method by political economy leads to the reification of entities abstracted from the social relations in which they are necessarily embedded, e.g. 'individual', 'labour', etc.³⁰ Political economy conceptualizes the social world as an aggregate of isolated, independent, atomistic entities having contingent rather than necessary relations with one another. The assumption is that these isolated entities can be captured at a specific moment in time through the method of abstraction and studied in that isolated, frozen state. The analytic approach which is adopted by political economy, as well as by most of the social sciences, abstracts entities from a complex reality, that is, separates in thought what is inseparable in reality, then reifies that separation by confusing the analytic category with the social entity which is now left as an apparently free-standing unit having only external and contingent, rather than internal and necessary relations with other apparently free-standing entities. The world is seen as an assemblage of clearly bounded objective entities which exist independently of each other. One of two approaches is then used to explain the relationship between these apparently free-standing entities and to solve the problem of the relationship and causal weight of apparently opposing phenomena (e.g. structure/agency, determinism/voluntarism, economics/politics, society/individual, material/ideal, rationality/affect) which the process of abstraction establishes. The first approach is dualism, which claims the total distinctiveness and separateness of these entities and so the impossibility of explaining one in terms of the other. The second is reductionism, which reduces one to the other. Neither of these approaches is satisfactory because both of them do cognitive violence to cultures as they really

28 Marx (1976), p. 90.

29 See Sayer (1983, 1987). See Castoriadis (1978) and Garnett (1995) for claims that Marx himself was not immune to this tendency.

30 See Cullenberg (1996), pp. 127 - 30.

function.³¹ The method which Marx developed was worked out in the light of the cognitive and social violence which analytic abstraction inflicts on the phenomena which it seeks to know. As will be seen, it was through the use of the dialectic method that Marx sought to transcend the inadequacies of the method of political economy.

Marx and the dialectic

The premise of the Marxian dialectic, as Lukács has put it, 'is that things should be shown to be aspects of processes'.³² Hence cultures are constituted as social relationships in flux rather than as an aggregate of radically separate 'things' or atoms. The task of Marxian dialectics is to translate the 'things' and 'facts' produced by political economy back into processes carried by social relations. Such a translation will provide a full account of the 'concrete reality' of industrial capitalism while at the same time revealing, first, the way in which that reality has transformed social relations and, second, the likelihood or otherwise that somehow out of this concrete reality will emerge the kinds of social relations necessary to constitute a transformative communal actor.

This is the materialist dialectical method, as opposed to the idealist dialectic of Hegel. Hegel's dialectical logic is an a priori method based on logical analysis. It exists at the conceptual rather than the practical empirical level. For Hegel, the latter is composed of abstract, or disconnected entities whose connections are achieved only in thought.³³ Because Hegel had made the dialectical nature of thought the basis of concrete reality, that is, he saw the actually existing social world as a manifestation of the Concept, he failed to achieve his goal of transcending the thought/being (or ideal/material) dichotomy. Marx does this by stressing the necessary material or embodied character of conceptual thought as well as the necessarily conceptual character of human activity, as mentioned before. Although he himself refers to the need to invert the Hegelian dialectic, the notion of inversion is, as Althusser claims, unsatisfactory since it leaves the dialectic fundamentally unchanged.³⁴ I shall return

31 Habermas (1988) offers a thoughtful account of the difficulties raised by these approaches in the social sciences. See Giddens (1984) for an ambitious (but ultimately unsatisfactory) attempt to resolve the structure/agency problem. Archer (1995) offers the most thorough and systematic account of the weaknesses of Giddens's approach.

32 Lukács (1971ii), p. 179.

33 See Gould (1979), ch. 1.

34 See Engels (1936; 1966); Lenin (1961); Meikle (1985). Nicolaus (1983); Shamsavari (1991) offer useful accounts of the Hegelian element (which they see as wholly beneficial) in Marx's mature thought. See also Jameson (1974), ch. 5; Mattick (1993); Nicolaus (1973); Thompson (1978a), p. 63, sees dialectical logic as tending to overwhelm the empirical in *Capital 1*, but this is because he misunderstands the character of that work. See also Piccone (1972).

to this question in section three of the present chapter. For the moment, let us see what Marx himself says about this:

My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of 'the Idea', is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought ...

The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.³⁵

This statement needs some interpretation and qualification if it is to be seen as compatible with the extremely subtle analysis which Marx himself carries out in *Capital 1*. As it stands, it seems to be an expression of a vulgar materialist account of the world, an account which is incompatible with some of Marx's own most powerful insights (as captured most compellingly and succinctly in the *Theses on Feuerbach*) about the inadequacy of both materialism and idealism.³⁶ In any case, the logic of the dialectic is a logic whose rigorous use requires the transcendence of all such dichotomies. It is the stress on the 'general forms of motion' which must be maintained here as that which connects Marx's dialectic to that of Hegel, this being a reference to the dialectic as a process whose dynamism is propelled by necessary contradictions. Apart from this, it is Marx's 'difference from' rather than 'opposition to' the Hegelian dialectic which needs to be borne in mind. Marx's use of the dialectical method is not accurately captured by either the 'inversion' or 'kernel' metaphors. Rather than turning Hegel's dialectic upside down Marx is transforming it so as to effect the transcendence of the ideal/material dichotomy. In effecting this transcendence, he is at the same time rendering the method capable of capturing the character of the capitalist totality in a way which recognizes the causal weight of the material as well as of the conceptual without falling into a reductive or mechanical materialism.³⁷

35 Marx (1976), Postface to the Second Edition, pp.102 - 3.

36 Marx in Marx & Engels (1976), pp. 3 - 5.

37 Althusser (1990i, 1990ii); Bhaskar (1987), pp.115 - 145. See also Ollman (1976, 1993).

The Marxian dialectic and contradiction

The dialectic as method is needed because capitalism is a contradictory totality of multiple and complex determinations. These are the result of the new kind of division of labour and differentiation of spheres needed for the realization of the law of value. This is what renders capitalism inherently contradictory and at the same time cognitively elusive. As we have seen above, the analytic method captures merely the appearances of this novel and bewildering form of culture. The dialectical method is needed to penetrate capitalism's opacity in order to arrive at accurate knowledge of its functioning. While Marx himself makes a general claim for the universality of the dialectic, he also notes the peculiarly dialectical character of capitalism.³⁸ For Marx, the dialectic

includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction ... it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well.

Following this statement of the general applicability of the dialectic, Marx goes on to refer to the uniquely contradictory character of capitalism, whose movement 'is full of contradictions'.³⁹ It is because capitalism is essentially contradictory that the dialectical method is needed. Here, the dialectic is used in an empirical sense, as will be seen. However, a more fundamental philosophical usage will also be necessary when we come to look at Marx's account of human nature and revolution. For the moment, though, we can concentrate on contradiction as an empirical phenomenon.

Marx writes about empirical contradictions in his work on crises, in *Theories of Surplus Value II*. There he notes

An 'absolute contradiction' is a condition in which the opposites, which compose the contradiction constitutive of the essential unity, pull apart from each other and cease to interpenetrate. The mediations holding them together in the unity break down, leaving each of them free and independent, bringing the life process of the whole entity to a standstill.⁴⁰

One example of such 'pulling apart' is that of the production and circulation of commodities in industrial capitalism. These processes are separated both spatially and temporally and therefore risk being pulled apart in the manner just cited. Contrast this with earlier forms of exchange (trucking and bartering), where buying and

³⁸ For more on this, see Rader (1979).

³⁹ Marx (1976a), p. 103.

⁴⁰ Quoted by Meikle (1985), p. 119.

selling constituted one concrete activity engaged in by the direct producers of goods in concrete markets; in which buyer was also seller and seller was also buyer. Here what is produced for exchange must be seen as a use-value by a potential buyer who, in turn, must have something useful to offer in exchange. Without this complementary usefulness, no exchange takes place. However, since exchange is only a marginal activity, production being mainly for use by the producer, no disaster follows the absence of exchange here. Contrary to this, there is a kind of 'double jeopardy' in the culture in which production for exchange predominates. First, because buying and selling are 'pulled apart' - because there are phases through which the commodity has to move in order to realize its value - it is vulnerable to failures in such realization. Second, since production for exchange is predominant - it is the form on which the collectivity depends - failure of realization is potentially disastrous. So, production is likely to be crisis-ridden due to the necessary fragmentation involved in commodity production and distribution; crises arise from the existence of contradictions between necessary and interdependent elements of the productive system. Or, as Marx says 'crisis is nothing but the forcible assertion of the unity of phases of the production process which have become independent of each other'.⁴¹ As we see, contradiction is here used in an empirical rather than metaphysical sense to capture the character of relations between necessary elements of industrial capitalist totalities which are marked by a kind of fragmentation which allows of the relatively independent development of these necessary elements.

Those who criticize the Marxian usage of contradiction do so from a position which emphasizes the logical character of the concept. Here contradiction is held to be a property of propositions rather than of social relations or processes. For such thinkers, to identify contradictions in reality is to make a category mistake.⁴² Marxists are split on this question in that while some of them accept the account of contradiction of which I have offered a very truncated version above, others stress that contradiction is a logical, rather than metaphysical or empirical entity while at the same time denying that Marx was guilty of its alleged misuse.⁴³ In general, criticisms derive from the fear that the abandonment of analytical logic portends the abandonment of science. Such a fear rests on a failure to understand the character and task of the Marxian dialectical method. The method does not require the abandonment of rigour or of the law of non-contradiction as it relates to propositions. On the contrary, rigorous and logical analysis remains a necessary moment in the process of knowledge production. However, the abstraction required for such analysis needs to be accompanied by an awareness of the necessary violence which

41 Marx (1951), p. 383.

42 Colletti (1975).

43 See Edgley (1979); Norman & Sayers (1980); Shamsavari (1991); Wilson (1991).

such abstraction perpetrates on the rich complexity and constant movement of the world. Such awareness is manifested in a process-centred dialectical approach which stresses the relational character of entities in the social world and which also, therefore, emphasizes the necessary fluidity of the concepts which we use to appropriate that world in knowledge.⁴⁴

II

Marx's method: some amendments and developments

I derive my method from a particular reading of Marx by the Japanese Unoist school (as interpreted by Albritton).⁴⁵ Through the use of this method the peculiar character of social relations institutionalized by capitalism can be discussed with maximum clarity and systematicity. First, it shows us how to avoid the problem of conflating transhistorical and historical abstractions. Second, and relatedly, it enables us to trace the theoretical and methodological sources of the extreme abstractness of much Marxist work and of the determinism and economism which result from this abstractness.⁴⁶ Third, through its focus on the character of dominant use-value production, it enables us to think more systematically about the kind of lived experience or 'everydayness' instituted by capitalism.

This particular method posits three levels of analysis as follows: first, an abstract level of the theory of the logic of capitalism; second, an intermediate level of theory informed by a non-teleological conception of stages of capitalism drawn from the historical development of dominant forms of capitalism; third, an historical level which is concerned with specific individual examples of capitalist development (what Althusser describes as social formations). This three-level approach is consistent with Marx's own purposes and usages, as mentioned above, and avoids the conflation of the logical (level 1) and the historical (level 3) which almost inevitably produces economistic, deterministic readings of the historical development of capitalism and of social formations.⁴⁷

The three levels are not absolutely separate; rather, there is a dialectical relationship between different levels in that the theory of pure capitalism is based on the work of the early political economists who were deriving their categories from

44 See Ollman (1976); Sayer (1987).

45 Albritton (1986, 1991).

46 These characteristics are also a function of the capitalist mode of life which necessarily shapes Marxists as well. However, attentiveness to theoretical and methodological problems can help us to mitigate distortions coming from this source.

47 Colletti (1976ii, 1976iii); Lukács (1971i, 1971iii).

developments in late eighteenth- century England i.e. the emergence of a new kind of 'economic activity' which made the idea of a purely economic realm thinkable. In short, the categories of the purely capitalist culture are historical categories; they emerge out of a specific socio-historical conjuncture. So, the categories used at level one are informed by actual, historical developments, those which are analyzed at level three. Similarly, the analysis carried out at level two is guided by concepts derived from level one to search for the types of use value production most representative of how capital accumulates at a particular time. The research process, although not the presentation of the research itself, will require a constant movement back and forth between the different levels so as to guard against the dangers of idealism or empiricism; of rationalism or economism. In effect, there is not an absolute separation between the different levels; it is rather that the temporal and spatial scope, the level of generality and the vantage point will be different at each level.

I shall now provide a brief outline of the different levels.

Level one: the theory of pure capitalist society

The theory of pure capitalist culture is developed in *Capital 1*. This work is a kind of mental experiment which removes the economic and isolates it from sources of interference so as to identify its laws of motion. So:

[I]n the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both. But for the bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell-form ... The physicist either observes natural processes where they occur in their most significant form, and are least affected by disturbing influences, or, wherever possible, he makes experiments under conditions which ensure that the process will occur in its pure state. What I have to examine in this work is the capitalist mode of production, and the relations of production and forms of intercourse [Verkehrsverhältnisse] that correspond to it. Until now, their locus classicus has been England. This is the reason why England is used as the main illustration of the theoretical developments I make.⁴⁸

[I]ndividuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers [Träger] of particular class-relations and interests. My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he

48 Marx (1976) Preface to First Edition of *Capital 1*, p. 19.

remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.⁴⁹

While the work contains historical material (relating to e.g. the necessary origins of capitalism in a feudal 'primitive' accumulation process, the class struggles over the length of the working day) this tends to be used either to reveal the fundamental novelty of capitalism (to be discussed in chapter five) or to illustrate a theoretical (logical) claim.⁵⁰

Marx imagines a population constituted purely by industrial capitalism, meaning a population ruled by the law of value. He is assuming a system of capitalist industrial production in which the different spheres are functional for such production.⁵¹ This would be a system in which the radical imaginary of capitalism⁵² - productivism - would have been institutionalized at all levels of activity and behaviour. Such a system was imaginable in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because of cultural changes taking place at that time. Imagining the system (rendering its connections visible) became the basis for political action intent on ensuring that the emergent system would flourish. To a significant degree, nineteenth century English life was coming to approximate the pure capitalist model.⁵³

However, Marx issues his own warning about the dangers of assuming a fully instituted pure capitalism and about the necessity for an historical approach. Here is what he says in *Capital 3*:

It is assumed that the laws of capitalist production operate in their pure form. In reality there exists only approximation; but this approximation is the greater, the more developed the capitalist mode of production and the less it is adulterated and amalgamated with survivals of former economic conditions.⁵⁴

Yes, we can acquire knowledge of the 'pure form' of the 'laws' of capitalism, but we must be aware that these pure laws are nowhere allowed free expression. They are tendential laws which will seek but never wholly attain full expression in actually existing social formations. As stated before, Marx is carrying out a thought experiment whereby he is attempting to isolate purely capitalist elements in a complex social totality. This work of isolation or abstraction is intended to produce knowledge of the real properties of capitalism. Here, the thought experiment of the

49 Ibid., p. 92.

50 See Zelány (1980).

51 The base-superstructure model can be seen as a metaphor expressing this position - an extremely misleading metaphor since it conveys the idea of a static contradiction-free state of affairs. See Althusser (1984i); Rader (1979).

52 The term 'radical imaginary' is borrowed from Castoriadis (1987).

53 See Corrigan & Sayer (1985); Kanth (1986); Polanyi (1957).

54 Marx (1981), p. 172. This statement assumes great significance in relation to the contemporary period in the Anglo-American world in which such survivals have been virtually eliminated.

social scientist substitutes (although inadequately) for the actual experiment of the natural scientist. Both are attempting to produce a realist account of the phenomena which they are studying.⁵⁵ If we adopt this point of view, then the interpretation of the quotation on page 27 above will be, not that real individuals in real historical situations are bound to act as 'pure' labourers or capitalists, anymore than entities in the non-human natural world behave in the empirical natural world of rich and chaotic contingency as they do when isolated under laboratory conditions. Once the (cultural-historical) laws are institutionalized they have to do battle with pre-existing institutions which may or may not be hospitable to capitalist laws. Once the pure law 'strives' to become the empirical law then it becomes a matter of historical, rather than logical analysis to trace the extent to which it operates as the theory would have it do. Failure to understand this was partly responsible for the aridities of orthodox Marxism.⁵⁶

I now turn to discuss level two, the level of stage theory, at which level, Albritton claims, questions about action are to be located.

Level two: stage theory

Stage theory is the mediating level of theory which enables us to use the theory of pure capitalism so as to understand historically specific requirements of capitalism as these are dictated by the nature of the predominant use value produced. Level two is arrived at neither by deduction from pure theory nor by abstraction from a complex reality. For Unoists, it is the result of a search, guided by level one concepts, for the types of use value production most representative of how capital accumulates at a particular time; English wool manufacturing during the mercantilist stage; cotton during the liberal stage; German steel during the 'organized' stage; US micro-electronics for the contemporary disorganized stage.⁵⁷ The criterion for identifying the dominant or representative use value is the extent to which such production advances the 'law of value' or commodification. For example, it is this criterion that dictates the choice of wool rather than iron for the mercantilist period. However, identifying the predominant use value also enables us to explore more systematically the character of 'everydayness' instituted by the particular stage of capitalism. It therefore helps us

⁵⁵ See Sayer (1981).

⁵⁶ See Colletti (1976ii, 1976iii).

⁵⁷ These stages are partly but not wholly derived from the Unoist school. I deviate from its account in that I replace its imperial and consumer stages by organized and disorganized stages respectively. This is because I wish to emphasize the characteristics which have the most significant subject effects.

to analyze the subject effects of different kinds of production. This is the specific usefulness of Unoist stage analysis here.

It should be noted that stage theory is not about 'stagism'; it is not a teleology, in other words. The transition from one 'stage' to another can only be identified and theorized after the event. This is because the transition requires political action which may not emerge or which may emerge but fail to achieve its purpose. This level could only be developed following the first major capitalist crisis and the steps taken to prevent that crisis from resulting in total breakdown. So this level requires a movement beyond Marx, to take up various accounts of imperialism developed around the turn of the century.⁵⁸

The following is a brief description of the different stages through which capitalism has passed up to now:

(a) *The mercantilist stage* During the mercantilist stage, the law of value had a minimal grasp on reality, being realized mainly through long-distance trade.⁵⁹ At the same time, the success of the putting-out system initiated the two-fold separation of agriculture and manufacture and of humans and the land. This was because, first, spinning and weaving now became full-time activities, hence setting in motion the division of labour between agriculture and manufacture; second, as the price of wool improved, land enclosures for the purpose of sheep-rearing became more common, the result of which was the separation of large numbers of the rural population from the land.⁶⁰

It was during this stage that the beginnings of a new body of knowledge about new kinds of productive (economic) activity began to emerge. As long-distance trade began to flourish during the seventeenth century, new, impersonal, relationships at a distance began slowly to assume more salience in the everyday English world. This led to systematic attempts to develop mental models of these changes. These attempts resulted in the acceptance of the idea of a single abstract market and of the quantitative conceptualization of the properties of people, land and movable goods.⁶¹ What we find here is the beginning of the instantiation of abstract relationships oriented to impersonal, purely 'economic' exchanges involving commodities and money in place of tactile, concrete, face-to-face relationships oriented to 'trucking and bartering' in local embodied markets. We have the beginnings of the instantiation of the law of value, in other words and the beginnings of the theory of political economy.⁶² At this point, emerging political economy, as well as more purely political theory, functioned as a radical critique of patriarchal theories privileging a hierarchical culture of estates e.g. Locke's critique of Filmer.⁶³

58 See Hilferding (1981); Hobson (1938); Lenin (1982); Luxemburg (1963).

59 Brenner (1993).

60 Marx discusses these developments under the rubric of 'primitive accumulation' in Part Eight of *Capital 1*.

61 See Appleby (1978); Gunn (1969). Tribe (1981) charts the development of the categories during the eighteenth century.

62 See Marx (1951).

63 See Dunn (1982).

(b) *The liberal stage* At this time systematic attempts were made to institute fully the law of value. The putting-out system gradually gave way to the factory system; the 'formal subsumption' of labour gave way to the 'real subsumption' of labour.⁶⁴ Insofar as the latter became fully instituted, the labour process was subordinated completely to capital; the individual labourer lost all control over the conditions and content of the labour process. The character of dominant use-value production, i.e. cotton, required relatively simple and self-sustaining institutions and mechanisms of reproduction. Albritton notes here that, because its capital requirements were comparatively modest, state interference during this stage was minimal, at least compared to that required during the organized stage. In purely 'economic' terms, this may have been the case. However, it should be noted that deliberate attempts to bring about 'cultural' change were required at this time. The work of the state was crucial at all stages along the road of capitalist development.⁶⁵

It was during this stage that the theory of pure capitalism (notably Ricardian political economy) was fully developed. The theory of pure capitalism had its political counterpart in Benthamite utilitarianism which conceives of 'industrialism' and 'industrialists' as harbingers of general well-being and progress.⁶⁶ As we have already noted, this body of theory was the basis of Marx's radical critique of industrial capitalism.

(c) *The organized stage* During this stage, (referred to by Albritton as the 'Imperial' stage), the law of value weakened. This was related to the character of the dominant form of use-value production, i.e. iron and steel, which required the mobilization of large amounts of capital and credit. The result was the growth of limited-liability joint-stock companies and the development of the banking system in which banks provided large amounts of credit for the major capital investments of heavy industry. The term finance capital was coined by Hilferding to refer to the resulting merger of industrial-capital and banking-capital. It was Hilferding also who used the term organized capitalism to capture the character and tendencies of this new stage: the centralization and concentration of production and capital; changes in productive forces sparked by the development of new industries; the increased role of knowledge and science; imperialism; the organization of class conflict and the more intimate relationship of politics and economics.⁶⁷ Gradually, over a period that extended from the end of the nineteenth century until the end of the 1960s (note that Albritton's imperial stage ends in 1945), the state came to take on the tasks of regulating social reproduction and distribution. This came to full fruition after 1945 with the full blossoming of welfare-state capitalism. In this way, the state was an agent of decommodification;⁶⁸ it either regulated closely or was directly involved in the provision of goods which were seen as outside the sphere of commodification. However, it was during this period, too, that a new norm of mass consumption became

64 Note though that these developments were very uneven. The real subsumption of labour by capital came nearest to full realization in England but was not complete even there by the end of the nineteenth century. For more on this, see Arrighi (1994); Mayer (1981); Merriman (1979).

65 Corrigan & Sayer (1985); Kanth (1986); Polanyi (1957).

66 See Halevy (1972).

67 See Arrighi (1994); Lash & Urry (1987); Piore & Sabel (1984).

68 See Offe (1985).

established; a norm of working-class consumption emphasizing individual ownership of commodities.⁶⁹ So, whereas commodification retreated in some areas, it made significant advances in others. In fact, and paradoxically, decommodification in one area was dependent on increased commodification in other areas. The active, interventionist state was dependent on a flourishing capitalism engaged in free trade in the world market.

During this stage, 'theoretical ideology' (Althusser's term) moved from liberal economics to Keynesianism⁷⁰ and neo-Marxism began to develop accounts of imperialism and of the 'cultural' basis of proletarian docility to supplement Marx's historical materialism.⁷¹

(d) The disorganized stage From about the mid-1960s on, a new global crisis of capital became apparent. Its emergence was related to the inflationary fiscal policy pursued by the United States as a result of its involvement in the Vietnam War. Following the Nixon Shocks in 1971, the international monetary system carried inflation from one country to another. In addition, the oil price increases in 1973 reflected the decline in US and European control over the terms of exchange. The well-defined set of rules produced by the Bretton Woods agreement and the hegemonic power of the US which underpinned those rules were beginning to disintegrate. The high price of petrol reduced the ability of petrol-importing countries to buy industrial goods; real income had to fall. The corollary of this process was that the allocation of resources became increasingly difficult and subject to disputes and conflicts.⁷² Allied to these changes, and exacerbating their destabilizing effects in advanced capitalist countries, was the spread of industrial capitalism to 'peripheral' areas of the world, notably East Asia. At this time, East Asian countries began to experience more rapid growth rates than were found in Europe. What emerged from disorganizing capitalism was the movement of industrial production to non-western parts of the world and the emergence of 'post-industrial' or 'knowledge/service' societies in the west.⁷³ At the same time, new technologies - micro-electronics, computerization, VCRs - were giving capitalism a new flexibility and mobility.

As organized capitalism gave way to disorganized capitalism, 'theoretical ideology' began to move from Keynesianism to neo-liberalism and radical theorizing began to move from neo-Marxism to the variety of 'post' theories which is found in the contemporary world.⁷⁴

It is at the level of stage theory that questions of agency can be posed. These questions should not be framed in terms of 'structure' or 'agency'. This opposition is an illusory opposition in that it is the result of abstracting from the rich complexity of the concrete and reifying the resulting abstractions. It is a misleading dichotomy

69 Aglietta (1987).

70 Gourevitch (1986).

71 See e.g. Baran & Sweezy (1966) and Marcuse (1986a).

72 Lash & Urry (1987), ch. 8.

73 Bell (1973) produced one of the earliest accounts of 'post-industrial society'. See also Gershuny (1978).

74 Boyne & Rattansi (1990); Plant (1992).

which needs to be eliminated so that the question becomes one of asking what repertoires of action are instituted by different cultures. At the level of stage theory, the answer to this question can only be provided in the shape of tendencies. For example, the tendency is towards state-directed and/or coordinated bureaucratic, corporative forms of action during the organized stage. It is at the third level - the historical level - that the detailed research taking full account of the complexities of specific historical conjunctures takes place.⁷⁵

Level three: the historical stage

This is the historical level at which the complexity and specificity of concrete historical changes can be explored by means of conceptions developed at level two. So, for example, the very general claim that Keynesianism gave way to neo-liberalism would be explored in relation to specific contexts e.g. England, France or Germany in the 1980s where pre-existing social relations would affect the speed of and extent to which this generalization was 'made flesh'.⁷⁶ The 'laws' of pure stages of capitalism would here be analyzed as tendencies which might or might not find a hospitable environment in specific social formations. As my work will be situated at the first two levels I need discuss this stage no further. In this thesis, I shall be 'thinking in extremes'⁷⁷ in the sense that I shall assume the fullest possible institutionalization of the laws of capitalism. This thinking in extremes should enable us to understand the erosion of political commitment in liberal capitalist cultures because in these cultures the pure form of capitalism comes close to full realization during the 1980s.

In conclusion, I now move on to discuss Althusser's methodological prescriptions in *CO*, *OMD* and *RC*.⁷⁸ These include the reinstatement of the concept of totality and the expansion of the concept of contradiction to capture the relationship between the different spheres of activity which constitute capitalism. This expansion involves the use of the concepts of relative autonomy, of practice and of overdetermination. These constitute the means of expanding the Marxian materialist dialectic (while divorcing it from that of Hegel) so as to arrive at an account of the causal powers of 'superstructures' without falling into idealism.

75 It should be noted that references to these stages of capitalism are references to their institutionalization in liberal capitalist cultures.

76 See Gourevitch (1986).

77 Althusser (1990vi), p. 209.

78 Althusser (1990i, 1990ii); Althusser & Balibar (1970).

III

Althusser on Totality⁷⁹

It should be stated at once that the concept of totality needs to be shorn of its metaphysical, romantic and teleological trappings if it is to be theoretically useful.⁸⁰ Following Althusser, it is used here in a theoretical sense to refer specifically and solely to the peculiar character of capitalist cultures, although it should be noted that Althusser himself is insufficiently attentive to this distinctiveness, as will be seen in chapter four.⁸¹ Althusser's work is useful here insofar as it suggests the means of developing and expanding Marx's dialectical method.⁸² It does this first by reminding us that capitalism is a total mode of life or culture and second by proposing (although unfortunately not developing in any serious sense) a new theoretical language to explain the relations between the different spheres which constitute this culture. From this point of view, the task is to transcend reductive analyses i.e. economism (orthodox Marxism) and idealism (Hegelianism or 'historicism'⁸³). These offer linear and expressive conceptions of causality respectively which fail to capture the specific kind of complexity that characterizes capitalist cultures. They both produce misleading and (for Althusser) politically dangerous evolutionary-teleological explanations of the capitalist world.

The expansion of the Marxian dialectic requires the ejection of notions such as the 'inversion' of that of Hegel, as noted in section one above. Inversion results in a mechanical materialism (an economism/determinism) every bit as misleading as Hegelian idealism.⁸⁴ It is because of the constitutive and contradictory complexity of capitalist cultures that economism and Hegelianism are deficient as accounts of causality. Both offer simplistic accounts of the relations between the fragments. Economism is simplistic in the sense that it conceives of the totality on the topographical model of the base-superstructure, thereby offering a linear, one-to-one deterministic conception of causality: the 'base causes the superstructure'.⁸⁵ Historicism is simplistic in the sense that it holds that the totality expresses one

79 Althusser in his later work replaces the concept of totality by that of whole, for reasons that I find unpersuasive. See Althusser (1990vi), p. 219. See Cullenberg (1996); Gordy (1983).

80 Jay (1984).

81 Benton (1984) offers the most comprehensive account of Althusser's theory. Elliott (1987) is useful on the political context within which this theory was produced.

82 See Levine (1981). Althusser initiates a research programme. He does not produce a coherent and well-developed body of theory, but he suggests the ways in which others can do so.

83 See Jameson (1983a), p. 27 n.12 for a useful note on Althusser's usage of this term.

84 As has been suggested in the first section of this chapter, these notions, although encompassed in some of Marx's own comments on the matter, are inadequate as characterizations of the dialectical method as used by Marx himself.

85 Althusser (1990ii), p. 213.

principle which informs and 'causes' all of the fragments constituting the totality.⁸⁶ In effect, the base/superstructure model also constitutes an expressive totality so that orthodox Marxism incorporates elements of both linear and expressive causality. Both accounts become in the end functionalisms and it is with the intention of rectifying these functionalisms that Althusser attempts to theorize fundamentally different kinds of causality by means of the concept of overdetermination. His attempt is read here as a realist account of a peculiar kind of causality which is found in capitalist cultures. Capitalism's 'necessary way of acting' (Sayer's phrase⁸⁷) is captured by the notion of displacement (structural or 'metonymic' causality⁸⁸). This is one form of overdetermination. The other form is discussed in CO as condensation i.e. a ruptural, potentially revolutionary causality. These terms will be explored further below. First, though I turn to discuss Althusser's account of the spheres in terms of practices, a development which enables us to transcend the ideal/material and agency/structure dichotomies.⁸⁹

Totality as practices

The whole as conceptualized by Althusser is made up of differences in 'spheres of activity, practices and objects... in *efficacy*.'⁹⁰ The different spheres engage in different practices namely, economic, political and ideological. These practices are all seen as productions as follows:

By *practice* in general I shall mean any process of *transformation* of a determinate given raw material into a determinate *product*, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of 'production'). In any practice thus conceived, the *determinant* moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means.⁹¹

86 We should note here, then, the anti-functionalist thrust of Althusser's work, the comments of his critics notwithstanding. Among the latter, see Barrett ((1993); Callinicos (1976); Collier (1979); Johnson (1979). See Lock (1988) for a more balanced discussion.

87 Sayer (1981), p. 7.

88 Althusser & Balibar (1970), ch. 9, esp. p. 188.

89 Althusser's choice of practice to replace the Marxian (and Gramscian) concept of praxis is related to the need to distance himself, not only from the assumed 'voluntarism' of the Gramscian approach, but also from that of Sartre. See Althusser & Balibar (1970), ch. 5.

90 Althusser (1990ii), p. 219. See also Geras (1972).

91 Althusser (1990ii), pp. 166 - 7.

I take the term determinant here to refer to the culturally specific character of these practices; that is to say, practices consist in materialized meaning. This will be discussed further in chapter four.

In using the language of 'raw material', 'production', 'labour' in relation to spheres of action normally labelled as 'superstructural', Althusser is accomplishing two things at once. First, he is undermining simplistic base-superstructure models of causality; he is questioning the conception of capitalist culture as a hierarchy of social activities (practices) which identifies one, the economic, as fundamentally different from and determinant of the others. Two, he is also, (by implication at least) rejecting the material/ideal dichotomy which is often conflated with the base/superstructure dichotomy. On the one hand, activities in the different spheres are all characterized as practices which are described in terms normally used only in relation to economic production, so that activities in the different spheres have something in common. On the other hand, the economic sphere is not the privileged locus of 'matter', as the economic/material conflation would tempt us to think. To equate the material and the economic is to naturalize the economic, in effect, to drain it of the symbolic or of meaning. It is to fall into the trap of classical political economy.⁹² Matter is present in different ways in all of the different spheres. At the most obvious level, all practices are carried on by human beings who are necessarily material entities. However, as human material beings they are also necessarily 'symbolicized' beings. They are material constituted symbolically, culturally, or (to use the term preferred by Althusser) ideologically.⁹³ It therefore follows that while practice in the economic domain may appear to be more 'material' than practice in other spheres, because it may be labour on 'brute' matter or nature, that labour is not (and cannot be) 'brute'. It is labour performed by subjects constituted by ideology. Here the materiality of practice, or of labour, is of a different order than the materiality of nature insofar as nature has not been penetrated by the human or symbolic.⁹⁴

Practice in the political and ideological spheres is oriented to the production and maintenance of social relations and of subjects of a specific kind, respectively. Again, these practices are material in the strong sense that they are necessarily embodied in human beings and they are essential to the maintenance of the economic because the economic sphere all by itself is incapable of producing out of its own resources the kinds of social relations and subjects which production (as narrowly conceived) requires. The totality is a 'complex unity' of practices, including the economic, the political and the ideological, all of which are essential to its maintenance and all of

92 See Ricoeur (1984), ch. 9. See Althusser & Balibar (1970), Ch. 7 for an account of the construction of the 'economic' by classical political economy.

93 As will be seen in chapter three, post-Marxism prefers the term discourse.

94 See Colletti (1976i); Jordan (1967) for more on the concept of matter.

which are composed of 'ideal' and 'material' elements.⁹⁵ This is the reality which the concepts of practice, of structural causality, overdetermination and relative autonomy are attempting to grasp. These concepts constitute a theoretical development of Marx's account of the dialectic and contradiction discussed in section one above. The concepts of overdetermination and of relative autonomy are intended to grasp the possible effects of the necessary contradictoriness of these practices i.e. their tendency to pull apart, as discussed in section one above. It is because of the constitutive role of non-economic practices and of the contradictory relationship that necessarily obtains between the different practices that the notion of one 'pure' fundamental contradiction between the 'forces' and 'relations' of production is wholly inadequate as an account of causality in capitalist cultures. These, far from being expressive totalities are totalities in which different spheres (composed of specialized practices) have relative autonomy, meaning sufficient freedom from other levels to develop in ways that may be antithetical to the maintenance of a functioning whole.⁹⁶ At this point it will be useful to say a word about the concept of relative autonomy.

Relative autonomy: Althusser uses this concept to theorize the simultaneity of connectedness and separation (of interdependence and apparent independence) which characterizes relations between the different spheres in capitalist cultures. The concept represents a theoretical development of Marx's concept of contradiction. The fundamental point about the totality as conceived by Althusser is that every sphere (level or instance) is constitutive of the totality; every sphere is both caused and causal. The relationship between the spheres is internal, rather than external. Without the economic sphere, the political and ideological spheres would not exist; without the political and ideological spheres, the economic spheres would not exist. If practices within these constituent spheres drift too far apart from one another, a point will come when the needs of the totality express themselves through a crisis. Political activity will then be needed to reconstitute functionality i.e. to reassert the 'determinance' of the economy.⁹⁷ That is to say, the economy, all by itself, cannot

95 There is also, of course, 'theoretical practice', one of the most controversial areas of Althusser's corpus (Althusser (1990ii)). I cannot go into this matter here, beyond noting that Althusser's insistence on the exteriority of this practice to the others is interpreted here as a political decision intended to overcome 'pragmatism' (i.e. Stalinism) in Communist Party politics. In theoretical and sociological terms it is an incoherent position. But see also Althusser (1990vi).

96 Complexity is intensified in social formations i.e. in actually existing capitalist cultures in which more than one mode of production (culture) is active. The result is a multiplicity of contradictions arising from different relations within and between different modes of production coexisting within one social formation whose 'total' character is guaranteed (insofar as it is guaranteed) by the state. See Althusser (1990i).

97 Insofar as the different levels cohere and form a totality, it is due to the functioning of the state, the key institution for ensuring that the fragments, or levels, fulfil their necessary tasks (Althusser (1990i)). The 'lonely hour' of the fundamental contradiction (or of economism) might arrive in the totally abstract world of pure capitalism. Althusser's expanded account of the dialectic and contradiction rules this out, however and his own gesture in the direction of orthodoxy makes no sense whatsoever in

determine anything. In fact, such talk is literally meaningless.⁹⁸ It appears to make sense because of the culturally specific fragmentation which capitalism requires and because of its need to subsume all under the imperative of the law of value. Economism naturalizes this historical requirement of capitalist culture.⁹⁹ I shall now go on to discuss Althusser's usage of the concept of overdetermination. This will point us towards psychoanalysis and the kinds of psychoanalytic conceptual borrowings which may be of use in this thesis.¹⁰⁰

Overdetermination

This concept, borrowed by Althusser from Freudian psychoanalysis, is used to clarify the difference between the Hegelian and Marxian conceptions of contradiction.¹⁰¹ That is to say, it is used by Althusser to refer to a kind of causality which is neither linear nor expressive. It appears that overdetermination is expressed in two different forms, namely, displacement and condensation. Although it is not clearly stated in Althusser's own work, the implication is that displacement is the 'normal' or functional kind of causality in capitalist cultures, whereas condensation represents ruptural or revolutionary causation. This is also the sense in which these two concepts are used (although again in an underdeveloped way) by post-Marxism, as will be seen in chapter three. Post-Marxism also indicates a further implication of these conceptual borrowings from psychoanalysis which I shall come to in a moment, that is to say, the theoretical relationship which they suggest between force (matter-energy) and meaning.

However, the importance of the concept of overdetermination for Althusser is that it focuses our attention on the true and unavoidable complexity of contradictions in capitalist cultures. Overdetermination

designates the following essential quality of contradiction: the reflection in contradiction itself of its conditions of existence, that is, of its situation in the structure in dominance of the complex whole. This is not a univocal 'situation'...since it [contradiction] reflects in itself, in its very essence, its relation to the unevenness of the complex whole.¹⁰²

relation to the relative autonomy account of causality. See Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 99; also Resnick & Wolff (1987), p. 93. We will consider the Marxian view in chapter six.

98 Althusser (1990i), p. 108.

99 We need to be clear that Althusser's own conception of 'last instance' economic determination is incompatible with the dialectical approach which he himself advocates. His own assertion that 'the lonely hour of the "last instance" never comes' is an acknowledgement of this. Althusser (1990i), p. 113. See also Althusser (1990ii), p. 206 for the claim about the totality as a structure in dominance whose character is ultimately determined by the 'economy'.

100 See Althusser (1990ii), p. 206. See also Balibar (1996); Resnick & Wolff (1987, 1996); Roberts (1996).

101 Althusser (1990i), p. 101.

102 Althusser (1990ii), p. 208.

However, if contradiction is not 'univocal' neither is it 'equivocal', meaning 'the product of the first-comer among empirical pluralities, at the mercy of circumstances and 'chance' ... Quite the contrary, once it has ceased to be univocal and hence determined once and for all, standing to attention in its role and essence, it reveals itself as determined by the structured complexity that assigns it to its role, as ... complexly-structurally-unevenly-determined' or, more elegantly, 'overdetermined'.¹⁰³ 'All contradictions are under the sway of the great law of unevenness'.¹⁰⁴ Uneven development is not

external to contradiction, but constitutes its most intimate essence. So the unevenness that exists in the 'development' of contradictions, that is, in the process itself, exists in the essence of contradiction itself.¹⁰⁵

Insofar as there is a 'principal contradiction', it is produced by displacement or substitution and only becomes 'decisive' or explosive through condensation or fusion. In fact, uneven development just is 'these same phenomena of displacement and condensation observable in the development process of a complex whole'.¹⁰⁶

The implications of these conceptions of causality in relation to the task in hand will be explored further in chapter three. Before concluding, I need to discuss a further implication of Althusser's conceptual borrowings from psychoanalysis, borrowings which point us towards the means of thinking beyond the individual/society dichotomy in a completely new way. In order to explain this claim, I need to make a few brief comments on Freud.

Freud on overdetermination

The concept of overdetermination is used by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* to explain the difference between manifest and latent dream contents.¹⁰⁷ It refers to the distribution and redistribution of psychic energy according to the principles of displacement i.e. the transfer of energy from one object to another or of condensation,

103 Ibid., p. 209.

104 Ibid., p. 210

105 Ibid., p. 213.

106 Ibid. In OMD Althusser, in rejecting the charge of 'pluralism' or 'hyperempiricism', cites Lenin as his inspiration for this notion of causality, quoting his words as follows: 'That the revolution succeeded so quickly ... is only due to the fact that, as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political and social strivings have merged, and in a strikingly, "harmonious" manner ...' (Lenin 'Letter from Afar [No. 1]', Selected Works, Vol. II p 35 quoted in Althusser (1990ii) p. 177 fn. 13. The influence of Mao Zedong's paper 'On Contradiction' is also cited (ibid. p. 182). See Liu Kang (1990) for more on this.

107 Freud (1976) chs. 6 & 7.

i.e. the fusion of the energy transferred from several different objects in one object, or nodal point, which stands for all of the others. As we see from the quotation from Althusser cited above, it is the latter principle of distribution and redistribution which results in a 'crisis' or 'explosion'. Condensation can result in the cathecting (investment) of one object with a huge quantity of energy, or force. Freud accounts for these distributional processes by means of the 'Censor' i.e. the voice of culture or the 'super-ego' whose task it is to ensure that 'forbidden things' are not allowed to emerge into consciousness.¹⁰⁸ In effect, force is used in two senses here; psychic energy or force seeks to evade or deceive social energy or force. In addition, force and meaning are brought together to account for 'symptoms' or, more specifically, for the manifest content of dreams. Freud is offering an account of psychic processes which brings together the cultural, biological and psychological.¹⁰⁹ The concept of overdetermination refers to a complex process involving the 'intersection of meaning and (psychical) force or energy' whose attempt to evade cultural force culminates in the 'emergence' of an entity e.g. a symptom, an image.

Overdetermination and culture

We can now begin to understand that in using the language of psychoanalysis in this way - although apparently adapting it to the requirements of a 'structural' account of causality - Althusser is, in fact, opening up to Marxism the possibility of explaining the character of cultural membership in a way which will transcend the individual/society dichotomy. Althusser's own analysis of these matters will be explored in chapter four. For the moment, it should be noted that psychoanalytic concepts can help us to understand cultural membership in terms of the relationship between force (matter-energy) and meaning. Moreover, it affords the means of understanding how the redistribution of force and meaning required to institute new meanings (or to reconstitute political commitment) can be brought about. It is in this sense that Althusser's work leads directly to that of post-Marxism, as will be seen in chapter three. Unfortunately, neither body of work offers lucid and systematic theoretical developments in this area. Nevertheless, they are indispensable points of departure. The contemporary theoretical preoccupation with the Freudian concepts of displacement and of condensation (as well as their translation into the linguistic concepts of metonymy and metaphor) offers clues to the wholly novel features of capitalist cultures which will be followed up in this thesis. For the moment, what needs to be noted is that metonymic causality is here taken to be the 'normal' or functional state of affairs for capitalism, but that this kind of causality needs constant

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 650.

¹⁰⁹ See Ricoeur (1970).

political supervision if it is to be maintained in good working order.¹¹⁰ So the concept of metonymic or structural causality will be interpreted here as a kind of causality which produces the possessive decentred subjects of liberal capitalist cultures.¹¹¹ It produces a kind of fluid and volatile relationship between force and meaning which is antithetical to the requirements of communal transformative action. The latter requires a process of condensation, interpreted here as a relatively fixed point of force/meaning. It will be the task of later chapters to elaborate on this claim.¹¹² So these concepts will be used here to understand the cultural-biological-psychic requirements for both stability and change. They encapsulate the requirements for relative stability in radically fragmented and contradictory capitalist cultures (metonymic causality or displacement) and for the initiation of transformative communal action in such cultures (metaphoric causality or condensation). Used in this way, they become dialectical concepts productive of synthesizing explanations for multi-faceted cultural phenomena.

The systematic development of Althusser's rather hesitant and rudimentary borrowings from psychoanalysis enables us to engage in a non-reductive analysis of both culture and individual as nodal points of meaning and matter-energy.¹¹³ So his use of psychoanalytic concepts to explain social causality opens the way for Marxism to develop a non-reductive account of constitutive social phenomena - the psyche and meaning - which orthodox Marxism has treated as epiphenomenal and therefore failed to understand. The account needed is one which falls into the trap of neither economism nor idealism. Such an account is crucial if we are to understand the failure of political commitment in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.

Conclusion

The method used in this thesis is an organic, dialectical method derived from the work of Marx. By directing our attention to the theory and reality of totality, this method allows us to develop realist accounts of processes and practices in capitalist cultures. It allows of the exploration of constitutive connections between phenomena (meaning

¹¹⁰ It is this fact of capitalist cultures that functionalism expresses. See Parsons (1951a).

¹¹¹ MacPherson (1964).

¹¹² Althusser uses these concepts in CO to attempt an explanation of the replacement of one culture by another. This is an explanation at the level of a social formation. His example here is the Bolshevik Revolution, an example which invites us to think about, on the one hand, the role of the state and, on the other, a group of radical intellectuals with the support of a tiny working class. In Russia, the revolutionary rupture was brought about by a combination of exceptional unevenness, a weak state incapable of undertaking the task of establishing a functional relationship between the multiplicity of radically uneven spheres and a revolutionary party prepared to fill the resulting power vacuum. Without the latter, the crisis would not have led to a revolution.

¹¹³ See Ricoeur (1984), ch. 8; Strawbridge (1984).

social relations, processes and practices) which tend to be kept apart when considered through the theoretical and conceptual lenses provided by the conventional disciplinary division of labour. Dialectics takes as its theoretical object contradictory (therefore dynamic) totalities made up of necessary and necessarily related but relatively autonomous elements. Contradictoriness is equated with proneness to crisis. Crises may or may not erupt into 'revolutionary situations'.

The dialectical method also alerts us to the necessary connectedness between theory and practice and therefore reminds us that pre-existing theories need to be taken seriously as accounts of the world. It therefore opens the way for the articulation of these to Marxism itself in a fruitful way. Here we have noted the tendency in liberal capitalist theorizing (as exemplified in the work of classical political economy) to naturalize the cultural-historical. The concepts of transhistorical and historical abstractions are used to analyze and correct this tendency which, as will be seen, marks most of the work with which we will be concerned.

It has also been necessary to expand on Marx's work so as to understand post-Marxian theoretical and 'practical' developments. Here Unoist Marxism has been found useful in relation to both of these. It helps us to understand the theoretical and methodological sources of the rationalism and economism which have characterized much of Marxist theorizing as well as the significance of different stages of capitalism. In relation to the first, the crux of the matter is the status of the key Marxian text *Capital I* which is taken here to be an account, not of the historical emergence of English capitalism or of the characteristics of actually existing forms of capitalism, but rather of pure capitalism. Realization of the dangers of rationalism and economism inherent in the attempt to clamp the categories of pure capitalism straight onto empirical, 'impure' social formations has alerted us to the need for a mediating level of analysis, that of stages of capitalism. As noted above, these are constructed post hoc and have no teleological implications. In addition, attention to stages of capitalism has the advantage of alerting us to the significance of the specific character of dominant use value production for the constitution of 'lived experience' whose political significance should become evident as the argument proceeds. Finally, Althusser's work has provided us with an additional range of concepts needed to think about capitalism as total mode of life or culture. These include totality, practices, overdetermination and relative autonomy; concepts which enable us to think beyond the economic and to theorize the radical fragmentation and contradictoriness of capitalist cultures in a way which takes account of the constitutive role of extra-economic spheres. While Althusser's analysis is seriously underdeveloped, it has been found nevertheless that his conceptual innovations facilitate thinking beyond dichotomies and reductivisms i.e. beyond a mode of thought which is inadequate to a

true understanding of the relations between different spheres and practices constituting fragmented capitalist cultures. In chapter three, we will see how post-Marxism develops Althusser's ideas so as to account for the relationship between subjectivity and political commitment. The continuities and discontinuities which this work exemplifies in relation to that of Althusser will be fruitful sources of further theorization on the problem of political commitment. Indeed *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* can be read as a meditation on just this problem, as will be argued.¹¹⁴ It can also (and relatedly) be read as an account of subjectivities in liberal capitalist cultures as these are shaped by the disorganized stage of capitalism.

Before concluding, it should be noted that discussion of theories in subsequent chapters is undertaken from the point of view of the initial problem. What is produced is not primarily exegesis but rather specific readings which may or may not be considered to be true to the original spirit of the theories in question. However, some exegesis is required to demonstrate the continuing utility of the theorists in question, given the strong contemporary tendency to dismiss their writings out of hand. At the same time, I would argue that all of the readings are emergent properties of the relevant bodies of work i.e. they proceed from teasing out the logics of the theories in question. In addition, these theories (as well as the theory whose development is undertaken here) need to be thought of as part of a totality in process. Their place in the totality and their historicity need to be appraised. We need to be attentive to the context within which these works are produced and the theoretical and political problems which they are intended to address and resolve. Such attentiveness will enable us to assess which parts of the work are oriented to the resolution of short-term immediate problems (and which therefore may be presented in an overly-polemical and one-sided form) and which are of more enduring significance.

114 Laclau & Mouffe (1985).

Chapter Three

Disorganized capitalism and the death of society

Introduction

In this chapter, a preliminary exploration of the erosion of political commitment in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures will be undertaken. The vehicle of this exploration will be the work of Laclau and Mouffe, to be referred to as post-Marxism.¹ With the help of post-Marxism we can begin to understand the way in which cultures simultaneously institute forms of subjectivity and repertoires of action. More specifically, we can begin to theorize the 'subjective' effects of the 'objectivity' of fragmented capitalist cultures as explored in chapter two. The notion of the decentred subject which underpins post-Marxism's account of the problem of political commitment is understandable in terms of the plethora of contradictory practices produced by capitalism, particularly in its disorganized form. So the decentred subject is taken here to refer to the culturally specific form of subjectivity produced by disorganized capitalism in liberal capitalist cultures rather than to the inevitable universal character of all forms of subjectivity as posited by Althusser and Lacan, among others.² It is the product of displacement, or of metonymic causality, as will be explained further below.

Post-Marxism sets out to replace the deterministic and economistic theories of orthodox Marxism³ by an open-ended account which will convey more accurately the character of contemporary culture while at the same time offering the theoretical means of constituting a more democratic political transformative practice than is available in Marxism itself.⁴ Since voluntary individual participation is a requirement of such action, it is necessary to take the point of view of those to be mobilized; to offer a 'subjectivist' rather than 'objectivist' account of the world. The concepts of

1 This is the self-description of the work of Laclau & Mouffe (1985). The following discussion is based mainly on this work and on Laclau (1990).

2 Althusser's work on the subject will be discussed in chapter four, Lacan's later in this chapter, as well as in chapters four and eight. For more on Foucault, see Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982); Honneth (1995), ch. 6.

3 It is in the light of the extremely fluid and volatile form of subjectivity instituted in liberal capitalist cultures (and of the extremely fluid culture of which this subject is both result and cause) that the inadequacies of the orthodox Marxist theory of collective action become clear. Indeed post-Marxism's theorizing is undertaken in the first instance as a deconstruction of this theory. Unfortunately, because of its impoverished reading of the Marxist canon, it deprives itself of much needed help from that quarter, as should become evident as we proceed. See Geras (1990b). Post-Marxism's response to Geras is in Laclau & Mouffe (1990).

4 Laclau & Mouffe (1985) refer to 'advanced capitalism'. Laclau (1990i) refers to 'disorganized capitalism', deriving this usage from the work of Lash & Urry (1987).

identity and antagonism answer to this necessity. In line with this requirement, the Marxist elements in the theory are those concerned with identity-formation - i.e. elements of the works of Gramsci and Althusser. These are assimilated to elements of poststructural linguistics and of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In addition, though, and most usefully, post-Marxism develops (although in a rather haphazard way) Althusser's psychoanalytic borrowings by (in effect) normalizing displacement (metonymic causality). The result is an 'ontology of flux' (Dews' phrase).⁵

The first section of this chapter will investigate this 'ontology of flux' whose advent is signified by post-Marxism by two conceptual moves: the first is from society to the social; the second is from production to discourse. It is post-Marxism's contention that the first of each of these two pairs of terms secrete the possibility of essentialism and therefore of antidemocratic politics. So, society conceptualizes an impossible fixity; the social reminds us of that impossibility. Production conceptualizes a stable, evolving, world of law-driven processes; discourse conceptualizes a radically fluid and contingent world. Having examined the subject effects of such a world, we will go on in the second part of the chapter to explore the political implications of these effects, as these have an impact on our problem. Here post-Marxism's theorization of radical collective action will be explored. The nature of the required political tasks are indicated by the Gramscian and Althusserian concepts of hegemony, articulation, interpellation and overdetermination. The third part suggests ways in which we can build on the contributions of post-Marxism by developing a number of key analytical distinctions which will enable us to theorize the materiality of discourse. This will enable us to evaluate the features and potentialities of specific discourses in ways not allowed for by the theory as it stands. In the absence of these distinctions, post-Marxism tends to dissolve into an idealist and naturalizing account of the culturally-specific phenomena with which it is concerned.

I

Post-Marxism offers an account of the world as radically and necessarily volatile. This is a world governed by the principle of movement which has been discussed in chapter two using the concept of displacement. As was seen there, displacement is taken to refer to a kind of causality found in capitalist cultures. It is now time to discuss this suggestion in more detail with specific reference to the problem at hand.

What displacement suggests is a constant slippage (metonymic movement) from one sphere or practice to another. It is because of this movement that the culture of

⁵ Dews (1987).

pure capitalism is experienced as volatile and it is this experience that post-Marxism expresses so powerfully. It is in this way that I interpret its claim that there are no pre-given subjects, classes, nations or societies.⁶ For post-Marxism, these terms suggest a state of affairs characterized by fixity, permanence or of closure, a state of affairs nowhere to be found. In effect, these entities are purely conceptual, positing what is empirically unachievable. Post-Marxism's argument for making this claim will be explored in this section. This is composed of naturalistic and historical elements. The former include the necessary discursive character of all human social life and the peculiar psychic character of human beings. The latter include the peculiar structural character of capitalism which allows and indeed requires individual subjects to take up a variety of changing 'subject positions' both at one point in time and over time,⁷ and the possibly related availability of a 'surplus of meaning' of which the discourse of democracy is the most significant. I shall consider each of these in turn. The discussion of the first of these will require a brief exploration of Saussure's linguistic theory.⁸

From society to the social

The linguistic turn in social theory

Post-Marxism shares with other 'post' forms of thought the claim that the social world is linguistically constituted.⁹ This is related to the claim that neither nature nor the logic of history dictates forms of the social. For post-Marxism, it is this fact of human life that the philosophy of language enables us to reveal. Human beings are constituted by language as particular kinds of subjects with particular kinds of relations to one another and to nature. So language is not merely a tool used to refer in a transparent manner to an independently-existing state of affairs. Not only is this referential theory of language inaccurate, but it is held by post-Marxism to be responsible for essentialist thinking.¹⁰

In order to understand the theoretical and empirical implications of the linguistic turn as manifested in post-Marxism, a few remarks on the structuralist account of language will be required. Saussure's work, which constitutes the point of departure in

6 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), ch. 3.

7 Melucci (1996) discusses some of the identity effects of this situation, in terms of the constitution of collective actors.

8 Saussure (1974).

9 Coward & Ellis (1977); Foucault (1974). I have been using the concept of culture to refer to this inescapable fact of human life.

10 See Mouzelis (1988); Sandler & Diskin (1995) on post-Marxism's views on essentialism.

this area, posits language, or signification, as an arbitrary system of differences in which elements gain their meanings from their relations with other elements of a structure rather than as free-standing entities with a self-sufficient meaning.¹¹ The elements of structure of a language are signs which have two aspects: the signifier (sound or word) and the signified (meaning). The signifier is the material embodied element (in the sense that the sound is emitted and received through the human senses); the signified is the intelligible element. The link between these two aspects is arbitrary as is that between the sign and the referent. The meaning of the signified is established through relationships of difference with other signifieds. Signs are necessarily elements of systems and are only comprehensible within systems of significance, never on their own. The structure is a system of difference which creates and sets in place both signifiers and signifieds.

In order to establish a systematic theory of language, one that would account for the myriad speech acts of everyday life, Saussure established some distinctions and exclusions; in other words he developed a method for the study of language. The primary distinction is that between *langue* and *parole*; the primary exclusions are of diachrony and of referentiality. In relation to the first, we should note that *langue* is the system of language which produces *parole*, the individual expressions of that system. *Langue* is a structure; it is synchronic or static. *Parole* is the expression of the structure in its movement; it is diachronic. In relation to the second (the exclusions), Saussure bracketed out both diachrony and the referent of the sign. In privileging the sign over its referent Saussure was not implying that referentiality is insignificant. On the contrary, Saussure identified two dimensions to the exchange of terms of *langue*. The first of these is the structural dimension, involving relationship to other elements within a linguistic system, as mentioned above. The second is the functional dimension, involving a relationship to something outside the linguistic system. Saussure's bracketing of the referent was a methodological move with no ontological implications. However, his work offers some encouragement to those seeking to minimize the importance of the referent or, put another way, it appears to licence idealistic accounts of the world.¹² This is a key point to which I shall return later. I shall also return to the analytical and empirical significance of the structure/functional distinction.

Two key moves shape the poststructuralist adaptation of a social science structuralism derived from Saussure's linguistic structuralism.¹³ The first is the elimination of the level of *langue* as permanent source and producer of the empirical, ephemeral, changing world of *parole* and second, the marginalizing or even elimination

11 Saussure (1974).

12 Ibid., p. 109.

13 For more on this see Merquior (1986).

of the sign/referent relationship. The combination of these two moves produces a model of the world as a world of flux, fluidity, slippage, transitoriness and undecidability. In effect, Saussure's methodological bracketing is translated into an ontological claim.

Post-Marxism's version of post-structuralism is filtered through deconstruction. The Derridean claim that nothing exists outside the text is a claim that language lacks an ultimate ground or 'transcendental signified'.¹⁴ The death of the 'transcendental signified' is an important component of post-Marxism which goes along with the rejection of structuralism's emphasis on an unobservable systemic level which produces empirical phenomena. What is retained from structuralism is the claim that the identity of phenomena is relational while what is eliminated is the relative fixity of these phenomena which the notion of systemness endows. Hence the replacement of the concept of society (implying closed, therefore fixed system) by that of the social (contingent and open therefore unfixed).¹⁵ As Laclau says:

[W]e renounce the fixation of ... identities in a system ... the social must be identified with the infinite play of differences, that is, with what in the strictest sense of the term we call discourse - on the condition, of course, that we liberate the concept of discourse from its restrictive meaning as speech and writing.¹⁶

Note here the equation of discourse and 'infinite play of differences'. The social world is now conceptualized as a signifying chain which distributes individuals (signifieds) in constantly changing, contingent therefore indeterminate social relations.¹⁷ Put another way, individuals as subjects are bearers of meanings or identities whose character - because purely relational - is held to be thereby contingent, arbitrary and unstable. These meanings are either imposed on the individual subject from outside or are chosen or accepted by the subject. It is not clear which is more likely to be the case here. Whichever is the case, the important point is that subjectivities are taken to be inherently and necessarily fluid and volatile; that identity in the strong sense is unavailable.¹⁸ We have here a rather odd equation of discourse, contingency and volatility. This is an equation which will need further discussion later.¹⁹ For the moment, let us explore further the post-Marxist account of discourse.

14 See Derrida (1967).

15 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 113.

16 Laclau (1990i), p. 90.

17 This indeterminacy is held to be an innate characteristic of both language and of the individual organism, as will be seen later.

18 See Melucci (1996), ch. 4.

19 See Mouzelis (1988), pp. 113 - 4.

Post-Marxism and discourse

It should be noted that in privileging meaning over materiality, post-Marxism is not thereby intending to produce an idealist account of the world. In fact, discourse is defined in material terms; it includes both linguistic and non-linguistic elements so it is neither linguistic nor extralinguistic, but prior to both. It is post-Marxism's expressed intention to transcend the ideal/material dichotomy by showing that the world is necessarily both matter and meaning.²⁰ Put another way, no purely *physical* entity, act or process is available to us unmediated by discourse or meaning. Merely physical acts will have different meanings and therefore different effects in different contexts or discourses. A discourse is a 'systematic set of relations' which endows physical actions, individuals and processes with meaning, which, therefore, makes them social.²¹ Once an action, individual or process becomes part of a set of social relations, it ceases being merely physical (*ens*) and becomes social (*esse*), therefore historical, therefore transitory. What follows is that the social and the discursive are coterminous. The world, both social and natural, is only available to us through discourse. Discourse, then, is not a *level* of the social but the social itself.²² It follows from this, as already indicated, that human individuals are always also discursively constituted. It will be useful to examine this matter in a little more detail.

Discourse and the constitution of the subject

For post-Marxism, the category of the subject refers, not to the subject adumbrated by humanisms, but rather, to 'subject positions' within a discursive formation.²³ Discursive formations are systems of discourses which constitute, organize and distribute social relations and subjects of specific kinds. Individuals are subjects *in* rather than *of* discourses; there is no pre-existing independent originary 'subject' to which discourse or language merely refers.²⁴ Looked at from this point of view, the humanist 'subject' is the overdetermined result of a specific kind of discursive formation; it is merely one historically and culturally distinct form of the subject. Since subject positions partake of the open character of every discourse, it follows that the subject also is marked by this openness. It is not and cannot be a 'unified and

20 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 108.

21 The Marxian concept of praxis, the Althusserian concept of practice - and, as will be seen in chapter four, the Castoriadian concept of the imaginary - also embrace meaning and materiality, as does indeed the Althusserian concept of ideology. These are all different ways of referring to the cultural form which human sociality necessarily takes. This will be discussed further in chapter four.

22 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 107.

23 Ibid., p. 115

24 This is a theme which will reemerge in chapter four.

unifying essence'.²⁵ There is no subject, either 'in' or 'for itself'. That it may appear to be so derives from the existence of an 'ensemble of social practices, of institutions and discourses' which, by acting on one another in a mutually reinforcing manner, have constituted the humanist subject 'Man'.²⁶ That is to say, the illusion of autonomy and coherence deriving from an apparently transparent and unified consciousness is the overdetermined product of discourses, therefore institutions, which are complementary rather than contradictory, or, which all move in the same direction. 'Man' is 'a fundamental nodal point' i.e. the outcome of a hegemonic political activity whose character will be discussed further later.²⁷ Insofar as fixity exists, it is the outcome of self-conscious political action oriented to the articulation of interpellations which constitute the subject into a coherent and relatively stable unity.²⁸ The success of such projects (always necessarily relative and vulnerable to subversion) can induce in the subject concerned a sense of self-evidentness or obviousness which renders his subjectivity apparently 'natural'.

It is the necessary precariousness (both 'objective' and 'subjective') of such fixing that post-Marxism wishes to insist upon. This it holds to be a universal characteristic of human social life (since discourse is a universal property of human social life). At this point, post-Marxism appears to be virtually naturalizing the state of affairs which it describes, which is another way of saying that it is reintroducing essentialism by the backdoor.²⁹ However, it is not immediately obvious that the essentializing of the discursive requires us also to essentialize unfixity. Indeed post-Marxism is itself aware that such a claim will not hold up to scrutiny. So it offers in addition an explanation derived from the character of the human psyche, as follows.

The psychic turn in post-Marxism

The psychic account of social volatility emerges out of post-Marxism's theory of social antagonisms. Whereas *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* uses antagonism as a political concept referring to specific kinds of social relations, (which will be discussed

25 Ibid., p. 116

26 Ibid., p. 117.

27 The constitution of this nodal point will be the object of more detailed attention in chapter four.

28 The concept of articulation was first used by Althusser and Balibar (1970) to capture the complexity of modes of production. For more on this see Foster-Carter (1978). This usage relates principally to the linking of different 'instances' of a complex social formation, to the necessary co-existence and interdependence of elements of the totality (Marx's 'limbs of the social system'). See Althusser and Balibar (1970) p. 95. The concept of interpellation is used by Althusser (1984i) to refer to the process (of 'hailing' or addressing) whereby individual human organisms are constituted as subjects of a specific kind.

29 See Fuss (1989).

further below), Laclau later, following a suggestion of Žižek³⁰ gives it a psychoanalytical gloss, as will be seen. It will be useful to discuss this here because it offers us a major clue as to the character of subjectivity instituted by disorganized capitalism.

As noted earlier, antagonism is one of those concepts that enable post-Marxism to theorize the social from the point of view of its participants, from the point of view of 'subjectivity' rather than of 'objectivity'. It refers to the consequences of an innate, unavoidable psychic characteristic which produces a sense of *lack* in individuals. In order to understand the argument about the human predisposition to antagonism, we need to explore briefly Lacan's account of the psyche as captured by the concepts of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real.³¹ The imaginary refers to a specific stage in the emergence of the human subject - the mirror stage at which an illusory sense of self-mastery and coherence is experienced by the small child.³² The symbolic refers to the point at which the child is humanized (subjected to the Law of Culture).³³ The real refers to the biological, to that which is the ground of the imaginary and the symbolic but which is never wholly captured (humanized) by the symbolic. The symbolic does not have direct access to the real so it cannot in any sense represent it. The consequence is that the real is capable of disturbing the fragile social and psychological equilibrium constructed by the imaginary and the symbolic, those orders which constitute reality for the subject. The real 'is there... ready to burst in and submerge what the "reality principle" has constructed under the title of the "external world"'.³⁴ So it both precedes the symbolic and remains after the inscription of the symbolic. It is responsible for the irreducible contingency of the social. The sense of *lack* which is the source of antagonism arises from the unavoidable 'gap' that exists between the real and the symbolic. Logically, then, the sense of *lack* is constitutive of (and accounts for the innate volatility of) the socio-cultural. As Laclau puts it: 'Every signifier fails to represent the subject and leaves a residue: something fails to be reflected in the mirror-world of reflections'.³⁵

The concept of *lack* enables us to consider interpellation from the point of view of the individuals or groups interpellated. It also enables us to consider further the political significance of antagonism.³⁶ Antagonism is the 'experience' of 'the limit of the social', that is, of the impossibility of closure, wholeness, or 'full' identities.³⁷ It is the outcome of 'lack of being' of the individual, of the inability of the symbolic or

30 See Laclau (1990iv), p. 235; Žižek (1989), p. 125; Žižek (1990).

31 See Lacan (1979; 1980i).

32 Lacan (1980i).

33 Dews (1987), ch. 2; MacCannell (1986); Wilden (1980).

34 Lacan quoted in Dews (1987), p. 104.

35 Laclau & Zac (1994), p. 32.

36 Laclau (1990), p. 206.

37 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), pp. 124, 125. See also Laclau (1990iv).

discursive order to capture completely the real. It is this experience of incompleteness, or emptiness which is at the basis of *antagonism*, in the post-Marxist sense. In other words, antagonism arises (in a way which will be discussed further below) out of the innate incapacity of discourse (culture) to capture completely the human individual. However, antagonism does not emerge *necessarily* out of this fact of human social life. The psychic account alone cannot explain how the 'lack of being' takes on political significance. In effect what is in question is an historically and culturally specific state of affairs which I now go on to discuss.

Capitalism, dislocation and flux

As we have seen, the fundamental claim of post-Marxism is that human social life is necessarily meaningful. It is because of this that a referential or literal theory of language is rejected. There is no necessary one-to-one relationship between meaning and materiality or between meaning and an existing state of social affairs. Social relations marked by 'an ultimate literality which would reduce them to necessary moments of an immanent law' cannot be constituted.³⁸ Since social relations (and therefore 'subjects') are always discursively constituted (as opposed to being 'given' by the natural biological character of human beings or by an unavoidable logic of history) these relations are always open to being reconstituted in a new way.

However, the impossibility of 'literality' has not been universally and transhistorically appreciated, as post-Marxism is well aware. In explaining this point, it moves towards a cultural-historical analysis of the basis of unfixity, although it continues to hold unfixity to be the real state of affairs which can, under historically specific conditions, be experienced as fixity. The latter is found in cultures with a low technological level of development where production is carried out by means of fundamentally repetitive practices. This gives rise to the illusion that the *being* of objects (*esse*), which is a purely socio-cultural construction, belongs to the things themselves. Systems of articulations of meanings (of subject positions and therefore of identities) are rigid and (from the point of view of the subjects concerned) unchanging rather than flexible and volatile. Second nature can therefore be taken for nature *tout court*. We may suppose that peasant communities (for example) are clearly bounded, relatively self-sufficient and enduring entities that, in the absence of outside interference, reproduce (rather than transform) themselves. We must assume that, the discursive (therefore relational) constitution of their identities notwithstanding, social relations and therefore identities are of a relatively durable

38 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 98

kind. On the fixity-unfixity spectrum, they are very close to fixity. They therefore have a strong sense of collective identity which becomes the basis for a strong form of political commitment once the group considers its way of life to be under threat from an external human force.³⁹

Consciousness of the contingency of human social life comes about as a result of two developments whose connections are not traced by post-Marxism. The first of these is the advent of capitalism which requires myriad new 'subject positions' and therefore, logically, myriad new meanings. It therefore heralds the end of the rigid systems of articulations found in pre-industrial cultures. In addition and connectedly, the development of capitalism leads to the dissolution of the clear, empirical boundaries between communities which had served to maintain 'closed systems of differences'. Moreover, capitalism's speeding up of history reveals the historicity of being and encourages a belief in the human capacity to create new worlds. Thus the ontological and philosophical bases for strong and fixed identities begin to dissolve.

Capitalism, particularly during its disorganized stage, displays a number of novel structural features, some of which have been discussed in chapter two. We do not need to explore post-Marxism's rather sketchy account of this novelty.⁴⁰ What we do need to consider is post-Marxism's evaluation of the subject (and therefore political) effects of this structural novelty. Indeed this is where post-Marxism makes its major contribution to the task of this thesis.

For post-Marxism, disorganized capitalism is characterized by a 'relative structuration' which produces a radically open world of proliferating possibilities of new kinds of freedom.⁴¹ This is because capitalism's peculiar structural character renders it comparatively powerless in terms of locating individuals as subjects in a system of relatively permanent social relations.⁴² From this point of view, the 'emergence of the subject' is merely 'the result of the collapse of objectivity'.⁴³ That is to say, capitalism's 'relative structuration' forces individuals into freedom. A few words on this conception of the subject will be useful at this point because it will bring to our attention a tension (or even contradiction) in accounts of subjectivity which we will meet again when we come to discuss Althusser's work on the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in chapter four.

39 *Ibid.*, ch. 4. See also Calhoun (1982); Tarrow (1994).

40 See Laclau (1990i), pp. 39 - 59.

41 Unlike e.g. Marcuse (1986a), Laclau considers neither commodification nor bureaucratization to be significant obstacles to the institution of radical democracy under capitalism. So, '... the prospects opened by the bureaucratic revolution are much broader than anything it can control in terms of its own logic'. Laclau (1990i), p. 54.

42 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 96.

43 Laclau (1990i), p. 61.

Capitalism and subjectivity

As we saw earlier, the subject as 'Man', whose emergence is associated with the emergence of capitalism, is held to have been the result of an 'ensemble of dispersed positions' connected by relations of overdetermination. The subject as 'Man' is the subject under the illusion that he is a self-contained, coherent, self-motivating entity. As we have seen, the reference to 'nodal points' (in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*) presupposes that the constitution of the subject in this way was the result of a successful hegemonic project. In Laclau's later work, however, the subject 'is merely the distance between the undecidable structure and the decision'.⁴⁴ In other words, the subject emerges out of the inability of capitalism to 'fix' individuals, that is, to provide the conditions necessary for the formation of a stable sense of identity. Due to this innate indeterminacy of capitalism, subjects are also indeterminate (decentred). This indeterminacy is the source, apparently, of freedom.⁴⁵ Decentred subjects are subjects whose culturally specific lack of fixity forces them into a state of being which can be equated with (or is the basis for?) freedom. It is capitalism's innate structural 'undecidability' which opens a space for the apparently free action of subjects. Here, the subject is a subject *faute de mieux*, as it were.

Are these two incompatible accounts of the subject 'Man', or accounts of the emergence of two different kinds of subjects out of two different stages of capitalism? The answer to this question is not clear from the texts under discussion. If we extrapolate from the account of hegemonic projects to be discussed further below, it is possible to reconcile the two accounts by taking capitalism's structural attributes to be the necessary but not sufficient condition for the constitution of the subject of freedom. In addition to this, what is needed is a hegemonic project oriented to the creation of an institutional nexus productive of such a subject. However, in the quotation just cited Laclau seems to be suggesting that the subject somehow 'finds' himself.⁴⁶ So we are bound to remain in some confusion. This is a matter which will require further exploration in later chapters of this work when the clues offered by post-Marxism will be followed up. For the moment, it will suffice to note this significant ambiguity about subjectivity which we will encounter again in Althusser's work (although in a different form).

I now turn to the second historically specific source of cultural and subjective volatility, as identified by post-Marxism. This is the 'death of the transcendental

44 Ibid., p. 39.

45 Kaviraj (1989) develops a similar argument.

46 Giddens (1991) offers a similar account of subjectivity in the contemporary world.

signified' and the related production of a 'surplus of meaning' or discourses, the most important of which is the discourse of democracy.

The death of the 'transcendental signified'

The death of the 'transcendental signified' (God) as adumbrated by Derrida is, for post-Marxism, an important source of the 'surplus of meaning' which underpins the cultural volatility with which we are concerned.⁴⁷ It eliminates the fixed point of meaning for subjects and therefore undermines their sense of groundedness or fullness in relation to the supernatural realm. Whereas capitalism reveals the malleability of the natural world and therefore natural sources of 'givenness' or 'objectivity', the death of the 'transcendental signified' removes their supernatural sources. One outcome is the discourse of democracy which offers a powerfully subversive interpretation of social hierarchies, an interpretation whereby subordination becomes the basis for antagonism. This comes about in the following way.

Relations of subordination are relations whereby one party is subject to the decision-making of another. So long as these are seen as natural or 'god-given' they cannot be antagonistic. Discourses of subordination, those endowing unequal relations with the character of positivity (of naturalness, or 'god-givenness') can only be transformed by the emergence of other discourses challenging such a characterization. The discourse of democracy introduces the possibility of interpreting and transforming relations of subordination in this way. The interpretation of social hierarchies incorporated into this discourse rests on the transformation of relations of subordination into relations of oppression and the interpretation of the latter as relations of domination, therefore as illegitimate.

At this point, we can begin to see the political significance of the intrapsychic sources of volatility as described earlier. The power of democracy is related to the psychic problem captured by the term *lack* (discussed above) which leaves individuals open to interpellations offering fullness. Democracy offers a convincing explanation of a state of affairs experienced as unsatisfactory by necessarily incompletely humanized subjects.⁴⁸ Democratic discourses are necessarily radical in that they undermine the taken-for-grantedness of social hierarchies and thereby offer an account of subjects' 'lack of being' with potentially radical implications. They encourage the belief that 'lack of being' is a remediable scandal; that fullness is attainable. They therefore encourage the search for the experience of fullness. It is in these ways that democratic discourses contribute significantly to the volatility of capitalist cultures.

⁴⁷ Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 112.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

To sum up, the combination of myriad interpellations constituting individuals as articulations of different positionalities and of the intra-psychic predisposition referred to by the concept of lack generates the ontology of flux. On the one hand, this cultural volatility affords the possibility of constituting new kinds of commitments and therefore of new kinds of collective action. On the other hand, it militates against the constitution of powerful and durable collective actors of any kind. In the next section, I shall consider post-Marxism's prescription for the constitution of such actors. What this requires, in effect, is that displacement be replaced by condensation. It should be noted here that Post-Marxism tends to reserve the concept of overdetermination for the latter form of causality, which is, as will be seen, the achievement of hegemonic politics.

II

Capitalism, hegemony and the logic of difference

The term the 'logic of difference' is used by post-Marxism to capture the character of the radically pluralist politics found in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures. It is a logic whose character can be understood in relation to the concept of displacement in that it produces radically pluralist and constantly changing forms of political allegiance. Or, in post-Marxist terms, the logic of difference refers to the 'limitation' of forms of antagonism produced by the cooptation of proliferating new positions as these emerge in response to the requirements of capitalism.⁴⁹ At the same time, this politics of cooptation is not read by post-Marxism as a politics which has the capacity to neutralize all significant opposition.⁵⁰ What capitalist cultures produce, apparently, are not docile subjects whose critical faculties are nullified through bureaucratic impositions or the seductions of consumerism, but, on the contrary, an apparently permanently mobilized, fragmented and self-aware population; a population predisposed to myriad forms of self-assertion in the political realm.⁵¹ The remainder of this section will be taken up with a discussion of the requirements for the constitution of 'nodal points' out of such a population. The constitution of 'nodal points' - of stable collective identities conceptualized as relatively fixed condensations of force (social and psychic) and meaning - is the work of hegemonic politics.

49 The term 'logic of equivalence' is used to refer to this earlier, simpler form of politics. See *ibid.* ch. 3.

50 As is argued by Marcuse (1970), for example. See Laclau (1990i), p. 82.

51 This seems to be an expression of the politics of difference. For more on this see Butler & Scott (1992). See also Brown (1993).

Politics and hegemony

Hegemony refers to the constitution of a collective political identity oriented to radical collective action under the conditions of acute fragmentation and instability instituted by liberal capitalist cultures.⁵² Post-Marxism derives this term from the work of Gramsci who uses it to refer to a specific kind of alliance - a historical bloc - in which the constituent members (individual and collective) are fused into a new unity with a strong affective-moral sense of membership and of communal purposes.⁵³ This alliance is unique in that, through the process which produces it, the identities of constituent groups are transformed through their mutual relationships, this transformation producing a radically new collective identity and thereby an enhanced capacity for collective action of a radical kind. Post-Marxism's introduction of the concept of 'nodal point' to theorize the character of this alliance is a significant contribution to Gramsci's account of hegemony, since it directs our attention to the psychic constituents of collective action, as will be seen below. What post-Marxism rejects is Gramsci's retention of a necessary class basis which it sees as an unfortunate remnant of economism and essentialism in his thought.⁵⁴ In effect, classes are not the sole social agents, since subjects are not constituted solely by location in relations of production but are rather the product of 'a precarious articulation among a number of subject positions'.⁵⁵ So we must note at this point that the post-Marxist historical bloc is quite different from the Gramscian historical bloc, as the reference to 'a precarious articulation' makes clear. Precariousness is not the mark of the strength of purpose and of moral commitment looked for by Gramsci, as will be seen in chapter seven. In any case, the commitment to radical democracy as conceptualized by post-Marxism seems to preclude such ambitions.

The concept of hegemony is internally related to that of articulation which, as mentioned above, refers to the process which is intended to constitute unity out of plurality.⁵⁶ In order to understand the character of the task involved in initiating this process, it is important to note at this point that the social always presents itself as society; as 'a closed space where each differential position is fixed as a specific and irreplaceable moment'.⁵⁷ Moments here are subjects who are fixed in positions which endow them with a comparatively strong sense of identity (sense of coherence,

52 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p.139

53 Ibid., p. 136. Gramsci's work will be discussed in chapter seven.

54 What it neglects is a systematic consideration of the role of organic intellectuals and of the crucial process of the constitution of the concrete phantasy. These will be discussed in chapter seven below.

55 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 58.

56 Ibid., ch. 3.

57 Ibid., p. 127.

stability). Elements are subjects who are not so fixed. Insofar as subjects have been the object of sustained and mutually supportive interpellations (or, put another way, have occupied a relatively coherent set of subject positions), then they are likely to experience a strong sense of identity. For example, as we will see in chapter four, bourgeois subjects are examples of such subjects in that they have been fixed (relatively) or endowed with a sense of identity by virtue of their several and mutually reinforcing positionings within a discourse or discourses. The initiation of a new hegemonic articulatory practice involves the creation of new signifying chains of equivalences (an organic ideology). These will have the effect of delinking moments from existing chains of equivalence thereby rendering them open to political mobilization by means of new interpellations. By implication, then, an important political task is to determine which positions are susceptible to this rupturing and therefore are open to articulation to a new chain of equivalences.

We must assume that individuals as elements feel acutely the sense of *lack* which is held to be constitutive of all human beings. They are therefore open to interpellations by discourses promising fullness. Where elements are more numerous than moments, we may assume a conjuncture describable as an 'identity crisis'.⁵⁸ Such conjunctures constitute an opportunity for radical politics. The task of a politics concerned to constitute a radical collective actor is to articulate 'floating' elements/meanings to a new democratic discourse, thereby transforming them into new moments. Where this transformation is successful, a new nodal point or collective identity will have been created and therefore a new collective actor capable of instituting a new radically democratic discourse.

Collective actor as nodal point

As we have seen, post-Marxism takes the discursive constitution of the social to be a standing source of volatility. It is (along with the other phenomena discussed in section one above) what makes the hegemonic project both possible to initiate and almost impossible to complete.⁵⁹ Temporary or relative fixity can be constructed, however; the flow of differences can be brought to flow more sluggishly or even to appear still. The constitution of fixity (which, for post-Marxism, is always necessarily temporary and fragile), is captured by the term 'nodal points', as mentioned above, a term derived from psychoanalysis and theoretically related to the concepts of condensation and overdetermination discussed in the third section of chapter two. The differences between the Freudian and post-Marxist usage of these

⁵⁸ See Laclau (1977)

⁵⁹ Laclau & Mouffe (1985), pp. 111, 112

concepts (insofar as these differences can be established) reveal some of the consequences of the fear of 'essentialism' which is so markedly present in post-Marxism.

It was seen in chapter two that Freud uses the concept of overdetermination to refer to the relationship between force and meaning and the outcome of this relationship as revealed in the manifest content of dreams. Recall that the individual psyche is forced into evasive manoeuvres, as it were, through the presence of culture in the shape of the super-ego which forbids certain desires. Put another way, it seeks to prevent the cathexis (investment) of psychic energy to particular kinds of meanings. The redistribution of energy (or its cathexis to 'innocent' objects or meanings) is a way of evading (by misleading) the subject's internal censor. Where condensation takes place, the force attaching to a number of different meanings is accumulated in one which comes to stand for all the rest. Where displacement takes place, the energy attaching to one meaning is transferred to another. Here force (both social and psychic) and meaning are joined in a causal sequence of a specific kind. While, for Freud, neither principle of distribution can result in durable cathexes, post-Marxism, following Althusser's adaptation discussed in chapter two, develops the concepts to distinguish between two forms of identity-formation: one (condensation) resulting in commitment to radical and communal political goals, the other (displacement) resulting in preoccupation with individual self-maintenance or development. In addition to this, post-Marxism gives the concepts an idealist emphasis as follows.

As was discussed in chapter two, Althusser took over the concept of overdetermination - albeit with reservations - to refer to a non-deterministic form of causality in the cultural rather than psychic realm, but opening the way for a non-reductive Marxist account of the psychical and biological components of cultures. Correctly remarking that Althusser's extension of this concept to Marxism 'had more than a superficially metaphoric character', Laclau and Mouffe go on to say:

For Freud, overdetermination is no ordinary process of 'fusion' or 'merger' - which would at most be a metaphor established by analogy with the physical world, compatible with any form of multi-causality; on the contrary, it is a very precise type of fusion entailing a symbolic dimension and a plurality of meanings. The concept of overdetermination is constituted in the field of the symbolic, and has no meaning whatsoever outside it. Consequently, the most profound *potential* meaning of Althusser's statement that everything existing in the social is overdetermined, is the assertion that the social constitutes itself as a symbolic order. The symbolic - i.e. overdetermined - character of social relations therefore implies that they lack an ultimate literality which would reduce them to necessary moments of an immanent law.⁶⁰

60 Ibid., pp. 97 - 8.

What is effaced here, or at least marginalized, is the fact that Freud is dealing with the material (in the sense of force or matter-energy as described above) world also. Given the claim that discourse is being used in a material sense - i.e. that it necessarily refers to practices - it might be supposed that the material referent of Freud's conception of overdetermination would find its place in post-Marxism's usage. Post-Marxism will claim that the discursive (and so the symbolic referred to in the above quotation) necessarily incorporates the material.⁶¹ However, its simultaneous rejection of dichotomies *and* of dialectics leads it to efface the empirical and theoretical sources and effects of these dichotomies which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.⁶² Here the effect is that, authorial intentions notwithstanding, the lack of differentiation in post-Marxist discourse analysis is such as to neutralize the material, as will be argued in section three of this chapter.⁶³ Force, both psychic and social, as well as biology, the necessary material basis of both psyche and social, is here lost sight of in the privileging of the symbolic. This idealist tendency reappears in the authors' appropriation of Lacan's translation of Freud's symbolic-biological-social categories of condensation and displacement into the linguistic categories of metaphor and metonymy. Here again the necessary material-energetic basis of the distribution and redistribution of meanings is lost.⁶⁴

It may be argued that the Lacanian account of psychic processes apparently accepted by post-Marxism has dealt with the question of biology through the concept of the real which conceives of the elusive unhumanized remainder as a permanent ineliminable subversive force. However, while the real (biological) does constitute a force for Lacan (and for post-Marxism) this is a purely negative force.⁶⁵ What this means is that the social or discursive is at the same time all powerful (because everything is discursive) and relatively powerless (because discourse cannot guarantee the fixity of its interpellations). The full implications of this conception of the social-psyche relation will be explored fully in chapters four and eight. For the moment, we need to note that, according to this view, what the subject experiences is a 'lightness of being', an inability (or refusal) to engage in long-term relations or in dedicated, sustained action of any kind. The further implication is that sociality (the capacity to engage in enduring and felt social relations) is not a characteristic of such subjects.

61 As Laclau & Mouffe (1990) do in response to Geras's criticisms.

62 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 110.

63 See Albritton (1993) for an argument about the dangers of collapsing distinctions which he sees as a questionable tendency in the 'post' problematic. See also Landry & MacLean (1991).

64 See Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 110. This matter will be discussed further in chapter eight.

65 From a poststructuralist point of view, it is politically dangerous to allot the biological more than a purely negative significance. To endow it with 'positivity' would incur the risk of a slide into the 'metaphysics of presence' and therefore into antidemocratic discourses. We may assume that post-Marxism shares this view, given its repeated admonitions regarding 'essentialism'.

The psychoanalytic component of post-Marxism's account of identity would lead us to expect that relationships will be strongly felt. Contrary to some interpretations of his work, Freud assumed that human individuals, although a-social or even anti-social at birth, would necessarily become social as a result of their development.⁶⁶ What we find in post-Marxism, though, is a radically individualistic account of human beings and subjectivity. The concept of *lack* requires such an individualistic focus and we find no hint anywhere in the work that sociality might be a good in itself for the individuals under discussion. Maybe we can interpret resistance to new interpellations, which is allowed for, as a manifestation of such sociality, or capacity to engage in durable social relations. We are given no encouragement to do this, however. In fact, little by way of explanation is offered for this surprising and presumably exceptional tenacity on the part of the fragmented contemporary decentred subject. It is almost as if we are presented with a Hobbesian individual engaged in endless 'computing' about the costs and benefits of commitment to different projects or discourses.⁶⁷

These problems arise from post-Marxism's rather perfunctory and untheorized adoption of Lacanian concepts which leads to the introduction into its account (whether wittingly or unwittingly is not clear) of Lacanian assumptions which force us to conclude either that culture is underpinned by battles between id and super-ego with no room at all for the emergence of ego or, more strongly, that capitalist cultures constitute subjects without either egos or super-egos. Since transformative communal action requires ego, in a sense to be developed in the remainder of this work, we must conclude for the moment on the basis of the post-Marxist account that such action is not an option in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.

To sum up, overdetermination here refers to a process of incorporation whereby a relatively durable form of political commitment to the achievement of collective purposes is constituted. This is the outcome of hegemonic politics which consists in the interpellation of groups and individuals as members of a new collective subject. These interpellations consist in reinterpretations of existing 'subject positions' from the point of view of the proposed action. These reinterpretations must offer to satisfy the myriad demands and needs of the plurality of subjectivities - both individual and group - to be mobilized, while at the same time demonstrating a common or unifying element connecting their claims. Acceptance of commonality yields a new collective identity i.e. it retains elements of the old identities while at the same time absorbing them into the new all-embracing collective identity.

66 This will be discussed further in chapter eight.

67 In relation to this, it should be noted that Laclau, in his later work, returns to Hobbes to explain such stability as does exist in terms of the need for order. Note the implication here that sociality is a cost rather than a good in itself. See Laclau (1994). The problem of sociality is addressed by Mouffe (1992) under the rubric of citizenship.

However, as we have seen, post-Marxism appears to eliminate (or render negligible) the moment of force (of cathexis of energy) from this concept. Meanings (interpellations) are not - indeed cannot be - forceful in the sense that they are cathected in a durable and devoted manner. So collective identities are also not forceful; they are not or cannot be retained, sustained and therefore acted upon for any length of time. Hence the apparently endless need for articulating new 'chains of equivalence' if group projects requiring political commitment are to get under way. The volatility of the social is double-edged in relation to the initiation of radical collective projects in that it leaves subjects open to new interpellations while at the same time leaving them unwilling or unable to commit themselves to these interpellations for any length of time. Identities are put on and discarded apparently at will (although in fact, if Lacan is to be believed under the imperative of a tragic search for an unattainable sense of fullness or fixity). A new hegemonic discourse must be composed of interpellations promising fullness but, as we know, this is a promise that can never be kept. Given the discursive competitiveness provoked by the 'surplus of meanings' available to subjects seeking satisfaction, and given the absence of any suggestion that sociality is in itself a source of satisfaction for such subjects, it seems unlikely that the subjects discussed by post-Marxism will feel much sense of obligation to the wider group.

I now turn to the final section of this chapter in which the attempt is made first, to clarify post-Marxism's contribution to our understanding of subjectivity and political commitment and second, to suggest ways in which the discursive approach can be rendered more systematic and more empirically adequate.

III

Having explored in some detail the post-Marxist theory of identity and action, we have found that its portrait of the contemporary world (of liberal capitalist cultures) forces the conclusion that any kind of sustained political commitment to the achievement of collective purposes is highly unlikely. This conclusion is reached on the basis of the centrality of a relatively stable and satisfying sense of identity to any kind of action or commitment and of the inability of such cultures to provide this. The strong thrust of post-Marxism is that the contemporary period of disorganized capitalism is witnessing a qualitative change in terms of forms and processes of identification. It is in this area that the work has made its most useful contribution, drawing our attention to the extraordinary fluidity of identities - therefore of subjectivities - now. While other theorists of collective action have also pointed this out, (for example Melucci, as discussed in chapter one), post-Marxism offers us some

of the theoretical means of arriving at a systematic explanation of this state of affairs. It does this by developing further (however haphazardly) the attempt to fuse Marxism and psychoanalysis, by bringing together more explicitly than does Althusser a range of concepts - hegemony and overdetermination, interpellation, articulation and nodal points - which will enable us to theorize further the character of subjectivities as these relate to the requirements for collective identity-formation. In effect, these concepts also enable us to theorize further the relationship between meaning and materiality, or meaning and power, for when we are talking about identity we are talking about the meanings available to or thrust upon subjects. What is in question here, though, is not meaning as phantasy, but rather the meanings which have action or inaction consequences for those subjects. If identities are as easily changeable, or as lightly borne as post-Marxism assumes, then actions that get in the way of the pursuit of fullness, or actions requiring self-discipline and long-term commitment, are unlikely to be undertaken or, if undertaken, then lightly abandoned. This is the implication of the post-Marxist view. Unfortunately post-Marxism has not given us sufficient theoretical means to understand quite why this is the case. This is because it fails to develop a framework of concepts enabling it to make the kinds of fine distinctions which are necessary if discourse analysis is not to dissolve into idealism. Materiality is asserted without being theorized and, connectedly, any phenomena which do not fit the main thrust of the argument are mentioned without being theorized or without being accounted for (e.g. resistance to new interpellations, as mentioned above).⁶⁸

Let me now suggest various distinctions which can enable us to build on the insights offered by this approach so as to produce a more rigorous and realist account of the phenomena whose political consequences post-Marxism has accurately characterized. These distinctions will be discussed under the following headings:

1. Discourse as transhistorical abstraction
2. Discourse and referentiality
3. Discourse as practice

⁶⁸ For charges that post-Marxism is an idealism, see Geras (1990b); Mouzelis (1988); Wood (1986). See Laclau & Mouffe (1990) for their response to this charge. For a defense of post-Marxism, see Daly (1994).

1. Discourse as transhistorical abstraction

The concept of discourse, as deployed by post-Marxism refers to an anthropological constant or universal human attribute. Discourse is therefore what Marx describes as a 'rational' or transhistorical abstraction, that is, one which draws our attention to an element common to all cultures.⁶⁹ It is the conflation of transhistorical and historical abstractions that produces the naturalization of the historically-culturally specific, as we noted in chapter two. Discourse as transhistorical abstraction tells us no more and no less than production as such. Moreover, an exclusive focus on discourse is likely to be as reductive as an exclusive focus on production as narrowly conceived. The discursive turn attains its usefulness and significance in relation to a social science which has effaced the theoretical and empirical importance of meaning in the constitution of the social. As the theoretical turn to production in mid-nineteenth century Marxism derived its critical status and significance in relation to an idealist philosophy (while at the same time courting the danger of merely expressing the emergent commonsense of industrial capitalism), so the theoretical turn to discourse derives its critical status and significance in relation to a vulgar materialist version of Marxism or a naturalizing economic liberalism. In other words, as the productivist turn signalled a shift in problematic in the mid-nineteenth century, so too does the discursive turn in the late twentieth century. This shift is not purely theoretical but is refracted through institutional changes in the world; it is telling us something about the world outside of the academy. What precisely and how much it is telling us is another matter. For the moment my point is that discourse as transhistorical abstraction can in itself tell us very little. In order to make the concept more useful, it is necessary to stress the specificities of historical discourses. While Laclau and Mouffe do occasionally make a distinction between the discursive (as transhistorical abstraction) and discourses,⁷⁰ this distinction does not inform their analysis in any systematic fashion. Furthermore, they have a tendency to equate all discourses; a failure to note that there are qualitative differences between discourses, not only in relation to the scope and ambition of their claims (shove-ha'penny discourse at one extreme; capitalism at the other) but to the resources available to different discourses attempting to become hegemonic, discourses, that is, claiming the potential for 'fixity'.

In fact, Althusser's intention in his work on ideology is to draw the attention of Marxists to what post-Marxism quite rightly insists on - the necessarily discursive, or symbolic, or cultural character of human life. Furthermore, his use of ideology to capture meaning has the virtue of pointing to the specificity of particular kinds of discourses i.e. those which are either seeking, or have already attained the power to

69 Marx (1973b), p. 85.

70 See Laclau & Mouffe (1990); Laclau (1990iv).

become dominant, to constitute a way of life for a whole population, or to constitute subjectivities. Put another way, Althusser's ideology can be equated with post-Marxism's hegemonic discourses. This point will be taken up in chapter four.

2. Discourse and referentiality

In order to understand the different characteristics and powers of specific discourses and to avoid the drift towards idealism, we need to make conceptual distinctions that will enable us to focus on referentiality. A return to Saussure, whose conceptual innovations in relation to the study of language were noted in the first section of this chapter, will be helpful at this point.

These innovations consisted of the conception of sign as composed of signifier (sound) and signified (meaning). Another dimension of the sign (its functional dimension) is its referent. It is important here to remember that Saussure, for purely methodological reasons, bracketed the referential dimension of the sign. He also insisted that the relationship between signifier and signified is not necessary but rather arbitrary, as is the relationship between sign and referent. Furthermore, signs gain their meaning, not as things in themselves, but from their relations to other signs within a system (structural dimension).

For reasons which are not absolutely clear, Saussure's 'arbitrariness' as a reference to convention (as opposed to nature) was translated into 'randomness' and 'fleetingness', a translation against which he himself warned.⁷¹ So that which is not natural becomes necessarily random and therefore completely unconstrained. Yet the equation of arbitrariness with randomness, indeterminacy or instability is not self-evident but needs to be supported by argument. Arbitrariness can be translated as randomness only if it is believed that the social world itself has become random. Now, post-Marxism has offered us arguments to that effect, but they are put forward at a very high level of generality and are marked, in addition, by a neglect of the institutional dimension and, relatedly, by a reticence about the necessary materiality of discourses. In effect, problems relating to functionality, referentiality and practical adequacy are effaced. In order to clarify this point, I shall say a few words about Saussure's comparison of linguistic and monetary systems.⁷²

A given coin is related to other coins and terms in a monetary system; it derives its identity from its location in a system of differences, in other words. This is the structural dimension. However, it must also be related to (exchangeable with) real goods of some value outside the system (functional dimension). Similarly, a given

⁷¹ Saussure (1974), pp. 68 - 9.

⁷² See the discussion in Baudrillard (1993), ch. 1.

signified is related to other signifieds in a linguistic system (and derives its identity or meaning from its location in a system of differences), but it must also be exchangeable for (refer to) something outside the system. The purpose of money is use-value; money which cannot be exchanged for real useful objects in the world is meaningless, or valueless. The purpose of language is designation; language which cannot be used to communicate with others about real objects in the world is meaningless, or valueless. The two dimensions (structural and functional) are separate but linked. In other words, meaning has two components, structural (relations between signs within a linguistic system) and functional (relations between signs and their corresponding material objects in the world).

It is important to incorporate these distinctions into our analysis because they remind us of the problem of 'use-value', or practical adequacy in relation to discourse. While the discursive as transhistorical abstraction pre-exists all functionality and meaning, actually existing discourses *of certain kinds* will persist as discourses only because they are capable of fulfilling certain essential functions. In effect, language is *both* constitutive *and* referential. To elide the referential is to elide the materiality of discourse. It is this elision which in part underpins the 'ontology of flux'. It is this elision which supports the interpretation of the contingent as the volatile, or which underpins, for example, the claim that: 'Necessity *only* exists as a partial effort to limit contingency'.⁷³

In the case of individual subjects, awareness of the referential function draws our attention to their materiality or embodiment as well as to their location in social embodied relations. Both the biological and social necessarily limit the 'free play of differences' which is claimed by post-Marxism to be an innate characteristic of discourse. The social fact necessarily encompasses the natural fact and this constitutes a check on volatility. The fact that functionality (e.g. the need to fulfil certain vital material bodily needs) is discursively constituted should not lead us to think that discourse can reconstitute functionality just as 'it' wishes. The natural element of life, which cannot be separated from the socio-cultural, constrains quite significantly the 'play' of differences. Discourse itself is both a natural and social fact of human life and therefore partakes of the constraints deriving from these two sources. This claim will become clearer as I go on to discuss the third criterion for cleansing discourse analysis of its idealizing tendency.

73 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 114 (my emphasis).

3. Discourse as practice

We noted in chapter two the utility of Althusser's dichotomy-transcending concept of practice, particularly when informed by an awareness of the different modes in which matter exists and can be transformed. Here we are particularly concerned with the human organism as an organism with properties or causal powers rendering him open to constitution as an apparently self-activating being with consciousness. (Chimpanzees cannot be constituted in this way, as is testified by many failed attempts to do so.⁷⁴) Human organisms have the capacity to become subjects through subjection to ideological practices. Ideology is a practice that works on specific raw materials (human infants) so as to produce specific kinds of subjectivities.⁷⁵ This practice requires different modes of materiality for its successful completion. Apart from the human organism, it requires *both* 'theoretical ideology', a text or body of meanings which will constitute the ideologizing practice *and* the social power to institute its practice.⁷⁶ This body of meanings will have been produced, reproduced or transformed by pre-existing embodied subjects and will be recorded or stored in texts taking various material forms. Moreover, this body of meanings will have been derived from (either as expression or transformation of) pre-existing practices.⁷⁷

The focus on practices and modes of materiality requires us to attend to the different capacities, functions and powers of different kinds of discourses. It enables us to address questions about the practical adequacy of different discourses i.e. about their capacities to constitute specific modes of matter in specific kinds of ways for specific purposes. It enables us to avoid the slide into idealism which an exclusive focus on meaning tends to induce. In the absence of these analytical distinctions, it is all too easy to equate meaning with text. Reducing materiality to textuality can be a disastrous move precluding any understanding of cultures, for the following reason.

Materials vary in their malleability; in their openness to specific kinds of practices. In contemporary liberal capitalist cultures, texts are modes of changing materiality (from print to electronics) which may be produced, reproduced, transformed or effaced with astonishing speed.⁷⁸ Post-Marxism has discussed subjectivity as if the human organism has the characteristics of a contemporary text. It takes the human organism to be an apparently malleable but also extremely volatile substance. This malleability and volatility are held to be the overdetermined result of *both* transhistorical 'facts of life' *and* historically-culturally specific developments

74 See Savage-Rumbaugh & Rumbaugh (1993).

75 Althusser (1990ii), pp. 166 - 7; Sprinker (1987), ch. 7.

76 Here I am assuming literate cultures.

77 This point will be explored further in chapter four.

78 Poster (1990, 1995).

which for the first time make us aware of these facts. In pushing us towards this conclusion, post-Marxism is virtually naturalizing the state of affairs in question. In effect, it is allowing a new kind of essentialism into its discourse.⁷⁹ It is not sufficiently historical in its approach. It gives us a powerful account of the experience of the decentred subject but its account of how this subject is constituted is badly flawed. Discourses do have different functions and different causal powers and it is necessary to take account of this. Post-Marxism appears to be unaware of the problems arising from the neglect of this question. The solution to this problem requires an account of institutions and a theory of materiality and its modes.⁸⁰ It requires us to be alert to the dehistoricizing effects of conflating transhistorical and historical abstractions.

Conclusion

Post-Marxism is read here as an analysis of the erosion of political commitment in liberal capitalist cultures. Through its development of Althusser's psychoanalytic borrowings, and its adaptation of his distinction between displacement and condensation, post-Marxism has produced a useful (but underdeveloped and unsystematic) account of the lived experience of decentred subjects i.e. of subjects constituted by a multiplicity of positionalities or interpellations which may or may not be congruent with one another. Such subjects lack the capacity and/or the inclination to engage in sustained long-term social relations or to enter into serious political commitments. In effect, post-Marxism is drawing our attention to a peculiar and culturally unprecedented characteristic of capitalist culture with which we will be concerned throughout this thesis: the privatization of sociality. By this term I refer to the reduction of the experience of the felt social bond to an individual voluntary - rather than culturally imperative - matter. The significance of this characteristic in relation to our problem cannot be overstated. Its origins will be investigated in chapter five where Marx's theory of pure capitalism will be seen to get to the source of this peculiar cultural characteristic.

So post-Marxism has offered valuable clues to the kind of investigations required to complete the task undertaken in this thesis. These clues will be followed up in later chapters which will also seek to fill the gaps which have been identified in this body of work, as well as to correct its naturalizing bias. In chapter four, the lack of institutional analysis will be made good. In this chapter we will set out to show that

⁷⁹ Fuss (1989) is useful on this characteristic of anti-essentialist theorizing. See Mouzelis (1988) on post-Marxism's anti-essentialism.

⁸⁰ See Mouzelis (1988); Osborne (1991). Jordan (1967) is useful on the philosophy of matter.

an analysis in terms of institutions rather than discourses can further our understanding of the processes which constitute individuals as particular kinds of subjects. More specifically, we will investigate the way or ways in which the 'relative structuration' of capitalist culture is institutionally expressed and will consider further the contribution to be made by psychoanalysis to the resolution of the problem in hand. This will help us to think more systematically about the significance of the two different models of the subject which are suggested by post-Marxism, namely, the bourgeois subject and the decentred subject (the subject by default) as well as about the different kinds of collective action in which these different subjects are likely to engage.

Chapter Four

Subjectivity, meaning and materiality

Introduction

Having examined post-Marxism's account of social fluidity in liberal capitalist cultures, I have suggested that this account is impoverished because of its failure to develop the range of analytic distinctions needed to theorize the materiality of discourse. Suggestions as to what these might be were made in the final section of chapter three. One important problem is the neglect of institutions. It is through institutions that discourses emerge and become materialized in different ways. Without an account of institutions the mechanisms which produce social (and psychic) volatility cannot be identified and questions about the practical adequacy of discourses cannot be addressed. More specifically, we need to consider how the structural distinctiveness - 'relative structuration' - of capitalist cultures is institutionally expressed and, relatedly, how 'nodal points' are constituted out of the indeterminacy which is apparently the defining characteristic of social relations, experience and subjects in these cultures. This will require a further exploration of the possibility of articulating psychoanalysis to Marxism. In addition, and relatedly, we will begin to explore the character of the bourgeois subject who is taken here to be a significant source of inspiration for the Marxian and Gramscian emancipatory goal and therefore for the account of communal transformative action required for the realization of that goal. These are the tasks to be undertaken in this chapter.

The first section will offer a general account of institutions as developed by Castoriadis.¹ Whereas Castoriadis shares post-Marxism's concern to emphasize the constitutive role of meaning in human life, he also addresses directly the question of institutions in a way that makes a theoretical space for questions of materiality and functionality. In addition, he draws our attention to a novel and significant characteristic of capitalist institutions. This characteristic consists in the claim to have identified pure functionality and rationality. We will need to note the subject effects of this characteristic as it becomes expressed in institutions.² The second section will follow up post-Marxism's interesting and suggestive remarks about the constitution of the subject 'Man' by looking at Habermas's work on the bourgeois public sphere.³ This will allow us to put institutional flesh on the bones of post-Marxism's claim that this subject was constituted by an 'ensemble of social practices,

1 Castoriadis (1987).

2 See Bowring (1996); Gorz (1989); Habermas (1984, 1987a).

3 Habermas (1992).

of institutions and discourses' acting on individuals in a mutually reinforcing manner so as to constitute them as 'nodal points'.⁴ It will also enable us to consider further the significance of modalities of materiality (practices) and of the practical adequacy of discourses. Moreover as it will have indicated the institutional requirements for the constitution of the bourgeois subject, it will enable us to assess the possible subject effects of different kinds of institutional change. The third section addresses the problem of relative structuration through Althusser's essay on Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).⁵ Here we will see that, for Althusser, relatively stable identities or subjectivities are the product of myriad institutions informed by the same ideology and functioning under the guidance of the state. From the point of view of capitalism, it is the state - through the ISAs - that must ensure (or attempt to ensure, not at all the same thing) the production of the kinds of subjects needed to bear the necessary relations of production. We will note here the significance of adopting a comprehensive or inclusive conception of capitalism and contrast Althusser's usage with that of post-Marxism, which equates capitalism with the 'economy'. Whereas post-Marxism maintains that capitalism has an 'outside' i.e. that relations of production form only one element of the totality of relations in which individuals are involved at any one time,⁶ Althusser sees capitalism as a total mode of life (culture) which has the tendency to gain and maintain control of every aspect of human life (although, as we have noted in chapter two, the contradictory character of capitalism stands as permanent source of crisis and therefore of possible subversion).⁷

Each of these works offers something that is lacking in post-Marxism and each of these works, in addition, tells us something significant about institutionalization which will enable us to think more systematically about meaning, materiality and the constitution of social relations. I turn first to Castoriadis.

4 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 117.

5 Althusser (1984i).

6 See Laclau (1990i).

7 See also Habermas (1984, 1987a).

I

Castoriadis on meaning and materiality

According to Castoriadis, the purpose of institutions is the 'fabrication' of individuals as particular kinds of subjects with particular kinds of thoughts, feelings, projects, behaviours. Subjects are materializations of discourses, or, in Castoriadis's terms, of imaginary significations. However, institutions do not capture individuals completely; individuals have the psychic capacity to resist total institutionalization. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Castoriadis conceives of this as an inherent, irreducible pre-cultural attribute which expresses itself in the ability to create representations: 'One must admit that originary phantasmization, which I term the radical imagination, pre-exists and presides over every organization of drives, even the most primitive ones, and that it is the condition for the drive to attain psychical existence.'⁸ It is the ineradicable capacity for creativity which produces the radical imaginary, or a predisposition to institute radically new cultures. Clearly, although Castoriadis shares with Lacan the view that the psyche is not completely captured by culture, he interprets the 'remainder' in much more positive terms than does Lacan. In it he finds the psychic resources for the transformation of institutions. He also provides an historically informed philosophical analysis of institutions which will enable us to begin to understand what it is about capitalist cultures that produces the kind of subjects described by post-Marxism and therefore what it is which renders the problem of political commitment so acute in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.

Castoriadis defines the institution as a 'socially sanctioned, symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations'.⁹ The imaginary here relates to the human capacity to imagine that which does not already exist, to create new images. However, notice here that human imagination is put to work on practical or functional problems. The definition draws our attention to the question of practical adequacy which was elided in the post-Marxist discursive account of the social.

The imaginary provides answers to questions about the character of a particular culture - about its identity, its desires, its goals, its relation to the rest of the world, and so on. Institutions posit the culture as existing, not only as an empirical but as a qualitatively distinct phenomenon. It is in terms of this distinctness that its 'functional' requirements are posited. There are no pure 'functional' needs distinct from particular cultural identities, in other words. Certainly no collectivity can exist

⁸ Castoriadis (1987), p. 287. See Habermas (1990); Leledakis (1995), ch. 8; Whitebook (1981-2).

⁹ Castoriadis (1987), p. 32. See also Castoriadis (1989) & (1991), chs. 3 & 7.

without organizing the production of its material life and its reproduction as a collectivity. However production and reproduction are not dictated either by natural laws (the real) or by rational considerations (the rational) *alone*. Nature (the real), perception (the rational) and imagination contribute to the instituting of human collectivities as particular kinds of collectivities. What is real for every culture - nature, social relations, subjectivity - is necessarily constituted by a categorial framework which is the work of the imagination. The imaginary (the meaningful) and the functional are fused in a unity or, put another way, the distinction between the imaginary and the functional is analytical rather than empirical or ontological. However, the capacity to separate them in thought lays the basis for a radical imaginary claiming to split them in reality. This is what happens in capitalist cultures and this has notable consequences for the formation of social relations and therefore of subjects.

The Imaginary Component

Existing societies are the *imaginary*¹⁰ actualized through institutions. The *imaginary* of a society is the element

which gives a specific orientation to every institutional system, which overdetermines the choice and the connections of symbolic networks, which is the creation of each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence, its world, and its relations with this world, this originary structuring component, this central signifying-signified, the source of that which presents itself in every instance as an indisputable and undisputed meaning, the basis for articulating what does matter and what does not, the origin of the surplus of being of the objects of practical, affective and intellectual investment, whether individual or collective.¹¹

It is 'imaginary significations' which provide the answers to these questions. As mentioned before, the imaginary posits the culture as existing, not only as an empirical but as a qualitatively distinct phenomenon. For Castoriadis, the 'qualitatively distinct' is imaginary in the radical sense that it is not given in perception. It derives from the human capacity to imagine something absolutely new. From this point of view, the nation is the modern form of the radical social imaginary which provides answers to these fundamental questions about the character of collectivities.¹²

10 This is quite different from the Lacanian concept, to be discussed further below.

11 Castoriadis (1987), p. 145.

12 Castoriadis (1997) considers this imaginary signification to have lost its effectivity in the contemporary world.

Central significations are not 'of' something, nor are they attached or related to something except in a second-order sense. On the contrary, they are what brings into being the co-belonging of objects, acts and individuals which, in appearance, are heterogeneous. They are at the origin of subjects, not at the disposal of subjects. They are that by reason of which subjects exist as subjects and as these particular subjects. The fact that reflection can attempt to intend them explicitly is secondary and the foundation for the possibility of such a reflection lies in social imaginary significations.

However, the radical imaginary cannot conjure institutions out of the air. Institutions are always caught up in the constraints of the 'natural stratum'. Moreover they are always inserted in an historical continuum and, therefore, shaped by what is already in existence. So they are not freely created and recreated. They are expressions of the real, the rational and the historical. Instituting society 'leans on' the first natural stratum and is always in a relation of 'reception/alteration' with what has already been instituted. So, it also 'leans on' already instituted subjects. 'The position of meaningful figures or of figured meaning by radical imagination leans on the being-thus of the subject as a living being, and is always found ... in a relation of what had already been represented by and for the psyche'.¹³ I take the 'being-thus of the subject as a living being' to refer to the everyday experience of that subject. Castoriadis fails to clarify the nature of this relationship between 'what is' and 'what could be'.¹⁴ However, it is clear that, the individual capacity for radical imagining notwithstanding, a given instituted imaginary will constrain radically new institutionalization. Little more is said about such constraints, though. In this respect, Castoriadis offers us little more than post-Marxism. As will be seen in chapter seven, Gramsci's 'concrete phantasy' proves to be a more useful conceptualization which will enable us to think more systematically about these matters.

The functional component

The functional aspects of institutions are captured by Castoriadis through the concepts of *teukhein* and *legein*. By the former is meant 'an organized totality of efficacious operations with a "material" basis'; the latter refers to the 'ensemblist-identitary dimension of language and ... of social representing'.¹⁵ *Teukhein* refers to

¹³ Castoriadis (1987), p. 370.

¹⁴ for a discussion of the inadequacies Castoriadis's account of the social/psyche relation, see Bookchin (1982); Habermas (1990); Whitebook (1981 - 2).

¹⁵ Castoriadis (1987), p. 261.

'doing'; *legein* refers to representations of 'doing'. *Teukhein* and *legein* are expressions of 'identitary-assemblist logic' which constitutes terms as

distinct and definite elements, solidifying the pre-relation of referral into relation *as such*, organizing the holding-together, the being-in, the being-on, the being-proximate into a system of determined and determining relations (identity, difference, belonging, inclusion), differentiating what they distinguish in this way into 'entities' and 'properties', using this differentiation to constitute 'sets' and 'classes'.¹⁶

Identitary logic involves thinking as thinking something determined; saying as saying something determined; being as being something determined. In other words, the world is represented as divided into identifiable, separate, bounded elements which can be immediately known and therefore acted upon. The identitary-assemblist assumes a determinate answer to questions. It opposes 'definiteness-determinacy-distinctness-limitation' to 'indefiniteness-indeterminacy-indistinctness-unlimitedness'.¹⁷

Clearly Castoriadis's 'identitary-assemblist logic' is the logic of analytical thinking, whose cognitive and social effects I have begun to discuss in chapter two. Analytical thought fragments nature (including human nature) so as to render it susceptible to knowledge oriented to control.¹⁸ It requires a wholly depersonalized, abstracted orientation towards the world which it renders in wholly disenchanted or profane terms. The full institutionalization of this orientation is attempted only in capitalist cultures for reasons which will be explored further in chapter five. Now, however, I return to the question of totality and fragmentation as it relates to the constitution of subjects.

Capitalism and the differentiation of spheres

We have noted before that capitalist cultures produce an historically and culturally unprecedented fragmentation of human activities through the division of labour and the differentiation of spheres. We have begun to approach this matter in the first instance through Althusser's account of contradiction and overdetermination (chapter two) and we have seen further that this characteristic of capitalism - captured by the term dislocation - is deemed by post-Marxism to constitute the basis for the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 344.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 353.

¹⁸ See also Habermas (1987b).

emergence of a constantly changing plurality of subjectivities, which it tends to equate with emancipation (chapter three).

What the differentiation of spheres refers to is the 'splitting' and parcelling out between different spheres - the economic, the political, the familial and the cultural - of a totality of social action. This splitting demands or allows different values, orientations and behaviours in the different spheres. Activity in the economic and political spheres is (or should be) rational, 'functional' and impersonal, oriented to strangers for specific and limited purposes; activity in the intimate sphere of the family is (or should be) loving, loyal and affectionate; activity in the cultural sphere is expressive and aesthetic.¹⁹ The differentiation of spheres and the accompanying distribution of dispositions - rationality, affect, expressivity - are associated with the belief that the modern world institutes a purely functional form of culture whose institutions are guided wholly by a specific kind of rationality preoccupied with efficient and effective action upon 'things'; a form of rationality which Castoriadis characterizes as 'identitary-assemblist logic', as we have seen. The claim that the spheres of economic and political activity should be rational and functional is related to the claim that the modern world has liberated (or offers the possibility of liberating) pure humanity from the shackles of custom, tradition, superstition; that it has liberated (or offers the possibility of liberating) pure functionality from cultural constraints. Liberated, culture-free rationality will be the basis of a liberated, self-activating subject and liberated functionality will be the basis of mastery of the natural world.²⁰ It is on the basis of this 'fateful differentiation of cultural components' that capitalism can represent itself as transparently rational, productive, objective and universal, or as Sahlins puts it: '[e]verything in capitalism conspires to conceal the symbolic ordering of the system'.²¹ It is on this basis that spheres of activity can be assessed in terms of 'utility' and pronounced to be rational or irrational. It is on this basis that activities considered to be outside the sphere of pure rationality and utility can be considered to be somehow optional, or surplus to strict social requirements; a matter for private, individual choice apparently without social implications or consequences.

Capitalism and the state are 'first order institutions' (Castoriadis's description) of the modern world which are avowedly characterized by pure functionality. They are also the institutions which oversee a complex, never to be precisely delineated, multi-faceted nexus of processes whereby different aspects of human activity became detached and institutionalized in separate spheres over a period of about two hundred years in Western Europe. The impersonal economic and political spheres result from

19 Giddens (1990); Habermas (1984, 1987a).

20 However, the very notion of a pure 'functionality' is in itself a cultural notion, as we have seen.

21 Sahlins (1976), p. 220. See also Gudeman (1986).

the disembedding of individuals from pre-modern corporate relationships found in the extended family, guilds, clans or tribes, and their reincorporation into the state.²²

Questions about the institutional composition of these different spheres, about the way in which these constitute individuals as fragmented or coherent subjects will be addressed in the remaining two sections of this chapter. I turn first to Habermas's work on the bourgeois public sphere.²³

II

Habermas's work will be discussed here as an account first, of the way in which the differentiation of spheres during the early liberal phase of capitalism was institutionally expressed and second, of the significance of specific institutions - in particular the bourgeois patriarchal family - in constituting the bourgeois subject. It was the bourgeois class which first generated the conditions for producing a new kind of critical attention (public opinion) to public objects which issued in a demand (couched in universalist terms) for human liberation. It is important, then, to investigate the institutional nexus out of which emerged this new kind of attention and this new kind of demand, which, as I am arguing, informs the Marxian and Gramscian projects and which, furthermore, helps us to understand the requirements for the constitution of political commitment in liberal capitalist cultures.

Politics and subjectivity: the bourgeois public sphere

Briefly, Habermas traces the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere during the second half of the eighteenth century in England, France and Germany. This bourgeois public sphere was a 'forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion'.²⁴ Here debate took place over the rules governing 'relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour'.²⁵ The bourgeois public sphere, which was constituted by the 'private' sphere mediated between 'society' (as an aggregation of private individuals) and the newly depersonalized state i.e. the state which had attained 'relative autonomy' from the person of the monarch.²⁶ As the state apparatus began to assume an independence

22 See Giddens (1990); Kalberg (1993).

23 Habermas (1992).

24 Ibid., pp. 25 - 6.

25 Ibid., p. 27.

26 For historians' views on this see Gunn (1969); Kamen (1984);

from the personal sphere of the monarch, the courtly society began to drift towards the town where it came to have an influence on the emerging new bourgeoisie. What might be described as the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, Habermas's 'bourgeois avant-garde of the educated middle class' acquired the art of critical rational public debate through its contact with the courtly world. It was when the court lost its central position in the public sphere that 'reason' could 'shed its dependence on the authority of the aristocratic noble hosts' and 'acquire that autonomy that turns conversation into criticism and *bons mots* into arguments'.²⁷

'Civil society' thus emerged in the towns and consisted, not only in free economic activity, but also in cultural-political activity carried on in coffee houses, *salons* or table societies. Both in England and France, from the time of the Glorious Revolution onwards, the coffee houses and the *salons* were the institutional means of fabricating a public sphere in which free private individuals could debate in a consequential way - or even constitute - the issues of the day.

These private people had developed specific subjectivities through a nexus of institutions, including that of the intimate family. The intimate sphere consisted in the property-owning, non-producing bourgeois patriarchal family. Individual productive property which was at the free disposal of the family head underpinned the family's autonomy and the father's authority. An increasingly rich cultural sphere composed of printed material of various kinds as well as theatres, museums and concert halls, was essential for the formation of the specific identity of the liberal, introspective and autonomous subject.²⁸ The emerging constitutional state was to be the guarantor of property and other liberal rights and of the impersonal functioning of the free market. In short, the different spheres were mutually constitutive although apparently governed by different values and logics. Some elaboration of this is in order.

In his account of the public sphere Habermas presupposes the Freudian model of the patriarchal bourgeois family. This family instituted 'permanent intimacy' as against older forms of communality found in the extended and directly productive family. It was the 'wellspring of a specific subjectivity'.²⁹ It served as the essential humanizing agent whereby the bourgeois subject came to be formed in 'strict conformity with societally necessary requirements'. At the same time, what the individual concerned experienced was a new kind of psychological freedom.³⁰ This was because the conformity in question was based on self-mastery rather than habituation. Self-mastery required that the individual not merely do the right thing,

27 Habermas (1992), p. 31.

28 See Cascardi (1992) and Touraine (1995).

29 Habermas (1992), p. 43.

30 Ibid., pp. 47, 46.

but do it for the right reasons. This is the Freudian Oedipal theory of subject constitution which stresses the role of the stern patriarchal father in the production of the individual (male) capacities just mentioned.³¹ Habermas is here drawing on the theory as socialized and historicized by the earlier Frankfurt School.³²

The parents/child relationship was part of a wider set of institutions all of which served to inform and reinforce the particular kind of individuation which seems to have flourished in certain strata of the new bourgeoisie for about a hundred years from the mid-eighteenth century. The privatization of the family was expressed and advanced in architectural changes whereby lofty raftered halls were replaced by separate rooms having distinctive functions. The house became a home for each individual rather than for the family as a whole. It was a place where privacy could be enjoyed.

In this respect literature, which could be read in privacy within the redesigned family home, was of particular importance in constituting the introspective, self-disciplined individual. Reading here was active and educational, oriented to self-improvement through the critical absorption of philosophy and literature, of moral weeklies and critical journals. It was, in addition to the cultural products of concert-halls, theatres and museums, the vehicle whereby bourgeois individuals developed a subjectivity marked by psychic inwardness (introspection) and self-consciousness.³³ This was an inwardness, though, which was not solely concerned with self-cultivation but was also to be constitutive of the new politically significant phenomenon called public opinion. The products of the new dedicated cultural sphere made an important contribution to the constitution of a new kind of subject equipped with a strong sense of self *and* a strong social sense.³⁴ This social orientation found its first expression in literary salons which therefore functioned as a kind of training ground for more explicitly political discussions in the more masculine environment of coffee houses.³⁵ The coffee houses were the congenial public spaces within which culturally and socially nourished individuals interacted with one another so as to produce an informed and self-confident collective public opinion.

The capacity to produce subjects who were at once inwardly- and outwardly-directed was linked to the economic functions of the patriarchal family as property-owner, or, as Habermas puts it: 'The economic demands placed upon the patriarchal

30 This will be discussed further in chapter eight.

32 See Adorno & Horkheimer (1979); Horkheimer (1972i). For accounts of the Frankfurt School, see Held (1980); Jay (1973).

33 Whyte (1960) gives a useful account of the emergence of self-consciousness in the modern world.

34 This is the individual that Durkheim was later to refer to as the Kantian individual, in contrast to the self-interested, calculating utilitarian individual. See Durkheim (1973).

35 See Ryan (1992) for a feminist criticism of Habermas. For an account of the role of clubs and salons in constituting an active and effective public opinion in prerevolutionary France, see Kennedy (1982, 1988).

conjugal family from without corresponded to the institutional strength to shape a domain devoted to the development of the inner life.³⁶ Autonomy was maintained through the ownership and control of productive property as the heads of bourgeois families had a crucial social role to play where production was being transferred from the family to a dedicated economic sphere. The inner sense of certainty formed in the familial and cultural spheres was internally, necessarily related to the outer sense of certainty derived from ownership and control of means of production as well as from participation in the more congenial public sphere. The bourgeois subject, while culturally constituted, experienced himself as both 'in' and 'for' himself.³⁷

In this case, the constitution of a collective political actor of the kind required to act on and in the world with self-awareness and controlled devotion to the collective goal - bourgeois self-assertion against monarchy and aristocracy - required a combination of 'private' and 'public' institutions having mutually reinforcing effects. That is to say, the different spheres within which the bourgeois subject acted - the intimate or familial, the economic, the cultural, the public - would all produce, reinforce and sustain individual characteristics of rationality, self-discipline and public-spiritedness while at the same time allowing for the expression of non-rational or affective orientations in the intimate sphere, of expressive, aesthetic and social orientations in the cultural sphere which in turned merged into the congenial public sphere where sociality joined 'interest' in the discussion of matters of shared concern. Not only would the political identity of the (male) bourgeois allow of effective political action but it would fulfil the human requirement for recognition and for a sense of place and human relationship. In short, the institutional nexus in question would have 'fabricated' subjects (members of the bourgeois class) for whom objectivity (outside) and subjectivity (inside) were continuous in that the world within which these subjects moved (objectivity) could be seen as the outcome of actions by these subjects, or as the product of their subjectivities. So bourgeois subjects could experience themselves as coherent, ordinary subjects.

For the moment, Habermas's work enables us to think about the point of emergence of capitalism as a radically new culture with the material and theoretical-conceptual resources required to sustain relatively durable, stable, self-confident and action-oriented subjectivities; subjects of a kind captured by the term 'Man'. Here was a discourse which, in post-Marxist terms, managed, through the successful

36 Habermas (1992), p. 157.

37 Here I am borrowing Adorno's phrase. See Adorno (1974), p. 16. This interpretation of the bourgeois subject differs from that of e.g. Schneider (1975), chs. 5 - 7. Schneider's bourgeois subject is constituted by abstract, rationalizing institutions and therefore resembles more the possessive or utilitarian subject. See MacPherson (1964). I suggest that MacPherson overstates his case and that the individual posited by him could only have come into being following capitalist industrialization (the real subsumption of labour under capital). The significance of this should become clear in chapter five.

completion of a hegemonic project, to constitute 'nodal points' at the level of both individual and group. This was done through the constitution of 'chains of equivalence' between the subject positions borne by each individual and between the individuals who made up the group. Group and individual, individual and individual, were mutually constitutive in a way which reinforced the sense of coherent subjectivity. The relational aspect of identity is here quite clear. However, what was required for the sense of competence which produced the capacity to act was *also* a strong inner sense of a self, of an essential, unique being who would remain over in his own right, as it were, even in the absence of social relations.

Habermas's work shows both the historical and cultural specificity of a 'human nature' claimed by liberals to be universal, natural, or given.³⁸ It shows, in effect, that the bourgeois subject is constituted by a range of private and public, economic, familial and cultural institutions.³⁹ While Habermas himself does little with the psychoanalytic material - indeed the Oedipal model is scarcely more than mentioned - he does indicate how we can go on to produce better accounts of the fusion of force (both social and psychic) and meaning as manifested in this particular institutional nexus. He also shows that the subject can be decentred without being dissolved. That is to say, it is possible to deconstruct the subject in the way that Habermas does in this work without also concluding that the subject is pure illusion. It is possible to conclude that the historically and culturally specific bourgeois subject was a subject who realized and exercised innate human 'causal powers' or essences; in this case, sociality, rationality and imagination.⁴⁰ Furthermore, we may also provisionally conclude that the bourgeoisie (or at least the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie) engaged in transformative communal action which required the fusion of a specific kind of knowledge and an imperative (moral/affective) sense of group membership.

38 One of the outcomes of this particular hegemonic project was the claim that one culturally specific form of human being represents humanity as such. A defining characteristic of liberal capitalist cultures is the claim to have discovered 'pure' or 'universal' rationality and functionality. This claim secretes the possibility (and has produced the actuality) of essentialism as domination, of the claim that one culturally specific form of human being is the best possible form of human being whom all should strive to emulate. It is in this context that talk about human nature and human causal powers are viewed as politically dangerous.

39 The extent to which a new radical bourgeoisie was in existence during this period is a matter of some controversy. For works which confirm (in broad terms) Habermas' account, see Kramnick (1990) and Eley (1992). According to Eley: 'The value of Habermas's perspective has been fundamentally borne out by recent social history in a variety of fields' (p.294). The researches of Perkin (1985) suggest a different view, namely that the English bourgeoisie was reluctantly radicalized by means of the Corn Laws in 1815.

40 For the account of causal powers invoked here, see Bhaskar (1989a, 1989b). However, it needs stressing that subjectivity of this kind would require continuous effort and self-discipline for its maintenance. It could not be a once for all achievement.

From bourgeois to proletarian subject

The strenuous disciplinary demands of the emergent capitalist culture were secured through the class-specific institutions discussed briefly above. The active social subject was, in this instance, a bourgeois subject. Universalist claims to the contrary notwithstanding, effective participation in the public sphere required a form of cultivation beyond the resources of the non-bourgeois.⁴¹ For the majority, individual conformity to the new disciplinary requirements of emerging industrial production was induced in a variety of ways ranging from early paternalistic arrangements whereby social relations were based on the principle of kinship, to later, more large-scale and impersonal institutions which sought to fabricate disciplined, docile individuals through surveillance, or the 'gaze'.⁴²

However, the bourgeois subject was a fragile and vulnerable achievement.⁴³ As Habermas points out, private and public spheres were marked by ambiguity, or, more strongly, by a contradiction, in the sense that the bourgeois was a privatized individual who was both

owner of goods and persons and one human being among others, i.e., *bourgeois* and *homme*. This ambivalence of the private sphere was also a feature of the public sphere, depending on whether privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings communicated through critical debate in the world of letters, about experiences of their subjectivity or whether private people in their capacity as owners of commodities communicated through rational-critical debate in the political realm, concerning the regulation of their private sphere.⁴⁴

This constitutive contradiction held the likelihood of degeneration into a politics of 'interest'. The inherent dynamic of capitalist culture is to fragment the individual - to render a sense of internal coherence difficult or impossible to achieve. The dichotomies instituted by capitalism - public/private, society/individual - have the effect of forcing

⁴¹ Translation of theoretical into empirical openness would have required a community of petty commodity producers, as Habermas himself points out (p. 86). Note here the conflicts about interpretations of property in relation to citizenship rights during the French Revolution. See, *inter alia*, Comninel (1987); Rose (1983); Rude (1988); Soboul (1964).

⁴² For a brief discussion of the variety of disciplinary procedures used during the nineteenth century, see Perrot (1979). See also Foucault (1979), Pollard (1963) and Thompson (1967, 1978b). According to Thompson (1978b) paternalistic relations were predominant in England until the 1840s. In France, on the other hand, according to Pollard, paternalistic relations survived to a significant extent until the end of the century. The work of Elias (1994) remains an indispensable guide to the long-term emergence of 'discipline'.

⁴³ Cascardi (1992) and Touraine (1995) both describe the bourgeois subject as under permanent threat from the contradictions (between subjectivity and rationalization) of 'modern' culture.

⁴⁴ Habermas (1992), pp. 55 - 6.

the individual into opposition to the social. The individual comes to have 'rights' against other individuals and against 'society' as a whole.⁴⁵ Thus the social becomes that which threatens the individual rather than being the very basis for all forms of individuality. As the social becomes hollowed out, a specialized institution - the state - becomes necessary to reinstate bureaucratically ineliminable social needs. The social then becomes the 'public' in a new bureaucratic (as opposed to Aristotelian/republican) sense.⁴⁶

From the point of view of the totality, the kind of functional, mutually constitutive relationship between different spheres needed to maintain early bourgeois culture would have demanded, in addition to enabling structural conditions, an unprecedented combination of political judgement and skill and of the freedom to exercise such judgement and skill in the appropriate manner. As further differentiation followed with the development of industry, and as mass politics came to replace the elite politics in operation during the period with which Habermas is concerned, the problems of functionality and coordination would become acute and bureaucratic forms of coordination would become increasingly necessary. Now, discipline would have been imprinted through drilling; mastery would have been imposed and would require no sense of an individual 'interior' or 'consciousness' of which the disciplined activity would be the direct expression. Whereas the bourgeois subject would have been the Kantian apparently autonomous individual, the new proletarian subject would have been (ideally) the docile and therefore heteronomous individual. In the final section of this chapter I turn to Althusser for his account of subjectivity as it is constituted under such fragmented and impersonal bureaucratized conditions.

III

From discourse to ideology

Althusser's account is useful here for several reasons. First, it indicates (although it does not systematically develop) a method for articulating psychoanalysis to Marxism. It thereby advances the project of theorizing meaning and materiality in a non-reductive way. Second, it shows how the fragmentation which is one of the defining characteristics of capitalist cultures is institutionally expressed and how integration of the different institutions can somehow be achieved so that the full subject effects of displacement are not experienced. Third, it expresses the subject

45 See Bernstein (1991).

46 Donzelot (1993); Keane (1984).

requirements of organized capitalism and therefore affords the possibility of contrasting different forms of subjectivity in a way which will advance the argument of this thesis. However, it must be noted at the outset that Althusser's attempt to theorize the political significance of cultural membership is no more than an attempt, as he himself notes.⁴⁷ It is an underdeveloped and sometimes contradictory body of work which nevertheless breaks new ground and therefore represents a theoretical breakthrough of great significance. While post-Marxism took up some of the theoretical tasks whose necessity was indicated by Althusser, it also unfortunately abandoned some of his insights. For example, it rejects Althusser's conceptual means of theorizing materiality and meaning - the concept of ideology - on the grounds that it suggests a misleading and politically dangerous essentialism. This essentialism resides, apparently, in Althusser's claim that ideology is a necessary 'level' of social formations which fulfils the 'functional requirements of the logic of reproduction'.⁴⁸ It is the emphasis on functionality and reproduction which causes offence here, since in other respects the concept is doing precisely the same work as does 'discourse' in post-Marxism. However, since, as we have seen, the neglect of functionality induces an idealist tendency in discourse analysis Althusser's preoccupation with functionality is to be welcomed.

As the discussion proceeds, we will notice marked similarities between Althusser's account of identity-formation and that of post-Marxism. Both decentre the subject in a radical sense and both incorporate Lacanian elements into their accounts of subjectivity; both insist on the constitutive role of meaning in social life; both allot a central role to capitalism in the constitution of subjectivities. Nevertheless, post-Marxism theorizes flux and Althusser theorizes fixity (apparently). These differences are overdetermined by both the explicit theoretical-political interests of the writers concerned *and* by the different stages of capitalism which inform their respective analyses. The theorization of fixity is an expression (not sufficiently distanced from its theoretical object as will be argued later) of the constitution of subjectivity during the organized stage of capitalism.⁴⁹

47 Althusser (1984i), n.1, p. 1.

48 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), p. 109. Laclau does acknowledge that the concept remains useful if it is equated with the concept of misrecognition or 'non-recognition of the precarious character of any positivity'. What is in question here is the failure to recognize that the cultural is historical rather than natural. This is one of Marx's usages of the concept which has been incorporated into that of Althusser. Laclau seems unaware of this lineage. See Laclau (1990ii), p. 92.

49 Smith (1984) notes this at the end of his book on Althusser but otherwise makes nothing of it. So it is not accidental that Althusser's work is written before the dissolution of organized capitalism has become manifest and at a time when the rectification of existentialist Marxism and 'socialist humanism' seems a matter of political (therefore theoretical) urgency. Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism and his related ejection of the concept of praxis from his theoretical vocabulary is related to his polemics with humanist Marxism as his much criticized (apparently conventionalist) conception of science can be explained as a response to Stalin's notorious interventions in the realm of science. See Benton (1984); Elliott (1987).

Ideology as culture⁵⁰

'Experience is ideology in action'. Althusser (1996), p. 75

Althusser uses the concept of ideology (ideology 'in general') to argue, against humanists, that individual subjects are not originary, or 'given' but rather, constituted in history, which is to say, in specific spatio-temporal, cultural ways. While Marx had shown that this is the case by pointing to the historical specificity of the atomistic subject, Freud's discovery of the unconscious enables us to produce a more scientific account of this fact of human life.⁵¹ This is the implication of Althusser's statement in the ISAs essay that there is an 'organic link' between his claim for the eternity of ideology and that of Freud relating to the unconscious.⁵² Unfortunately this claim is not supported by argument at this point, although it is discussed in greater detail in 'Freud and Lacan' (FL).⁵³ What we need to note for the moment is that Althusser considers that a Marxist account of subjectivity requires the articulation of psychoanalysis to Marxism.⁵⁴ Freudian psychoanalysis shows up a serious gap in Marxism which it is Althusser's purpose to fill. It shows that subjects cannot be taken for granted but are, rather, the end result of an arduous process of humanization. It is to this fact of human life that the concept of ideology alerts us. Ideology is a concept which embraces power, meaning and materiality.⁵⁵ As will be seen, it refers to culture as organized practices kept in place by relations of power. It is these practices which transform the infant human organism into a subject.

Althusser distinguishes between ideology in general and historically specific ideologies.⁵⁶ The former refers to the necessarily cultural constitution of human

50 Althusser himself equates ideology and culture. See Althusser (1984iii), n.2, p. 154.

51 Althusser (1996).

52 Althusser (1984i), p. 35.

53 Althusser (1984iii).

54 Althusser (1996).

55 This is an aspect of Althusser's work which appears to have escaped the notice of many of his critics, Thompson (1978a) being a notable example here. See Anderson (1980) for a discussion of this. See also Wood (1995).

56 It should be noted at the outset that Althusser's concept of ideology does different theoretical work in different contexts. At times, it is used in relation to the classification of knowledge. Theoretical ideology is theory which is functional for an existing state of affairs and is contrasted with *science* as theory which is oriented to the transformation of (therefore is dysfunctional for) an existing state of affairs. (See Althusser, 1990iii p. 231. See also Collier, 1989; Resch, 1992 for discussions of Althusser's conception of science.) At other times, ideology is used to show how individual subjects are constituted in history, which is to say, in specific spatio-temporal or cultural ways. To complicate matters further, ideology is also occasionally used to refer to science (Marxism) as it comes to guide the revolutionary activity of the proletariat. What these different conceptions of ideology have in common is their reference to the 'practico-social' function. That is to say, ideology is necessarily implicated in practices (in the strong sense i.e. of an immediately practical kind) including revolutionary practices. This is the common element uniting Althusser's usages of the term. The concept of ideology embraces power, meaning and materiality. For positive evaluations of Althusser's account of ideology, see Sprinker (1987). See Therborn (1980) for a serious attempt to develop

individuals as subjects; it is a transhistorical abstraction. The latter refers to the historically and culturally specific forms which cultures take; it is an historical abstraction. I shall here discuss the latter as a capitalist specific historical/empirical abstraction, while noting that different stages of capitalism will necessarily have different ideological characteristics.

Ideology as transhistorical abstraction

Ideology in general has the function of humanizing individual organisms. The way in which it carries out its functions is described by Althusser in terms of three theses. The first point to be noted is that ideology functions by interpellating individuals as subjects. The raw materials on which ideological practice 'labours' are human infants (or infants to-be-humanized), the goal of this labour being the production of specific kinds of subjects '*equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence*'.⁵⁷ Second, this interpellation takes place through practices rather than through concepts or bodies of ideas.⁵⁸ Ideology is not in the first instance about 'consciousness'; it is practiced before it becomes conscious and may never be self-consciously known.⁵⁹ It is the practice of ideology which constitutes consciousness; which in part endows ideology with its 'obviousness' and therefore with its extraordinary power. The importance of this 'obviousness' cannot be overstated and is brought out by Althusser in his use of the concept of the imaginary which leads to the third thesis. This is the claim that ideology constitutes subjects through recognition-misrecognition; it requires subjects to live their ideological (imaginary) relations as natural, obvious, taken-for-granted relations and this state of affairs (the nonconsciousness of the cultural and historical specificity of 'consciousness') is possible because ideology begins to shape the subject-to-be even before his birth. Subjects of a specific kind are formed through practice-driven processes of identification whose real nature must be obscured from the subject if he is to function effectively as a subject i.e. if he is to do what is required of him by his culture.⁶⁰

We need to consider in some detail the third fundamental attribute of ideology, that is, its constitution of real relations as imaginary relations,⁶¹ since the concept of the imaginary is central to Althusser's account of ideology but is the object of repeated

Althusser's ideas in this area. Callinicos (1993), p. 47 finds little of merit in Althusser's work on ideology.

57 Althusser (1990iii), p. 235.

58 Althusser (1984i), p. 39.

59 Althusser (1990iii), p. 233.

60 For more on this, see Castoriadis (1987); Dews (1991). See Touraine (1995) for a different perspective. Strathern (1992) analyzes the problems which arise when the taken-for-grantedness of culture becomes eroded.

61 See Althusser (1984i), pp. 36 - 39. Here 'real' appears to refer to socio-cultural generative mechanisms (not directly experienceable) rather than the Lacanian real.

misunderstanding, encouraging, as it does in its commonsense meaning, the conflation of ideology and illusion.⁶² The recognition/misrecognition moment which characterizes the imaginary is a more accurate characterization of the character of ideological (cultural) membership.⁶³ It will be necessary to discuss Althusser's (highly selective) appropriation of psychoanalysis in order to show why this is the case.

Marxism and psychoanalysis

For Althusser, psychoanalysis affords Marxism the means of producing a non-reductive account of subjectivity.⁶⁴ He sees, though, that if psychoanalysis is to play this role, it must be cleansed of the kind of 'functionalism' to be found in American (ego-centred) adaptations of the theory, whether this functionalism takes the form of biologism or sociologism.⁶⁵ For Althusser, it is Lacan who heroically attempts to return psychoanalysis to its original Freudian purity by reinstating the unconscious as its fundamental theoretical object. What the return to the unconscious signifies for Althusser is the precarious hold exerted upon the individual by the socio-cultural. In reinstating the unconscious, Lacan is at the same time reinstating 'the "effects", prolonged into the surviving adult, of the extraordinary adventure which from birth to the liquidation of the Oedipal phase transforms a small animal conceived by a man and a woman into a small human child.'⁶⁶ Humanization is 'the long forced march which makes mammiferous larvae into human children, *masculine* or *feminine subjects*.'⁶⁷ Note the language here ('mammiferous larvae') which suggests a radical discontinuity between the to-be-made-human infant and the human being as subject. Note also the language of war, of victimhood, of 'wounds suddenly opening again in psychotic explosion' which suggests that humanization is *nothing but* suffering for the infant. The infant posited by Althusser (following Lacan) appears to be wholly nonhuman (pure animality), as resistant to the disciplines and as blind to the joys of

62 The equation of ideology with culture precludes its equation with illusion. Illusion appears with the theoretical naturalization of culture (theoretical ideology).

63 Althusser's privileging of the imaginary is related to his political project of denaturalizing capitalist culture (particularly as it is manifested in 'socialist humanism') so as to enhance its contradictoriness. Althusser (1990iii).

64 See Althusser (1984iii) p. 143. Sève (1978) offers the most systematic and convincing arguments for the claim (rejected by 'orthodox' Marxists) that Marxism needs a psychology. While acknowledging certain fundamental compatibilities between psychoanalysis and Marxism, he rules the former out because of its neglect, as he sees it, of labour. However, Sève's objection loses its force once it is accepted that Freud does in fact open the way to theorizing labour (precisely in Marx's usage of this term) by means of the concept of sublimation. This will be discussed in chapter eight.

65 See Lacan (1980ii); also Greenberg & Mitchell (1983).

66 Althusser (1984iii), p. 157. There is a voluminous literature on this. See Freud (1984fvi); Lacan (1980). For further discussions see, *inter alia*, the papers in McCabe (1981); Mitchell (1974, 1984); Rose (1986); Wilden (1980).

67 Althusser (1984iii), p. 158.

humanization as we must assume other kinds of animals to be.⁶⁸ Put another way, the relationship between individual and socio-cultural (i.e. the pre-existing world of humanized social relations) appears to be contradictory somewhat in the sense discussed in chapter two.⁶⁹

In relation to this point, it is important to note that Althusser celebrates and adopts Lacan's structural-linguistic interpretation of the Oedipal complex as conveyed by the centrality of the symbolic and the signifying chain.⁷⁰ The infant is humanized primarily by the 'Law of the Symbolic', or of 'Culture'. It is this Law which constitutes the unconscious and therefore subjectivity. The linguistic account of the formation of the unconscious⁷¹ is intended to counteract the biologism of certain forms of psychoanalysis by privileging the social or symbolic moment in the constitution of the subject, thereby stressing the discontinuity between the biological and the symbolic. We should note here the contrast with the psychoanalytic account suggested by Habermas; one which stresses lived, directly experienced and face-to-face relations with biological parents. The significance of this contrast will be explored further in chapter eight.

Althusser celebrates Lacan's linguistic emphasis while at the same time remaining highly selective in his adoption of Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁷² This selectiveness relates to his privileging of the imaginary, rather than the symbolic, in characterizing the small child's entry into culture. Lacan presents the imaginary as the moment in which the child recognizes himself as a separate, apparently independent entity. However, this moment of recognition is also a moment of misrecognition in that the child has not yet reached the stage at which he can function independently of his mother. For Lacan, this is a pre-cultural moment (because of its imagistic and pre-linguistic character) and therefore prior to the emergence of the subject. For Althusser it constitutes both the founding constitutive moment and the necessary means of understanding the true character of cultural membership.

This moment matters to Althusser because he wants to stress, first, the simultaneity of *recognition/misrecognition* which marks all human cultural membership and second, the pre-linguistic character of ideology. The imaginary moment takes place at a time when the apparently natural relationship between the human infant and its mother has not been broken up by the intrusion of the father. To bring together the concepts of imaginary and ideology as Althusser does is to underline his rejection of any unmediated, natural, biological relationship between

68 The difference is that this particular kind of animal, unlike other kinds of animals, has the potential to be humanized. Nothing much is concluded from this remarkable distinctiveness, though.

69 See Freud (1985iv) for an account of this contradiction.

70 Althusser (1984iii), p. 159.

71 See Lacan (1979), p. 20.

72 See Lock (1996); Macey (1994).

human beings, even the apparently most universal and natural relationship of the mother and her infant. As we noted before, the child becomes a member of his culture through practices which begin to form his subjectivity in advance of the acquisition of language, 'consciousness' and 'self-consciousness'. It is for this reason that ideology retains its great power, even where the most self-conscious and systematic attempts are made to overcome it. Althusser's account of the process of cultural incorporation is intended to aid such attempts by alerting us to the *real* character and power of the processes whereby the socio-cultural constitutes subjects.⁷³

To sum up, ideology is the law of culture whereby the humanization of the small biological being is effected. Ideologies are the cultural-historical, specific, particular forms which this humanization takes. The imaginary captures the 'second nature', obvious, taken-for-granted, apparently unmediated character of human relationships which are, in fact, from the very beginning, ideologically (culturally or discursively) constituted. Althusser's retention and privileging of the imaginary signals the importance of the simultaneity of recognition/misrecognition as the identifying characteristic of ideology. Ideology is that which allows the small (to be humanized) being to recognize himself (his place, relations etc.) as 'natural', as 'autonomous', as 'given', or, to 'misrecognize' the ideological-cultural-social as natural. The impersonal 'Law of the Father' is imposed through impersonal cultural force on an individual having no attributes, apparently, apart from the urge to resist. However, whereas vacancy becomes an active sense of 'lack' in the Lacanian model, it appears at times to translate into infinite malleability in the Althusserian account, as we will see.

Lacanian psychoanalysis emphasizes both the *weight* and the *fragility* of the cultural or symbolic. The cultural is weighty because it is the very bedrock of the subject. The cultural is fragile because of innate human resistance to humanization. Althusser theorizes (capitalist) culture's weightiness in terms of the ISAs. He does not theorize adequately (or indeed at all) this resistance to humanization which he notes so vividly in FL. We have traced its source to the Lacanian notion of the 'lack' in our discussion of post-Marxism in chapter three. This interpretation will be scrutinized further in chapter eight and we will return to this question of the apparent docility of the proletarian subject, in chapter nine. For the moment, we need merely note that given the alleged resistance to humanization, and the multiplicity of contradictions found in capitalist cultures (as discussed in chapter two), the fixing of the individual in one stable cultural form of subjectivity so that reliable and predictable behaviour can be guaranteed is a hazardous process whose outcome cannot be assured. Althusser's essay on the ISAs is an attempt to show how successful outcomes (from a systemic point of view) may be achieved.

73 See Resch (1992) for an account of Althusser as realist.

Ideology as historical abstraction: The ideological state apparatuses (ISAs).⁷⁴

The ISAs essay constitutes Althusser's most sustained (but nevertheless programmatic) account of the ideological constitution of individuals as subjects.⁷⁵ This is also an account which, through the concept of the ISAs, allows us to think about institutionally separated dimensions of capitalist culture - subjective and objective, meaning and force, public and private - within a common conceptual framework. In this essay Althusser attempts to expand on the few lines written by Gramsci about ideology in the *Prison Notebooks*⁷⁶ and, as did Gramsci, Althusser relates his account of ideology to an expanded Marxist account of the state. That is to say, what we find is the claim that the state is not merely repressive but needs to be seen as having a range of ideological functions related, in the first instance, to the unavoidable species need for humanization and, in the second instance, to the specific need of the capitalist mode of production for a unifying coordinating institution capable of guaranteeing that the necessary practices of the capitalist totality will hold together so as to ensure reproduction. What this means is that the state must be capable of having the 'infrastructural power'⁷⁷ needed to achieve effects in every sphere of activity. Althusser's listing of the ISAs is an expression of this need.⁷⁸

Here it is important to return to the concept of totality. This concept becomes theoretically significant when human groups no longer function as unself-conscious totalities whose parts cohere through regular embodied, concrete, face-to-face relations. A tribe will be a 'real-concrete' totality for whose members functional failures or crises will be immediately, experientially apparent and for which explanations (however inadequate we may consider them to be) will be readily available. Here humanization is effected routinely; it is a process which changes only slowly and unself-consciously. Productive, familial, cultural tasks are all of a piece in a culture which is not fragmented into dedicated, specialized spheres of activity which are separated both in time and space. Social relations, skills and orientations are reproduced 'on the spot' in a self-evident, obvious way.

74 Read carelessly and in isolation from CO, Althusser's essay on the ISAs can be charged with functionalism. See Barrett (1993); Callinicos (1976); Collier (1979); Johnson (1979). Such a charge is without foundation, though, when we recall Althusser's concern to eliminate functionalist thinking from Marxism by way of the ejection of Hegelianism and economism. As noted earlier in this chapter, the maintenance of functionality between the different spheres of practice which constitute the capitalist totality requires the most demanding combination of accurate knowledge of relations between the spheres, good political judgement and the power to exercise that judgement. The ISAs essay assumes this combination but it does not thereby involve functionalism. See Lock (1996), who offers a more nuanced analysis than those cited above. For a useful discussion of Marxism and functionalism see Noble (1984).

75 At the same time, it is merely an outline of a research project.

76 Gramsci (1971), pp. 375 - 7; Althusser (1990i), p. 114.

77 See Mann (1984).

78 Althusser (1984i), p. 17.

Capitalism lacks the immediacy and transparency of earlier modes of production, as we have seen. In contrast to all earlier cultures, reproduction of the total capitalist way of life is carried on in different spheres so the production of the required kinds of subjects becomes an extremely onerous task. It is a problem whose solution is partly secured by first, the creation and maintenance of a coordinating institution - the state - which is capable of ensuring that systemic requirements are met and second, by constituting a radically new kind of subject, one who can and will do the right thing all by himself (although this requirement must be modified in relation to the proletarian subject). Fragmentation will be expressed to a greater or lesser degree in social and geographical mobility which dissolves the kind of density and 'multiplexity' of social relations which, in pre-capitalist cultures ensure an ongoing and sustaining process of reinforcement of subjectivities of the required kind.⁷⁹ Fragmentation has the strong tendency to eliminate the kind of concrete 'fixing' of identities and activities found in relatively static cultures in which individuals are enmeshed in overlapping and mutually-reinforcing directly experienced social relations.⁸⁰ The subject constituted by industrial capitalism is a radically separate, individuated and apparently autonomous subject. He is the embodiment of a radically new kind of culture, of a nexus of force and meaning which is maintained (insofar as it is maintained) under the supervision of the state. As discussed in chapters two and three above, the contradictory character of capitalist cultures represents a permanent source of volatility, of the interruption or subversion of the process of subject constitution. As should be clear from the Lacanian analysis of subjectivity which Althusser attempts to articulate to his account of ideology in general, an additional source of volatility is located in the apparent resistance of the individual organism to the process of humanization (although I shall be arguing in later chapters that these two are connected).

It should be abundantly clear, then, that cultural incorporation (the constitution of subjectivity) cannot be a seamless, coherent and totally successful process in capitalist cultures. What is required is that the multiplicity of different institutions (apparatuses) and practices which make up the totality be governed by the same ideology, so that the individual is subjected to interpellations which are mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory.⁸¹ If such ideological control or closure is effected, a relatively coherent and obedient subject *may* be produced because ideology will retain the 'obviousness' or taken-for-grantedness which gives it its great power.

79 See Urry (1985).

80 Calhoun (1991) is useful on this question.

81 It is in this way that we can understand Althusser's controversial claim (derived from Gramsci) that the ISAs traverse the 'public' and 'private' realm. In any case, 'public' and 'private' are politically enforced distinctions and boundaries which may be (and have been) changed from time to time. See Kanth (1986).

However, as we know, such ideological closure is impossible in capitalist cultures because of their constitutive contradictory character.

In any case, Althusser's turn to psychoanalysis suggests that we must go beyond the notion of ideological closure in order to understand the power and durability of cultural membership. In this respect his work contains, by implication at least, two different accounts of the constitution of subjects. The first, with its emphasis on familial ideology and the Oedipal model, appears to accept the Freudian account which centres on identifications and cathexis (to be discussed further in chapter eight). The Freudian model requires a painful and long-drawn out process of accommodation to the reality principle (the resolution of the Oedipus complex) which produces the bourgeois subject. Through the resolution of the Oedipal complex the individual manages, however precariously, to reconcile his need for gratification with specific cultural requirements. At the same time, the individual comes to develop a strong sense of a self with enduring and specific inner 'contents'. The constitution of the apparently autonomous subject is a process of active and painful engagement between the subject and others, in particular the father, with whom the subject has an ambivalent relationship. This is a highly personal, affect-laden process. An account of this process will be offered in chapter eight. For the moment, it need only be noted that the subject posited by Althusser, while requiring, apparently, the sense of autonomy required by bourgeois subjects (for whom actions are the product of deliberations internal to that subject), appears in fact to be capable of having little sense of self beyond that constituted by a strong resistance to humanization.

However, there is (again by implication) a second model of subject-constitution in Althusser's ISAs essay. This is encapsulated in Althusser's paraphrase of Pascal's thought: "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe".⁸² This formulation implies a total malleability on the part of the individual. It also implies though that cultural values are internalized. In this sense it is compatible with the ego psychology which Althusser, following Lacan, wishes to see overturned.⁸³ In certain respects (internalization apart) it resonates with behaviourist rather than psychoanalytic accounts of humanization and with mechanical materialism rather than realism. To this degree, it is (quite significantly) congruent with Foucault's account of the production of docility.⁸⁴ Althusser's own explanation of this as a 'reshuffle', rather than an 'inversion' of idealism is wholly unpersuasive, amounting, as it does, to

82. Althusser (1990i), p. 42. We should note here as well Hirst's criticism that Althusser himself has not completely escaped the 'humanist' account of subjectivity since he assumes a coherent subject whose 'consciousness' and actions are congruent. See Hirst (1979). However, this would appear to confirm rather than refute Althusser's account of ideology.

83 See Jacobson (1954) for an account of identification produced by imitation and therefore apparently compatible with Althusser's formulation just cited. Richards (1989b), ch. 2 is useful on this question.

84 Foucault (1979).

no more than a verbal trick. Not only is this model incongruent with Althusser's own project of dethroning mechanical materialism, but it is irreconcilable with the account of humanization offered in 'FL' and belied earlier in the ISAs essay by the reference to the 'teeth-gritting... "harmony"' secured by the ISAs.⁸⁵

I suggest that Althusser's account of subject-constitution is contradictory for two related reasons. First, it expresses in a rather unsystematic and radically underdeveloped way the fact that capitalism institutes different kinds of subjectivity i.e. bourgeois (early liberal), proletarian (organized) and decentred (disorganized). Second, the rudimentary and sketchy character of Althusser's psychoanalytic borrowings prevents him from noticing Lacan's departures from Freud; departures which might have alerted him to empirical differences in subjectivities. An interrogation of Lacan's claimed return to Freud (which will be undertaken in chapter eight) will point us in the direction of a fuller explanation of the rather strange state of affairs uncovered in chapter three. It will suggest the possibility (already implicit in Althusser's 'imprinting model') that capitalist cultures may bind individuals purely through social force, through habituation and overt coercion, rather than through cathexis. If this is the case, then political commitment can scarcely be expected to manifest itself. However, the question of internalization and the proletarian subject will be taken up again in chapter nine.

Before concluding, I need to point out that Althusser's work, like that of post-Marxism, is flawed in that it tends to conflate transhistorical and historical abstractions. More specifically, Althusser is taking Lacanianism as an account of subjectivity *tout court* when in fact it is an account of *capitalist* forms of subjectivity, as has been suggested in chapter three and will be argued further in chapter eight. The result is a naturalization of the cultural and the effacement of the total novelty of capitalist culture.

In ways which will be explored further in chapter five capitalism is historically deviant in terms not only of the radically fragmented culture which it necessarily institutes but of the character of subjectivity and experience which results from that fragmentation. While Althusser does not concern himself unduly with the radical novelty of capitalism in terms of the *experience* which it provides for the populations it shapes, he does occasionally make reference to it.⁸⁶ For example, he notes in *Reading Capital*: 'history has reached the point and produced the exceptional, specific present in which *scientific abstractions exist in the state of empirical realities*, in which science and scientific concepts exist in the form of the *visible* part of experience as so many directly accessible *truths*.'⁸⁷ Certain passages in 'Is it simple to be a Marxist in

⁸⁵ Althusser (1984i), p. 24.

⁸⁶ Geras (1971), pp. 73 - 77.

⁸⁷ Althusser & Balibar (1970), p. 124.

philosophy?' offer further examples. In this essay, Althusser notes how capitalist relations in different spheres of activity 'abstract' from the real man 'in order to treat him as a simple "bearer of the legal relation", as a simple subject of law, capable of owning property, even if the only property which he possesses is that of his naked labour power.' Note the following:

[T]he man of production, considered as an agent of production, *is only that* for the capitalist mode of production; he is determined as a simple 'support' of a relation, as a simple 'bearer of functions', completely anonymous and interchangeable, for if he is a worker he may be thrown into the street, and if he is a capitalist he may make a fortune or go bankrupt. In all cases he must submit to the law of a production relation, which is a relation of exploitation, therefore an antagonistic class relation; he must submit to the law of this relation and its effects. If you do not submit the individual concrete determinations of proletarians and capitalists, their 'liberty' or their personality to a theoretical 'reduction', then you will understand nothing of the terrible practical 'reduction' to which the capitalist production relation submits individuals, treating them only as bearers of economic functions and nothing else.⁸⁸

Human beings are subjected to the tyranny of the many abstractions required by capitalist production. These abstractions in the form of specialized legal, political and ideological relations 'brand men in their flesh and blood, just as the production relation does.'⁸⁹ This paper of Althusser's reflects quite powerfully Marx's intuitions about the strange character of capitalist institutions, as will be seen in chapter five. Unfortunately, this aspect of capitalist social relations is not explicitly theorized in Althusser's work on ideology, although it is indirectly (and probably unwittingly) expressed in the choice of Lacanianism. In general, though, Althusser has a regrettable tendency to forget about the novelty of capitalism and he does not explicitly theorize this as a problem for the constitution of political commitment to challenging collective tasks. As we will see in chapter seven, Gramsci will afford the material to fill this particular gap.

In conclusion, I return to Habermas's work on the public sphere to bring out some relevant aspects of the institutions of organized capitalism not noted by Althusser.

⁸⁸ Althusser (1990v), p. 238.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The structural transformation of the public sphere

If we follow the logic of Habermas's argument about the structural transformation of the public sphere, we will note two aspects of institutional change which are not brought into view in Althusser's analysis; namely, the family and culture.⁹⁰ Changes in these areas contributed to the transition from the active bourgeois subject to the passive and 'privatized' proletarian subject whose character is expressed in Althusser's dictum: 'kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe'. In fact, Habermas, following the analysis of various members of the Frankfurt School, dated the decline of the bourgeois subject to the transition from liberal to organized capitalism, a transition which transformed the family head from independent property owner to functionary in a system over which he had no control. In addition, the cultural sphere was transformed through a new kind of commodification which altered the content of cultural products so that these were no longer of the kind needed - educational, critical, challenging - to constitute the introspective, critical subject. Now cultural products were designed to amuse, to entertain, to pacify, rather than to stimulate and educate. They debilitated or rendered empty and vacant the individuals who consumed them, therefore reinforcing the debilitating effects produced by changes in the industrial production process.⁹¹

Althusser's account of the ISAs complements the 'culture industry' account provided by the Frankfurt School.⁹² Both are accounts of the different institutional mechanisms whereby docile proletarian subjects are produced. This is not to deny that there are major differences between the French and German authors here. For one, the Frankfurt School takes seriously the existence of the bourgeois subject and sees the emergence of the docile subject in terms of decline. Yes, individuals are shaped in a profound sense by socio-historical factors, but the individual is not exhausted in the cultural. There is an intransigent remainder which is not merely the unhumanized, unhumanizable Lacanian real.⁹³ Althusser, through the ideas of 'misrecognition' stresses the 'irreality' of all subjects. His hostility to 'humanism' prevents him from engaging in a comparative evaluation of subjectivities in terms of

90 But Althusser does express awareness of the importance of familial ideology, perhaps here marking some unease at the Lacanian abstraction of culture by means of the symbolic. See Althusser (1984iii), p. 163, n. 4.

91 Habermas (1992), ch. 6.

92 It should be noted here that, Foucault's repudiation of Marxism notwithstanding, his account of the disciplines makes sense in terms of the trajectory delineated by the Frankfurt School. As Foucault acknowledged towards the end of his life, he would have spared himself much labour had he been acquainted with the work of the Frankfurt School. See Poster (1984). See Adorno & Horkheimer (1979) pp. xiv-xv, 154, 155 for strong statements which prefigure Foucault's account of power, discipline and the decentred subject.

93 Adorno & Horkheimer (1979), p. 241.

their humanizing/dehumanizing effects.⁹⁴ However, this anti-humanism (in the strong version which he appears to espouse⁹⁵) is in itself only thinkable under conditions produced by capitalism, as will be made clear in subsequent chapters. Furthermore (and here Althusser's critics are correct) this strong version of anti-humanism precludes the possibility of transformative action of the kind looked for by Althusser himself. Here the failure to be sufficiently historical becomes quite crucial.

Conclusion

Two tasks have been undertaken in this chapter, both intended to fill some of the lacunae - relating to the failure to consider discourse as institution - in post-Marxism's account of subjectivity. First, a general account of institutions - derived from the work of Castoriadis - was provided. This afforded the theoretical means of acknowledging the constitutive role of discourse without at the same time effacing materiality and functionality. At the same time, we have been alerted to a peculiar characteristic of capitalist cultures i.e. their claim to have discovered pure functionality as expressed in Castoriadis's concept of identitary-assemblist logic. Second, an analysis of two different accounts of the institutional expression of capitalism's uniquely fragmented culture were provided. The first of these - Habermas's exploration of the bourgeois subject - initiates reflection on the subject requirements for the constitution of political commitment in capitalism's fragmented culture. We need to register here the character of experience - not yet overwhelmed by the abstract and impersonal - which constitutes the bourgeois subject. Recall that the bourgeois public sphere is a congenial public sphere of largely face-to-face relationships. During this early stage of capitalism - before the real subsumption of labour under capital - the social bond remains visible and directly experienceable. The second account - that of Althusser - introduces the notion of the proletarian subject who is apparently *both* resistant to humanization (a-social) *and* docile. This docility appears to be the the outcome of internalization induced by habituation. Matters are far from clear, though. It is necessary to conclude that Althusser's account of subjectivity is underdeveloped and apparently contradictory. In order to benefit from it, a more systematic analysis of the social relations (and therefore subjectivities) constituted by capitalist cultures is required. Finally, in order to understand the problem of political commitment we need to historicize subjectivity without reducing it to pure illusion. We need to consider the ways in which different

94 Althusser (1990iii).

95 But see Althusser (1984ii, pp. 84, 85; 1990v) where a weaker version is implied. See also Sprinker (1987).

forms of subjectivity serve to develop or stunt specific human causal powers. This will require the strengthening of both the institutional and the psychoanalytic components of the accounts offered by Habermas and Althusser. This task will be begun in chapter five, where a return to Marx's account of pure capitalism will lay the basis for understanding the cultural specificity of the Lacanian concept of lack and therefore of the resistance to humanization which we have found naturalized in the work of Althusser and post-Marxism.

Chapter five

The radical imaginary of pure capitalism

Introduction

The task to be undertaken in this chapter is an investigation of Marx's account of pure capitalism as developed in *Capital 1*. In this work, Marx carries out a thought experiment consisting in the creation of capitalism as a closed system. The purpose of imagining the institutionalization of pure capitalism is to arrive at knowledge of capitalism's innate powers and tendencies and to set out the likely effects of the full realization of these powers and tendencies. This is capitalism instituted so as to render a population maximally functional for the production of surplus value. What this requires is the institution of fetishized social relations. *Capital I* is read here as an account of such relations. From this point of view, Marx's account of capitalism, far from being an outdated analysis applicable only to the nineteenth century, as Laclau claims,¹ remains the necessary basis of an account of disorganized capitalism since it is only with the advent of disorganized capitalism that fetishized relations become virtually fully instituted in liberal capitalist cultures.²

We have noted in previous chapters that capitalism is a culture which fragments human activity and dispositions in a wholly novel way. It is now time to engage in a more precise exploration of this culture in terms of the social relations and therefore subjects which it constitutes. As was suggested in chapter four, a major clue is provided by Althusser who notes that '*scientific abstractions exist in the state of empirical realities*'.³ This state of affairs will be investigated now by means of Marx's account of pure capitalism. Having examined this account, we will be in a better position to appreciate the significance of Althusser's analysis in terms of the problem at hand.

Pure capitalism will be read here as a mode of production which naturalizes and universalizes identitary-assemblist logic through the institutionalization of abstractions. The argument to be pursued in a later chapter will be that disorganized capitalism represents the nearest equivalent to date to the pure form of capitalism. This is what helps to account for the apparent vacancy, fluidity and lack of sociality of the decentred subjects described by post-Marxism and other post-structuralist writers.⁴ The subject effects in question may be described under two broad headings. First, there is the divorce of subjectivity and objectivity which diminishes the

1 Laclau (1990i), pp. 5 - 41.

2 Lukács (1971ii) offers the best account of this.

3 Althusser & Balibar (1970), p. 124.

4 Foucault (1979). For a criticism, see Honneth (1995), ch. 6.

individual cognitively. Second, the divorce of society and the individual diminishes the individual socially and affectively. These effects have been conventionally described under the rubrics of fetishization and alienation.⁵ The institutions which bring them about will be described in this chapter. The claim that transformative communal action - and therefore the (individual) capacity to form binding commitments to the achievement of collective goals - requires the overcoming of these effects will be made and developed in chapter six.

Marx and the theory of pure capitalism

The radical imaginary of capitalism and the 'everydayness' which it institutes will be explored here by means of Marx's theory of 'pure' capitalism as discussed in chapter two above. Marx was the first theorist to attempt a comprehensive institutional evaluation of capitalism. This evaluation is read here as an account, not of a specialized form of activity carried in in a dedicated 'economic' sphere, but as a total way of life, or culture.⁶ Marx's theory of 'pure' capitalism is developed most systematically in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. While these works will be the *primary* focus of attention, it will be necessary to refer back to the earlier, more explicitly philosophical works so as to avoid economizing the later texts. As Kosik points out: 'The relationship of economics and philosophy is not just another partial aspect of Marx's work ... Rather, it provides access to the very *essence* and *specificity* of *Capital*'.⁷ Alertness to the philosophical components of the apparently purely *economic* concepts used by Marx will ensure against loss of awareness of the overall project of these works which is to reveal the nature of the radical discontinuity between capitalism and all previous cultures.⁸

The source of this pure capitalism is the theory and practice of industrial capitalism as it was institutionalized in nineteenth century England. It was at this time and in this place that liberal industrial capitalism found its first systematic theoretical and institutional expression. But since complete institutionalization was resisted in the first instance by the determined attempts to reinstate pre-industrial modes of production and, in the second instance, by working-class struggles against commodification, it cannot be said that 'pure' capitalism was the outcome of this

5 See Lukács (1971i); Mészáros (1975); Ollman (1976); Postone (1993).

6 See Dupre (1983); D'Amico (1981); Lichtman (1982), ch. 7.

7 Kosik (1976) p. 97. See also Dupre (1983) and Hyppolite (1969). Sève (1978) offers an excellent account of the way in which early philosophical concerns (in this case specifically about the concept of 'man') 'pass into' the later Marxian work. See especially ch. 2.

8 Cohen (1982); Lefort (1978). As Cohen points out, *Capital* can be read as a cautionary tale about the kind of world which pure capitalism would institutionalize, if left unchecked. Cohen (1975) points out the danger of conflating logical and sociological categories.

process.⁹ Nineteenth century England had the character of a social formation rather than pure mode of production. This needs to be borne in mind throughout this discussion. What is in question in this chapter is *not* a sociology of nineteenth century English capitalism but rather an account of capitalism's innate properties and therefore strong tendencies; tendencies whose realization depends on the presence or absence of counteracting tendencies deriving either from pre-capitalist cultures or from new forms of anti-capitalist cultures emerging out of capitalism itself.

It is important to note that the representation of capital in *Capital I* is a critical representation. The social relations institutionalized by capitalism are assessed both in relation to those which have preceded capitalism and those that are possible and desirable given the potential displayed by humanity as a species and given the most complete expression of that potential under capitalism itself. The representation constitutes a critique made from the point of view of the achievement of a radical collective goal of universal human emancipation.¹⁰ This goal was only conceivable because Marx held that human beings have certain essential 'species specific' capacities. The discussion of 'pure' capitalism is developed so as to understand the character of a specific culture (industrial capitalism) from the point of view of a 'species being' possessing species specific capacities whose simultaneous realization and stultification (dehumanization) is effected by that specific historical culture. It will be necessary, then, to grasp Marx's conception of 'species being' as a preliminary to exploring further his account of pure capitalism. It will be seen that this conception is understandable in relation to the emergence of the bourgeois subject, as discussed in chapter four.

Marx's Account of Human Nature

Marx's critique of capitalism and his revolutionary project derive from his Aristotelian view of human nature as an organism whose distinguishing characteristic is the potential for action on and in the world.¹¹ This is 'human nature in general' which is 'modified in each historical epoch'.¹² What is distinctively human about human nature (as opposed to the rest of nature) is this capacity to act creatively on nature so as to produce a world.

9 See Calhoun (1982); Kumar (1988), ch. 6; Polanyi (1957).

10 McCarney (1990).

11 Note though, the expansion of the concept of *action* by Marx to incorporate directly useful (functional) productive as well as political and theoretical activity. This characterization of materially productive activity marked a radical departure from all previous social theory. See Dupre (1983) for more on this. For more on Marx and Aristotle see Gilbert (1984); Margolis (1992); McCarthy (1992); Meikle (1985).

12 Marx (1976a), p. 759. See Lichtman (1982), ch. 3.

Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity.¹³

The essence of human nature lies in its capacity for developing 'consciousness' and thereby for engaging in 'free activity'.¹⁴ Human capacities 'in general' or 'outside of history' are discussed by Marx by way of concepts of 'power' (*Kraft*) and 'need' (*Bedürfnis*). 'Natural powers' (capacities, functions, abilities) are those which human beings share with other animals; 'species powers' are those which make human beings uniquely human. Species powers are always in the process of change; they are *potentials*.¹⁵ Human need is need for something outside the individual; it is need for an object. The human being is an object with powers which are only realizable through other human beings possessing similar powers, as well as through other natural and humanly created objects. It is through relations between human beings and the rest of nature that human species powers are developed. Natural powers constitute the basis or framework, as well as constraint, within which species powers are developed. In fact, this distinction between natural and species powers is an analytical rather than empirical distinction. The human senses are clearly natural powers; however they are always exercised in a human, socio-historical (cultural) way. Whereas all human beings share a 'species-character', the way in which and the extent to which this human potential is realized or stunted is culturally and historically specific. Human nature is also always *socio-cultural* nature and *socio-cultural* nature is also always *historical*. The *cultural* character of human activity is expressed by Marx as follows: 'the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail, tooth'.¹⁶ The *social* dimension is expressed as follows:

Man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society. Production by isolated individuals outside of society - something which might happen as an exception to a civilized man who by accident got into the wilderness and already dynamically possessed within himself the forces of society - is as great an absurdity as the idea of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another.¹⁷

13 Marx (1977), p. 68.

14 Petrovic (1988).

15 Ollman (1976).

16 Marx (1973b), p. 92.

17 Quoted by Ollman (1976), p. 105, from Introduction, Marx (1973b), p. 84. (I have used Ollman's translation here.)

The *historical* dimension of human nature is expressed in a striking fashion by Marx as follows: 'The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.'¹⁸

The human essence, says Marx in the Sixth Thesis, 'is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations'.¹⁹ It is *not* 'an inner, mute, general character which unites the many individuals *in a natural way*'.²⁰ What unites human beings is their sociality; it is only through *social* being that the 'species being' of humans is realized. The *essence* of human beings is creativity (or, more accurately, the capacity to transform - rather than merely reproduce - what is given) which is only activated by means of *social relations*. More strongly, the impulse to create is (necessarily) related to the need for recognition from and relationship with other human beings. It is social relations which transform the human animal into the human being.²¹ Freedom is the socially available opportunity to develop one's many-faceted capacities in relation to other human beings. It is the outcome of specific kinds of social relationships which may or may not be found in particular cultures; the active unfolding and expression of a variety of powers and needs. Insofar as opportunities exist for the cultivation of human (therefore social) 'free conscious activity', a culture will be 'rich'; insofar as such opportunities are unavailable, a culture will be 'poor'. The more 'needs' one has, the more richly human one becomes.²²

The interpretation of Marx's conception of human nature is subject to intense controversy, marked by extreme opposing positions which privilege either an 'essentialist' (humanist) Marx or a 'scientific' (anti-humanist) Marx.²³ Both positions are easily supported by quotations from Marx's own works as will be obvious from the above. The *Paris Manuscripts* is full of statements which offer support to the 'essentialist' viewpoint; the *Theses on Feuerbach* as well as remarks scattered throughout the mature works, offer support for the 'scientific' viewpoint. However, these dichotomous terms are incapable of capturing the dialectical character of both

18 Marx (1977), p. 96.

19 Marx (1976b), pp. 3 - 11. See Marcuse (1972ii) for an excellent discussion of the concept of essence. This is an argument against the 'reduction of the problem of essence to one of logic and epistemology' (p. 47) in favour of a usage which relates to 'the critical consciousness of "bad" facticity, of unrealized potentialities' (p. 46.)

20 Marx & Engels (1976), p. 4.

21 See Kosik (1976), ch. 3 on the dialectic of animality and humanity in Marx.

22 See Heller (1976) on the philosophical and economic use of these terms by Marx; also Mészáros (1975, 1995).

23 Geras (1983); Soper (1986) stress the continuity in Marx's work on this question. Discontinuity is claimed most forcefully by Althusser (1970, 1990iv). See Depew (1992), Margolis (1992), for opposing accounts, Aristotelian essentialist and unAristotelian historicist respectively. See Castoriadis (1978) and Garnett (1995), both of whom, from quite different points of view, identify *both* essentializing *and* historicizing elements in Marx's work.

Marx's account of human nature and of the relationship between his early and late works.²⁴

Marx's conception is neither humanist in the sense that he holds to a *fixed* human nature with determinate, universal forms of social being; nor 'scientific' in the sense of a refusal to posit any innate human characteristics. It is, rather, a kind of realism (transcendental critical realism) in the sense that it is a claim that entities (social and natural) have *real* capacities or powers which may or may not be realized or exercised at the level of *actuality*.²⁵ As does Marx, transcendental critical realism holds to an ontology of 'levels'; beneath the empirical level of the *actual*, there is a generative or real level at which we find *real* powers, innate capacities or properties. These powers, capacities or properties may or may not be activated so as to produce phenomena, processes or events at the level of the *actual*. The *real* level is arrived at through an inferential process of conceptual analysis beginning at the level of the empirical.²⁶ The essential human attribute of creativity can be inferred from the great variety of social forms, relationships and artefacts found in history. This realist approach is congruent with the apparently contradictory claims of Marx cited above, the claims that all human beings share a species character *and* that human nature is an 'ensemble of social relations'. Individual members of the species can only be humanized in the myriad forms of social relations revealed in the historical record because they possess innate species powers which render them open to such humanization.

Marx's conception of essence is also strongly Aristotelian and if we bear this in mind we can avoid a misunderstanding of his language of 'necessity' as a deterministic language. Necessity in the Aristotelian sense is related to the essence of a thing and refers to changes which develop that essence in contradistinction to 'accidental' changes which either hinder or do not advance that development.²⁷

So, for Marx, human beings are creatures with the innate capacity for creativity and sociality; they can produce a great variety of needs as well as a great diversity of social relations and of material and ideal entities for the satisfaction of those needs. However, this capacity requires social conditions of realization. It is expressed or suppressed in a great variety of historically and culturally specific forms. I now turn to elaborate Marx's account of the character of human action. This will serve as an introduction to the kind of action institutionalized by pure capitalism.

24 See Sève (1978), fn. 27 pp. 161 - 167 for a discussion of this question which is also a critique of Althusser's anti-humanism.

25 See Bhaskar (1989a, 1989b).

26 See Bhaskar (1989a) ch. 5 for an account of the inferential method.

27 Meikle (1985).

Human Nature and Action

Human action as labour

The Marxian account of human action as praxis was touched on in chapter two. It will now be necessary to discuss this in greater detail. Labour is a central concept in Marx's account of human nature, as well as of capitalism.²⁸ Labour is the point at which animality and humanity, at which causality and purposiveness meet. Through labour the species being of the human being is realized.²⁹ This is *not* labour as toil, but rather labour as transformative action, or, put another way, labour as discursively constituted. Here labour or production is a concept which is logically prior to the culture/economy split.³⁰ Unfortunately, the naturalization of the 'economy' which has been effected by orthodox Marxism has effaced this dimension of Marx's thought.

The character of imaginative, expressive, satisfying and useful human activity is captured most vividly by Marx in *Capital 1*, in the following passage:

A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials.³¹

Although this is Marx's account of human labour, it also serves as an example of praxis. Praxis is world-making integrated human activity which is informed by theory and which is also the expression of human creativity and sociality.³² It is multifaceted *social* activity combining cognitive, creative, expressive, useful and affective elements. The architect needs knowledge of the *real* properties of the materials used to construct the building, as well as knowledge of the environment (both natural and social) in which the building is to be placed. This is a labour process during which the individual architect acts in a highly-trained, skilled, confident manner on nature so as to produce a useful and beautiful artefact for a fellow human-

28 Postone (1993) claims that labour, rather than property relations, is the central critical category in Marx's work.

29 See Kosik (1976) ch. 4; Arendt (1958) ch. III. See D'Amico (1981) for a discussion of Arendt's (and Habermas's) misreading of Marx here.

30 D'Amico (1981).

31 Marx (1976a), p. 284.

32 I am aware that in certain places eg *Capital III*, Marx sees praxis as taking place in the 'realm of freedom' only. This is praxis as activity undertaken purely for its own sake and by this criterion, labour as described in *Capital I* would not constitute praxis. See Gorz (1989); Postone (1993) with whose position on this I concur. See Rattansi (1982) for an opposing argument.

being. The architect expresses himself in relation to nature, to the object produced (the building) and to the fellow human-being for whom the object is produced. In the process, the architect also receives recognition from his fellow human-being as a skilled and productive labourer. Here, labour becomes

attractive work, the individual's self-realization, which in no way means that it becomes mere fun, mere amusement ... Really free working, e.g. composing, is at the same time precisely the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion. The work of material production can achieve this character only (1) when its social character is posited, (2) when it is of a scientific and at the same time general character, not merely human exertion as a specifically harnessed natural force, but exertion as subject, which appears in the production process not in a merely natural, spontaneous form, but as an activity regulating all the forces of nature.³³

Here Marx is offering an Aristotelian notion of 'self-realization' some of whose institutional prerequisites were explored in chapter four. For Marx, this mode of being becomes theoretically available to all following the development of capitalism. Furthermore, it is this mode of being which has produced the great bourgeois revolutions.³⁴

Labour as praxis is activity carried out in the full awareness of human (social) powers, of social functions fulfilled and recognized by others. It is activity in which the 'objective' and 'subjective' elements form a unity at the *individual* level; that is, the production process requires an individual possessing both the skills to produce a useful and beautiful object and full consciousness of the social and natural requirements of the overall process of production. This is fully human production the practice of which will advance the humanization of individual human beings. It is important to note that, in acting upon nature, human beings produce not only a world, but themselves. The character of action and of the world produced through that action will affect the character of the human being. There is a dialectical relationship between world and human being as mediated by labour. Note the following account of 'human' production offered by the young Marx in 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Science*':

[L]et us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed* himself and the other person. (1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality, its specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and

33 Marx (1973b) pp. 611 - 2. Note here the striking resemblance to Freud's account of sublimation (to be discussed in chapter 8).

34 Feher (1984).

hence a power *beyond all doubt*. (2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified man's essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *man's* essential nature. (3) I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the species, and therefore would become recognized and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. (4) In the individual expression of my life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed and realized* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal* nature.

Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature. This relationship would moreover be reciprocal, what occurs on my side has also to occur on yours.³⁵

This passage expresses the character of face-to-face human relationship, of mutual recognition, respect and usefulness which, given the nature of human beings, might be instituted in a future community built on the achievements of capitalism. Human nature is *communal* nature; it is essentially (potentially) active, self- and other-conscious. Humanization is the process of developing this human nature; dehumanization is a process which impedes its development. As will be seen shortly, Marx sees pure capitalism as a system which *both* humanizes and dehumanizes; it has *both* progressive and regressive characteristics.

Capitalism and Action

Historically, empirical human beings are very unlikely to conform to their species essence (insofar as this is equated with freedom in the sense used above) until capitalism provides the preconditions for the universalization of such conformity. Prior to capitalism, humanity's creative powers were realized very patchily and unevenly. It is capitalism which creates the conditions whereby the enrichment of the individual can for the first time keep pace with the enrichment of the species.³⁶ It does this, though, in a rather one-sided way. It is one-sided in that, while the preconditions (material abundance) for creative many-sided activity are developed, the social relations of capitalism are such as to eliminate the conditions for sociality. While it creates the preconditions for human enrichment, it is essentially, necessarily incapable of providing this enrichment, according to Marx. Capitalism which is the

35 Quoted in Adamson (1985), p. 83.

36 See Introduction, Marx (1973b); Heller (1976).

peak of species enrichment is also the peak of individual impoverishment. This is because the defining, essential characteristic of capitalism is the expansion of surplus value for the purpose of private appropriation (profit); or, put another way, it is the institutionalization of the law of value.³⁷ As we will see, this law requires individuals who behave in a specific kind of controlled, predictable manner, as functionaries of capitalism rather than as fully human actors.³⁸ In order to understand this claim, it is necessary to explore further the social relations instituted by capitalism, as described by Marx.

Capitalism and Social Relations

Marx's purpose in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital I* is to establish beyond doubt the radical discontinuity between capitalism and all earlier cultures.³⁹ In these works, the theoretical object becomes *capitalism* rather than the whole of human history. As discussed in chapter two, these are works concerned with the logic of capital rather than with history, the logic of capital being derived from the liberal industrial practice of capitalism as refracted through the concepts of political economy. Where Marx uses historical material it is mainly to show the contrast between capitalism and what went before it. As mentioned above, this contrast consists in the imperative ceaselessly to expand production so as to increase profit-taking. Other ways of conceptualizing the contrast are internally related to this imperative. One of these is of particular interest in relation to the topic of transformative communal action. This is the contrast between the *communal* structure of all pre-capitalist cultures in which the individual is embedded in the group (so that the opposition individual/society is unthinkable) and the *atomistic* structure brought about by capitalism whereby the individual is given theoretical primacy over the group.⁴⁰ What was preserved in all of these earlier cultures (be they 'Asiatic', 'Antique', or 'Germanic') regardless of changes brought about by the emergence of the State, war, etc., was the communal character of social relations. So:

In all these forms ... there is to be found: (1) Appropriation ... of the natural conditions of labour, of the *earth* as the original instrument of labour as well as its workshop and repository of raw materials. The individual relates simply to the objective conditions of labour as being his; [relates] to them as the inorganic nature of his subjectivity ... (2) but this *relation* ... to the earth, as the property of the labouring individual ... is instantly mediated by the naturally

37 Garnett (1995).

38 Gorz (1989); Kosik (1976).

39 Cohen (1982); Lefort (1978).

40 Marx (1973b), Notebook V, esp. p. 488. See also Lefort (1978).

arisen, spontaneous, more or less historically developed and modified presence of the individual as *member of a commune* ... An isolated individual could no more have property in land and soil than he could speak.⁴¹

Capitalism replaces this communal and conservative principle by an individualistic and revolutionary principle. Hence the exceptionality and complete novelty of capitalism, which for the first time separates 'inorganic conditions of human existence [land/nature] and ... active existence [human social action], a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital'.⁴² This separation is both cause and consequence of the privileging of production over human beings. In terms of the character of their social relations, all pre-capitalist cultures experience neither evolutionary nor revolutionary but 'repetitive' history; that is to say, underlying all social upheavals, they experience a *repetition* of *communal* social relations. It is largely in the durability of such communal social relations that pre-capitalist cultures show their superiority over those of capitalism. For these cultures 'the human being appears as the aim of production, regardless of his limited national, religious, political character' and the social character of the human species-being is part of the 'everydayness' institutionalized in these cultures. That is, individuals feel themselves embedded in a network of social relations characterized by face-to-face, *personal, felt* interdependence.

With the advent of capitalism, for the first time, the 'human end-in-itself' is sacrificed to the aim of production.⁴³ It is in its transformation of production relations, or, more accurately, its transformation of social (human) relations into production relations, that capitalism displays simultaneously its progressive *and* dehumanizing aspects. Through its progressive side capitalism reveals more than any other culture the productive, creative powers of the human species and creates the material and technical preconditions for universal human flourishing. At the same time, it is capitalism which impedes the further development of such productive powers *as well as* concealing the *social* character of all human powers and the *real power* of individuals as *social* individuals. Capitalism institutionalizes *personal, individual* independence and *impersonal* dependence. In relation to questions about transformative communal action and collective political commitment, the importance of this can scarcely be overstated.

Marx deploys several concepts (including 'inversion', 'alienation', 'ideology', 'fetishism' and 'reification') to refer to the peculiar and historically unique character of social relations instituted by this new 'mode of production'. These concepts will help us to think of the 'everydayness' established by pure capitalism. They all refer

41 Quoted in Lefort (1978), p. 626, from Marx (1973b), p. 485.

42 Marx (1973b) p. 489. Square brackets mine.

43 Ibid., p. 488.

to aspects of the one-sided, fragmented, mystificatory character of capitalist institutions. They refer to overlapping, mutually-reinforcing aspects and forms of institutionalization, which produce cumulative and apparently irresistible effects upon and within individuals. These effects include a new kind of individuation, that is, atomization.

The character and effects of atomization are described by Marx and Engels in a passage in *The Holy Family* which deserves lengthy quotation:

Speaking exactly and in the prosaic sense, the members of civil society are not *atoms*. The *specific property* of the atom is that it has *no* properties and is therefore not connected with beings outside it by any relations determined by its own *natural necessity*. The atom *has no need*, it is *self-sufficient*; the world outside it is absolute *vacuum*, i.e., it is contentless, senseless, meaningless, just because the atom has *all its fullness* in itself. The egotistic individual in civil society may in his non-sensuous imagination and lifeless abstraction inflate himself to the size of an *atom*, i.e., to an unrelated, self-sufficient, wantless, *absolutely full*, blessed being. Unblessed *sensuous reality* does not bother about his imagination; each of his senses compels him to believe in the existence of the world and the individuals outside him and even his *profane* stomach reminds him every day that the world *outside* him is *not empty*, but is what really fills. Every activity and property of his being, every one of his vital urges becomes a *need*, a *necessity*, which his *self-seeking* transforms into seeking for other things and human beings outside him. But as the need of one individual has no self-understood sense for the other egotistic individual capable of satisfying that need and therefore no direct connection with its satisfaction, each individual has to create that connection; it thus becomes the intermediary between the need of another and the object of that need.⁴⁴

In this passage we find the key to understanding some of the most important elements of the new kind of enchantment instituted by capitalism. The passage is an early expression of the loss of a sense of personal interdependence, of the experience of reciprocity between independent producers and of *social* being; of the illusory character of feelings of personal independence. Capitalism institutes a strange kind of *social* ineptitude and a new kind of *social* ignorance. It is to different aspects of this state of affairs that the concepts listed above refer. Brief comments on each of these follow.

Inversion: This refers to the capacity (indeed requirement) of capitalism to turn the world upside-down or inside-out, a capacity which severs the link (at the phenomenal level) between individual activity and its consequences, between individual production and product. The effect is that the subject becomes the predicate and the predicate

44 Marx & Engels (1975) pp. 162 - 3.

becomes the subject. The human being becomes 'effaced', particularly in the activity of labour. Wherever we find inversion, we find a mystified relationship between individual and the world; a relationship which involves the subordination of the individual to the world. In effect, we find the *passive* individual, one who functions according to the requirements of the world seen as an 'alien power'.

Alienation: This is a concept which refers to the cognitive and affective effects of the institution of the law of value; it refers to separation and loss of control in relation to the kind of labour process required by industrial capitalism; separation from oneself, from one's fellow human being, from the production process and from the product produced by the production process. This separation and loss of control is first discussed in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* which also traces the way in which industrial capitalism brings about the reduction of human needs to the need to 'have', this being one of the most notable aspects of the 'one-sidedness' of the subject institutionalized by capitalism.⁴⁵

Ideology: This refers to the fragmentation brought about by the division of labour, one, therefore preceding industrial capitalism, but realizing its full fragmenting effects only under industrial capitalism. These effects relate largely to the way in which subjects know reality.⁴⁶ In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels are primarily interested in the 'cognitive' effects of the division of labour which I describe here as the disjunction between objectivity and subjectivity. (However, the social effects - the individual/society split or loss of awareness of the *social* nature of human being - are at least as significant, as we know from the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.) The division of labour produces a world which is not immediately knowable in its essence; it is opaque at the level of everyday experience; it presents itself to the group in an intrinsically mystifying way. Because the division of labour produces 'specialists', the danger and even likelihood is that these specialists will attribute excessive significance to their own domain of action. It is in this way that Marx and Engels account for philosophical idealism, or the 'German ideology'. The 'ideologists turn everything upside-down' because:

*The occupation assumes an independent existence owing to division of labour. Everyone believes his craft to be the true one. Illusions regarding the connection between their craft and reality are the more likely to be cherished by them because of the very nature of the craft.*⁴⁷

45 Marx (1977); Avineri (1968); Dupre (1983); Mészáros (1977); Rossi-Landi (1990).

46 See Marx & Engels (1976).

47 Ibid., p. 92.

However, mystification becomes complete only when commodity production is instituted on a general basis. It is at this point that the form of mystification referred to as 'fetishism' manifests itself.

Fetishism: Fetishism is related to inversion in that human attributes and powers are transferred from human beings to their products.⁴⁸ It is a characteristic of the capitalist world which results from the translation of value and its subjective producers into exchange value. That is to say, it comes about when commodification pervades all of the institutions of capitalism (when even the labour power of the producer becomes a commodity). It is a 'relatively late phenomenon' found when the commodity shapes, both the production process and subjects as well. It comes about with the 'real' (as opposed to 'formal') subsumption of labour, of which more will be said later. Fetishism sets up a fundamental disjunction between human creators and the created world. It therefore brings about institutionalized forgetfulness of the human capacity for transformative action.⁴⁹

In short, all of these concepts refer to different aspects of the institutionalization of the law of value. They all make sense, and assume their theoretical and critical function in relation to the conception of human nature discussed above *and* in contrast to the whole of human history preceding the emergence of industrial capitalism. What is common to all of these concepts and the reality to which they refer is the concept and reality of *abstraction*. We need to consider abstraction as a process of instituting particular kinds of fetishized social relations productive of the subject as *homo oeconomicus*. This is abstraction made empirical through the constitutive capitalist institutions of *abstract labour*, *commodification* and *monetization*, to be discussed further below. As I have suggested above, the overall effects of capitalist abstraction are captured in the objectivity/subjectivity and society/individual dichotomies. However, these changes do not spring up all at once. A long process of transition is required. Here the discussion of that transition will be limited to an account of two of its stages: first, the formal subsumption of labour; second, the real subsumption of labour.

The law of value instituted: from formal to real subsumption of labour

In terms of the periodization informing this study, the transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labour under capital marks the passage from the mercantilist to the liberal stage of capitalism. Marx's account of the differences between

48 Mészáros (1975); Ollman (1976).

49 See Dupre (1983).

'conditions of life' experienced by workers under the two stages will serve to bring out more clearly the novelty of liberal industrial capitalism from the point of view of the worker.⁵⁰ We will see that during the early stage, the replacement of personal paternalistic relations by impersonal contractual wholly instrumental relations in the workplace constitute a movement in the direction of the individual/society dichotomy. There is an accompanying loss of personal independence on the part of the worker. However, until the advent of industrialization, the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy cannot emerge to any significant degree.

The formal subsumption of labour

This term refers to the first stage of the direct *subordination of the labour process to capital*. During this phase, the master and journeyman become transformed into capitalist and worker. Unlike the master-journeyman relationship which is immediately personal and social, the relationship between capitalist and worker is one between buyer and seller.

Before the process of production they ... confront each other as commodity owners and their relations involve nothing but *money*; *within* the process of production they meet as its components personified: the capitalist as 'capital', the immediate producer as 'labour', and their relations are determined by labour as a mere constituent of capital which is valorizing itself.⁵¹

However, at this stage there is no change in the process of production which the capitalist takes over without modification. True, the work becomes more intensive because directed and supervised by the capitalist, and the hours of work are lengthened as the capitalist seeks more and more surplus value. In addition, the raw materials and probably the tools, as well as the end product, all belong to the capitalist. But the worker remains master of the tools and materials which he uses, therefore the production process remains transparent. Production remains production on a human scale and is visibly the activity of cooperating individuals.⁵²

The formal subsumption of labour marks the phase of manufacture which grows out of handicraft production. By manufacture is meant the simultaneous employment of a large number of workers in a workshop together with the mass of means of production needed for their use. It will not be necessary here to give an account of the ways in which manufacture develops out of handicraft. It will suffice to note that manufacture either introduces or further develops the division of labour or

50 See Marx (1976a), chs. 13 - 16, Appendix.

51 Ibid., p. 1020.

52 See Kosik (1976), ch. III. Arendt (1958) has some interesting things to say about this difference.

it combines together various handicrafts that were formerly separate. While the process of production is broken down into its different partial operations, each operation continues to be carried out by hand and therefore retains the handicraft need for strength, skill and proficiency. Even though the individual worker may be allocated a narrow specialized element of the productive process which he is required to retain for life (he is 'subdivided' and therefore prevented from developing his skills); even though a hierarchy is established between skilled and unskilled, it remains the case that a long period of apprenticeship is still necessary for many skills and that the skilled predominate over the unskilled. The handicraftsman remains the 'regulating principle of social production' until abolished by machines. Moreover, skilled workers are seen as 'self-willed and intractable', not really fit to be 'a component of a mechanical system'.⁵³ Docility and total domination are made possible and necessary with the advent of machines.

To summarize, the formal subsumption of labour under capital did not allow of the institutionalization of a new kind of capitalist subject. While instrumental relations between buyers and sellers of labour power were coming to replace paternalistic relations between master and journeyman, and while the 'upward mobility' to which the journeyman could realistically aspire was fast becoming unavailable to the new kind of worker, it nevertheless remained the case that the workshop required a greater preponderance of skilled workman than would the factory. Skilled workmen did not acquire their skills from the capitalist who might be (but was not always) a former master craftsman. So they were likely to have important knowledge not possessed by the capitalist. In addition, the division of labour remained at a level where the production process overall retained its transparency both in terms of its *social* character and its knowledge requirements. Handicraftsmen were capable of asserting themselves in relation to the capitalist. They were engaged subjects whose 'consciousness' was a constitutive element of the production process. They were active beings with a strong sense of their world and of their place in it. At this point, the objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy had not yet been instituted, although there was a movement towards the society/individual dichotomy. Movement in this direction would be accelerated following the replacement of tools by machines.

The real subsumption of labour

The dynamic of this development was the imperative to increase production so as to realize surplus value as capitalist profit. Whereas the formal subsumption of labour

⁵³ Ure (1835) p. 20, quoted in Marx (1976a), p. 490.

involved new kinds of instrumental and asymmetrical social relations established between embryonic capitalists and workers, allowing of the enhancement of production and of surplus value, the fact was that production (albeit made more 'efficient' by new practices of constant supervision and the lengthening of the working day) could not be increased beyond the bodily capacities of the workers. The introduction of machinery and of production in the factory which would cut the limiting direct relationship between the pace of production and the bodily abilities of the worker required that money be transformed into capital and that the wage contract become the predominant form of social relationship between capitalists (a new class of owners of the social power to produce) and workers (a new class of owners of labour power and of nothing but labour power). Now the sole object of production becomes exchangeability and the use value of a commodity enters the capitalist's calculations only in relation to exchangeability.

The real subsumption of labour under capital requires the mutually constitutive institutions of *abstract labour*, *the commodity* and *money*. These institutions will now be investigated in a little more detail.

1: Abstract labour

Industrial capitalism is the most complex form of society ever developed. However, the categories which express its relations and character are simple or abstract categories from which all particularity, all substance, have been eliminated. That is to say, they are categories which view phenomena strictly from the point of view of one of their aspects. This is because social relations are the outcome of real processes of abstraction of individuals, of production and circulation processes, from the specificity of local communities, from the immediacy and concreteness of actual exchanges (individual production of use values to be exchanged in actual local markets for other use values by means of 'trucking and bartering'). This peculiar character of institutions under industrial capitalism is brought out in the *Grundrisse*, in Marx's remarks about labour as conceptual and actual abstraction.⁵⁴

"'Labour'" says Marx, 'is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple abstraction'.⁵⁵ It is only with the beginning of industrial capitalism that simple labour, labour without description or qualification, abstract labour, in a word, becomes both conceptually and actually available. It was Adam Smith who first threw out 'every limiting specification of wealth-creating activity' thereby departing from the physiocratic concern with specific, or embedded labour i.e. agricultural

⁵⁴ Marx (1973b), Introduction. See also Berki (1983).

⁵⁵ Marx (1973b), p. 103.

labour. The abstraction 'labour' became available because the mode of production had developed to a specific stage.

As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone. On the other side, this abstraction of labour as such is not merely the mental product of a concrete totality of labours. Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form ... the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.⁵⁶

In effect, abstract labour becomes everyday reality - part of the lived experience of workers - for the first time with the advent of the machine. However, the institutionalization of machine production becomes thinkable only following the earlier commodification of social relations which paved the way for treating workers as 'means' of production and only as means of production.⁵⁷ It is the machine, though, which allows of the institutionalization of abstract labour and therefore of the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy.

Having sold his labour power to the capitalist, the worker is ruled over by capital as by a *thing*. That is to say, the means of production, the conditions essential for labour to take place, are alienated from the worker and assume the character of a 'thing' or *fetish*. The institutionalization of abstract labour eliminates the creative and communal character of labour; it eliminates the creative and aesthetic and intellectual elements of human productive activity; it eliminates the human sense of activity and achievement and interdependence.⁵⁸ Hence the (mis)perception on the part of individual labourers that the 'force' (which is their collective force) is an independent, active, producing entity which rules over them (to be discussed further below). Indeed, from the point of view available to the labourers this is not a misperception at all, since their empirical situation, their lived and felt experience of that situation, is of powerlessness, of isolation, of dull, repetitive work, etc. And 'collective labour' is

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 104 - 5.

⁵⁷ See Sayer (1991), ch. 1.

⁵⁸ See Marx (1977), p. 32; Colletti (1976ii), esp. p. 84.

indeed an independent 'force' as against any individual labourer in that labourers can only produce their necessities of life by subjecting themselves to that force.⁵⁹

This is significant in relation to the point made earlier about the transition from a mode of subjectivity whereby the personal self-confidence of the artisan is combined with a sense of *social* (subjectively experienced) interdependence to one whereby a sense of personal individual independence is combined with a strong sense of objective dependence. Pure capitalism institutes a social world of 'things' on which individuals depend and these 'things' are seen as independent of and intransigent in the face of individual human action, needs or desires. At the same time, there is no sense of *felt*, social, human interdependence. The everydayness of industrial capitalism is fragmented, disjointed, abstract, impersonal and objectified.

The institutionalization of abstract labour allows (even requires) that the individuality of each labourer be lost from view. The result is that each individual labourer is considered to be identical to all the others and the great differences between individual labourers are ignored. Individual capacities are treated as separate from real empirical individuals. They are regarded as a 'force' separate from the individuals whose power they are. As the individuality of individual workers is effaced under the real subsumption of labour by capital, so also the consciousness of individual workers ceases to be a constitutive element of the production process.

As production becomes an end in itself, it becomes 'indifferent' to the producer who is now regarded as an object to be manipulated within a system ready made and given. Social power as a relationship between persons is replaced by social power as a relationship between things. The worker becomes integrated, as Kosik puts it:

in a transindividual lawlike whole as one of its components. However, this incorporation transforms the subject. The subject abstracts from his subjectivity and becomes an object and an element of the system. Man becomes a unit determined by its function in a lawlike system ... The purely intellectual process of science transforms man into an abstract unit integrated in a scientifically analysable and mathematically describable system. This reflects the *real* metamorphosis of man performed by capital.⁶⁰

That real metamorphosis produces *homo oeconomicus* who is an isolated, apparently free, apparently self-activating but intrinsically passive subject. The fabrication of *homo oeconomicus* is achieved through the institutionalization of commodification.

Homo oeconomicus is the atomized individual, another simple abstraction which is prefigured in the work of Hobbes and whose institutionalization begins in the 'civil society' of the late eighteenth century, when, according to Marx, 'the various forms of

59 Marx (1973b), pp. 242 - 3.

60 Kosik (1976), p. 50. See also Gorz (1989).

social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity'.⁶¹ At this point, apparently, a nexus of institutions had made its appearance with the capacity to produce a new nodal point, or a new kind of human being. *Homo oeconomicus* is not to be confused with the bourgeois subject. While we have noted, in the discussion of Habermas's work on the bourgeois public sphere, that a tension existed from the beginning within the public sphere between these two kinds of subject, we should be clear that one (the bourgeois subject) is capable of transformative communal action; *homo oeconomicus*, as Olson, for example, correctly notes, is not.⁶² I shall return to this point later.

2: Commodification

For Marx, the commodity form is the 'cell-form' of capitalism, the entity which is the basic unit out of which the whole system is constructed. All of the institutional effects of industrial capitalism discussed so far relate to the character of the commodity. The commodity form structures social relations into quantifiable and calculable but opaque economic relations under the guise of equivalence. Whereas commodities were found in many earlier cultures, 'they became commodities only within the limits of being direct use-values distributed at opposite poles, so that the commodities to be exchanged by their possessors must be use-values to both'.⁶³ The exchange of commodities remained a marginal activity, carried on mostly at the 'borders' of communities, at the point where different communities met. To the extent that this activity moved towards the 'interior of the community', that community began to disintegrate. To the extent that the production of use-values remained the predominant form of activity, the community retained its integrity.

The emergence of industrial capitalism marks the beginning of communal disintegration, for reasons which should be becoming clear by now:

[T]he products of labour, both use-values and exchange-values - ... rise up on their hind legs and face the worker and confront him as '*Capital*' ... even the social form of labour appears as a *form of development of capital*, and hence the productive forces of social labour so developed appear as the *productive forces of capitalism*. *Vis-a-vis* labour such social forces are in fact '*capitalized*'. In fact *collective* unity in co-operation, combination in the division of labour, the use of the forces of nature and the sciences, of the products of labour, as *machinery* - all these confront the individual workers as something *alien, objective, ready-made*, existing without their intervention, and

61 Marx (1973b), p. 84.

62 Olson (1971).

63 Quoted in Lukács (1971ii), pp. 84 - 5.

frequently even hostile to them ... The social forms of their own labour - both subjectively and objectively - or, in other words, the forms of *their own* social labour, are utterly independent of the individual workers.⁶⁴

What this means is that dead labour (machinery) predominates over living labour. From the point of view of the individual worker, objectivity and subjectivity become separated. The objectivity incorporated in the production process is indifferent to (does not require the active engagement of) the subjectivity or consciousness of the individual worker.⁶⁵

3: Monetization

For Marx, money is far more than a mere medium of exchange. It is an institution which helps to constitute the characteristic subject of pure capitalism.⁶⁶ What exacerbates the alienating effect of the process of commodification is the institution of money, its necessary concomitant. Abstract labour, commodification and monetization are all internally related; in a sense, to discuss the effects of one is to discuss the effects of the others. They *all* contribute to the constitution of the abstracted therefore fragmented subject, necessarily egoistic and competitive; they all help to constitute an opaque, impersonal, reified culture, one which appears impervious to the needs of individuals; so they all help to constitute the a-social, passive subject, the subject whose constitution is described by Althusser. In relation to monetization, it is money which allows the fragmentation of production, circulation and exchange; therefore it is money which allows the replacement of immediate, direct social relations (of the direct exchange of useful products by the direct producers) by the abstract, fragmented, fetishized relations of industrial capitalism.

With the advent of the real subsumption of labour under capital, production for use becomes subordinated to production for exchange, to commodity production. Exchangeability requires calculability and the convertibility of labour and of labour output into money. Money comes increasingly to take the place of the *felt* social bond. The capitalist sees the worker in terms of a commodity, namely 'abstract' or commodified labour; labour somehow detachable from the worker; labour to be sold and bought. The capitalist as buyer of a commodity confronts the worker as seller of a commodity. They meet in the market-place as personifications of labour and capital; not as particular individuals:

64 Marx (1976a), p. 1054.

65 As was noted in chapter four, Althusser fails to understand this crucial characteristic of capitalist culture, expecting, as he does, a match between 'consciousness' and individual practice.

66 See Abercrombie et al (1986).

The only force bringing them together, and putting them into relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interest of each. Each pays heed to himself only, and no one worries about the others.⁶⁷

This is the point at which

money-making appears as the ultimate purpose of activity of every kind ... the tendency for all products to be commodities and all labour to be *wage-labour*, becomes absolute. A whole mass of functions and activities which formerly had an aura of sanctity about them, which passed as ends in themselves, which were performed for nothing or where payment was made in roundabout ways ... all these become directly converted into *wage-labourers* '.⁶⁸

At this point money comes to have the following remarkable effects:

If *money* is the bond binding me to *human* life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all *bonds*? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal *agent of separation*? It is the *coin* that really *separates* as well as the real *binding agent* - the [...] *chemical* power of society.

Money ... appears as this *distorting* power both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., which claim to be *entities* in themselves.⁶⁹

Monetization is essential to the effacement of the social, communal, aspects of relationships and therefore the basis for feelings of reciprocity and mutual recognition as fellow members of a community.⁷⁰ Social relations are replaced by *legal, monetized* relations regulated by contract. The wage contract institutionalizes individuals as atomistic, possessive, rights-bearing, abstract subjects; as subjects shorn of all those characteristics that make them particular and unique *individuals*. These subjects engage with one another in an impersonal, calculating, instrumental fashion. As we will see, the sphere of circulation reinforces and reproduces this kind of everyday experience.

67 Marx (1976a), p. 280.

68 Ibid., p. 1041.

69 Marx (1977), p. 124.

70 Habermas (1984, 1987a).

The sphere of circulation

Insofar as capitalism also needs to increase human appetites for objects which can enhance the accumulation process, objects, that is, produced by means of the division of labour and commodification, then these effects will not be confined to the working day, but will also take hold of the 'private' sphere. Some of Marx's most vivid and damning descriptions of the sphere of circulation are found in his early works, notably *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. As he sees it, once in the realm of circulation, buyers and sellers of the multiplicity of commodities produced by capitalism are engaged in

mutual swindling and mutual plundering. Man becomes ever poorer as man, his need for *money* becomes ever greater if he wants to master the hostile power... The need for money is therefore the true need produced by the economic system, and it is the only need which the latter produces. The *quantity* of money becomes to an ever greater degree its sole *effective* quality. Just as it reduces everything to its abstract form, so it reduces itself in the course of its own movement to *quantitative* being. *Excess* and *intemperance* come to be its true norm.⁷¹

As the worker's activity in the sphere of production is 'a pure abstraction from all activity' as well as from sociality, in the sphere of circulation and exchange, commodification institutes an abstraction of the need to 'have' from the multiplicity of rich needs which the human species being has the potential to cultivate.⁷²

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it - when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., - in short, when it is *used* by us ... In the place of *all* physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of *all* these senses, the sense of *having*. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world.⁷³

The kind of sensuous development encouraged by liberal industrial capitalism is limited, incapable of developing the 'richness of man's essential being' or 'the richness of subjective *human* sensibility ... *senses* capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*'.⁷⁴ That is because liberal industrial capitalism institutionalizes the need to *have* rather than the need to *do* or *act*. The obsession with *having* rather than *doing* leads to the proliferation of 'artificial needs'

71 Marx (1977), pp. 101 - 2.

72 Heller (1976).

73 Marx (1977), p. 94.

74 Ibid., p. 96.

rather than 'rich human needs'. It is in this way that we can make sense of the concept of 'artificial' needs from the point of view of a theory which stresses the historical specificity of all aspects of human life. Artificial needs are those needs which are necessary for capitalism; real or rich human needs are needs which are necessary for the human species being. The first kind of needs are required for the self-realization of capitalism; the second are required for the self-realization of human beings (in the sense discussed earlier in this chapter and pursued further in chapter six).

The need for money is the overwhelming need produced by pure capitalism. Money is the ultimate fetish, the necessary fetishized form on which all other capitalist fetishisms are based. As commodification becomes more widespread and more and more human needs become commodified, money produces more and more fetishized social relationships; social relationships from which human agency and human sociality have been effaced. Money is a power created by humanity which dehumanizes humanity in the precise sense used by Marx that it causes humanity to 'forget' its creativity and sociality. It is a human creation which renders invisible human creativity and removes the need for sociality; it inverts the subject/predicate relationship; it inverts the causal relationship between humanity and humanity's products.

The possession of money allows of the apparent evasion of the concrete, particular, embodied character of individuals and their social relations. In money, *needs* and *powers* come together in an abstract way in that the only needs recognized as real are needs which can be realized through money, or commodified needs and conversely, only those powers are recognised which possess the money needed for their realization. So 'what I am and am capable of is by no means determined by my individuality'; rather it is determined by the extent to which I *have* money.⁷⁵ The obsession with *having* as opposed to *being* and *acting*, could not come about without the institution of *money* and it needs constant cultivation and nourishment by fresh inflows of money. The preoccupation with money and having leads to the preoccupation with maximizing exchange value. Such an emphasis does not lead to the development of heterogeneous, diverse new human needs but rather to the homogenization of needs as having. It institutes self-interested subjects necessarily engaged in endless calculations about the costs and benefits of various social relations and practices.

75 Ibid., p. 138.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have read Marx's *Capital 1* as a depiction of pure capitalism as an historically novel culture characterized by alienated and fetishized social relations, by relations, that is, formed by the instituted abstractions of labour, commodification and money. By returning to Marx we can achieve greater understanding of the subject-effects of the fragmentation discussed in earlier chapters. These subject effects result from the attempt to universalize the identitary-assemblist logic discussed by Castoriadis. They translate into the apparent a-sociality and resistance to humanization posited by post-Marxism (chapter three) and Althusser (chapter four). They are understandable in terms of the subjectivity/objectivity and individual/society dichotomies which refer us to the cognitive and social-affective impoverishment created by capitalism's drive to increase surplus value.

Pure capitalism as exemplified in liberal industrial capitalism is a culture in which the commodity form is dominant. Production is for exchange before it is for use. Capital is indifferent to the specific nature of production which is dictated by the ease or difficulty of selling the commodities manufactured. In addition, it requires that the worker be indifferent to the character of work; that he be capable of easy transition from one kind of production to another. Capital requires characterless or 'abstract' labour power. Labour power is also a commodity, one operating under the wage contract. What this means is that social relations are totally fetishized; they are mediated impersonally by money and contract. Capitalist and worker confront one another in the market-place as *buyer* and *seller*. Eventually, human individuals become personifications of *capital* and *labour* who confront one another as commodity owners whose relations involve nothing but money.⁷⁶ The 'natural laws' of political economy constitute subjects so as to render them susceptible to commodification in all spheres of life: malleable subjects who will respond in their occupational lives to the requirements of capital accumulation and who will possess the kinds of needs (in their 'private' lives) whose fulfilment will also contribute to the accumulation process.

As mentioned before, an important part of my argument is that the social relations described by Marx have achieved their most widespread institutional expression in liberal capitalist cultures during the disorganized stage of capitalism, when the 'decommodification' effected by the welfare state during the organized stage begins to be reversed. However, there are significant differences as well, given that

76 Marx (1976a), pp. 1019 - 1020

Marx equates pure capitalism with industrial or mass-producing capitalism whereas use-value production during the disorganized stage produces quite different institutional effects as indicated in chapter three. We will need to return to these questions in chapter nine. Next, however, I investigate Marx's account of proletarian revolutionary action, which I am describing as transformative communal action.

Chapter six

Capitalism and collective action: the Marxian account

Introduction

The task in this chapter will be to return to the problem first addressed in chapter three i.e. the problem of constituting political commitment under conditions of capitalist fragmentation. Here we will examine Marx's work on this topic, as represented in his account of proletarian revolutionary action. While Marx is concerned with analyzing the possibility of the emergence of 'transforming practice' out of practices as ideologically constituted, i.e. practices that are functional for the reproduction of existing social relations, it will be seen that this analysis involves reflection on the constitution of political commitment to the attainment of challenging collective goals. Transforming practice requires a strong form of communal political commitment to the goal in question. Discussions in earlier chapters have thrown up some ideas in this area, relating to the specific structural character of liberal capitalist cultures. An important element is an account of preconditions in terms of a specific kind of structural 'decentredness' or 'looseness', as we have seen in our discussion of Althusser in chapter two and of post-Marxism in chapter three. However, neither of these sources enables us to understand how the kinds of subjectivity which they begin to theorize might become the basis for transformative communal action. Althusser is largely silent on this matter; he does not suggest how we can move beyond the proletarian subject. Similarly post-Marxism's undertheorized account of psychic openness to subversive interpellations leaves us with the strong sense that the subjects in question - decentred subjects - are unlikely to have the capacities to make a sustained commitment to communal concerns. The return to Marx in chapter five was prompted by the belief that his work on pure capitalism would enhance our understanding of this situation. This work stresses the novel kind of passive or contemplative a-social stance towards the world which pure capitalism institutes at the level of the (proletarian) subject. Nevertheless, Marx argues that pure capitalism will produce its own 'gravediggers' in the shape of a revolutionary proletariat which will not only destroy capitalism but establish a radically new emancipatory culture.¹ It is this argument which will be examined in this chapter. The purpose of this examination is to grasp the institutional changes needed to reconstitute political commitment. From this point of view, Marx's

¹ See Perkins (1993), chs. 2 & 3.

explanation for the transformation of self-interested subjects into active social subjects is of crucial significance.

It should be remembered that in line with the methodological protocols set out in chapter two, the structure/agency dichotomy is rejected in favour of the dialectical approach derived from Althusser's account of these matters. Rather than an absolute opposition between *action* as a kind of essential, original, individual attribute and *structure* as, on the one hand, the unintended consequence and/or oppressive imposition which gets in the way of the individual's exercise of this attribute, or, on the other, that which wholly determines individuals as specific kinds of subjects, the two entities are seen here as internally, necessarily related, so that *structure* is both necessary means and outcome of human action.² Here structure refers to the principle of unity informing a specific nexus of institutions which constitutes culturally specific repertoires of action. It is therefore the means by which the human capacity for praxis is more or less realized in culturally specific ways. This interpretation, derived from Althusser, is congruent with the Marxian account of human nature as interpreted in chapter five.³ Claims that Marx's own work is marked by a tension between an 'actionist' and 'structuralist' account of human action can be answered and the tension at least partly resolved by interpreting that work in terms of (a) the writings that take as their theoretical object 'pure' capitalism as a fetishistic, apparently law-driven system and (b) the political sociology which takes as its object historically and culturally specific social formations.⁴

It will be necessary to examine both kinds of texts in this chapter.⁵ The first section will consist in a general exploration of the problem here conceptualized as a leap from fetishism (passivity) to freedom (activity). This involves a discussion of the nature of 'interests' and of the contradictions which impel collective action. The second section will centre on the *Communist Manifesto (CM)* which is read here as an account of 'pure' proletarian revolutionary action.⁶ An examination of this work will produce an understanding of the process whereby contradictions produce conflict and

2 This is Althusser's viewpoint - which is theoretically expressed through his account of the contradictoriness of the world - a viewpoint whose subtlety has gone unrecognized, partly due to Althusser's own overstated anti-humanism and partly due to the persistence of the analytic approach (a tribute to the power of theoretical ideology) to the theorizing of human action. See Archer (1995), Bhaskar (1989a) for realist attempts to theorize beyond the structure/agency dichotomy. See also Giddens (1984).

3 I am interpreting Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism in a weak sense in this thesis. This weak anti-humanism was explained in chapter five.

4 See Gouldner (1980); Rundell (1987). The latter discusses this in terms of two paradigms i.e. 'actionist' and 'productivist' to be found in Marx's work. See Perkins (1993) chs. 1, 2.

5 Gilbert (1981) discusses Marx's 'two types of theorizing', pp. 3 - 18.

6 While the CM predates the development of Marx's theory of pure capitalism, we find in it intimations of this theory and we can therefore take that work as a useful point of departure. In any case, Marx himself continued to hold to the account given in this early work, with the addition of one significant modification which will be noted later. See the preface to the 1872 German edition: Marx & Engels (1967), p. 53. See also Johnson (1980).

therefore the constitution of collective political commitment. The third section of the chapter will elaborate on the concept of 'active union' with which Marx characterizes proletarian association in the *CM*. This elaboration will consist in a brief discussion of Marx's writings on the Paris Commune, writings which suggest the nature of his objections to bureaucratic social relations. As should be clear by the end of this chapter, Marx's prescriptions for the reemergence of sociality out of the atomistic social relations constituted by industrial capitalism are not wholly persuasive. What will need further immediate elaboration will be the theorization of communality and cognition as these pertain to transformative communal action. The work of Gramsci will offer the means for such elaboration, as will be seen in chapter seven.

I now turn to discuss Marx's account of pure proletarian revolution.

I

Proletarian revolution as transformative communal action

In chapter five, Marx's *Capital I* was read as an account of a pure industrial capitalist culture or total mode of life. This is a culture which is fragmented into dedicated spheres of specialized activities all of which are governed by the law of value. What this means is that fetishized social relations have produced radically individuated, passive subjects; subjects as functionaries for whom sociality is a matter of private choice rather than being a cultural imperative. Pure liberal industrial capitalism is a kind of expressive totality in which the economic sphere seeks first and last instance determinance. This is the world which is described in the *CM*. It is therefore not an actually existing world, but the world to be expected given the full institutionalization of pure liberal industrial capitalism. Here description has an active critical intent (to be explored further below). It is description intended to aid in the constitution of motivations for transformative communal action. For this reason, it stresses action rather than impediments to action, offering the proletariat the heroic example of the formerly progressive bourgeoisie for inspiration.⁷ Before engaging further with this text, it will be necessary to make some general remarks about the very demanding and unlikely leap from fetishism to freedom needed if the proletariat is to become a transformative actor.

⁷ Marx & Engels (1967); Gilbert (1981).

The proletariat: from passivity to revolution

The proletariat is a class which has been wholly 'produced' or institutionalized by industrial capitalism. Therefore it is a class composed of a-social and passive subjects. Yet it is the proletariat which has been allotted the task of revolutionary transformation. Given the character of social relations instituted by pure capitalism, it is no surprise to learn from Marx that the 'changing of circumstances' requires the changing of subjects through revolutionary practice:

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.⁸

Note here the equation of 'human activity' and 'self-changing'. The proletariat, as we will see, is to be set the most challenging and arduous task in that it is required to be the first wholly self-aware and wholly humanizing communal actor in history.⁹ Revolutionary proletarian action requires an ongoing process of self-conscious self-transformation on the part of the proletariat. In this sense, it is unprecedented in its requirements in terms of communal dedication, knowledgeability and self-discipline. These requirements were formulated most powerfully in *The German Ideology*, as follows:

For the production on a mass scale of ... communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.¹⁰

Note here that revolution is a process whereby the proletariat will transform both itself and the culture. It is a process which will effect the complete transformation of the proletarian subject. Self-discipline is to be, not only the property of the group as a group (in which case it could be imposed by bureaucratic or other coercive means) but of individual members of the group as subjects of a specific kind. In other words, it requires a form of subjectivity which in some respects resembles that of the bourgeois subject as investigated in chapter four. This requirement is related to the necessity that the transformative action be radically democratic action. Here

8 Marx (1976b), p. 4.

9 The thrust towards universal humanization is theoretically present in bourgeois ideology but empirically unavailable because of the character of capitalism.

10 Marx & Engels (1976), pp. 52 - 3.

democracy is both means and end. It is an active process whose character is given by the ends desired.¹¹

How, though, is this unprecedentedly demanding process to be initiated? For the young Marx and Engels, it is a process whose necessity is derived from the very character of human nature and its self- and nature-transformative capacities. In effect, a new kind of individual and group subjectivity will emerge out of capitalism by virtue of capitalism's own requirements. While pure capitalism was depicted in a wholly negative way in chapter five, it will be necessary in this chapter to remind ourselves of potentially emancipatory subjective attributes deemed by Marx to have been constituted by capitalism itself. So, while capitalism does produce a new kind of social and cognitive debility it also, through its novel kind of individuation, contributes to the emergence of a new kind of post-capitalist emancipatory culture. As noted before, emancipation here refers to the releasing and development of the human potential for communality and creativity.

Capitalism has paved the way for this emergence in related ways. First, its productivism has created material-cultural conditions for the universalization of praxis through the proliferation of different kinds of activities and the development of different kinds of capacities, albeit of a kind limited by the requirements of the capitalist production process, as discussed in chapter five. Second, it has released individuals from paternalistic hierarchical relations of a limited and relatively static kind; of a kind in which inequality is naturalized and horizons are necessarily narrow. It has forced individuals into a kind of freedom (however inadequate and misleading this term may be) in the sense that it interpellates individuals (in both political and economic spheres) as originary subjects with specified rights and duties *as individuals*. This is the proletarian subject as 'juridical' rights-bearing subject.¹² In his function as owner of labour-power the proletarian is interpellated as a free, self-motivating subject through practices in the private, political and economic spheres: through practices instituted as freely-chosen individual activities such as the making of contracts or the casting of votes.¹³ This limited experience of freedom has real effects although it conceals a reality which is far from free, as has been seen in chapter five. However, the kind of apparent freedom which constitutes (up to a point) self-activating subjects also constitutes radically-individuated a-social subjects. How is this kind of subject to be drawn into a new kind of collective action - transformative communal action - in which neither individual subject nor group is dissolved? That is to say, how is a new kind of subjectivity constituted in which the individual is

11 Avineri (1968), ch. 8; Hunt (1984).

12 Poulantzas (1978a, 1978b).

13 See Marx (1976a), p. 271. This denaturalization of subordination is both cause and consequence of the conception and practice of democracy described by post-Marxism and discussed in chapter three.

sufficiently differentiated so as to sense himself as an active, self-motivating social being without at the same time forgetting that he is necessarily culturally constituted? What kinds of institutions are required to replace the possessive, atomistic proletarian subject by the active social subject required if transformative communal action is to emerge?

As already noted, revolutionary action is praxis or action requiring a specific kind of theoretical knowledge of the object to be transformed. So, the key point will come with the proletariat's 'recognition [*Erkennung*] of the products as its own, and the judgement that its separation from the conditions of its realization is improper - forcibly imposed...'14 This will be a recognition that objectivity (products) is the outcome of collective subjectivity (labour) and therefore the beginning of knowledge of the essential characteristics (as opposed to directly experienced 'appearances') of capitalism. In other words, at this point, the proletariat will have begun to acquire theoretical - rather than merely commonsense15 - knowledge of capitalism.16 This knowledge will have arisen out of intra-capitalist changes to be explored further below. The translation of this knowledge into revolutionary action requires an ongoing process of self-transformation on the part of the proletariat. We can begin to understand how the proletariat is expected to take on its heroic task by returning to the Marxian notion of *contradiction*, which was discussed in chapter two.

Contradictions and revolutionary action

As we have seen, the concept of contradiction has a constitutive place in Marx's account of pure capitalism and of its transcendence by socialism. To say this is to say that the concept of contradiction has a constitutive place in his account of revolutionary class action, since for Marx, unlike some later 'orthodox' Marxists, revolution is *necessarily* a *subjective* as well as an *objective* phenomenon.17 Revolution is change resulting from the combination of enabling 'objective' conditions and collective 'subjective' capacities emerging out of and in turn acting back on those objective conditions. Revolution as collective *praxis* is collective action in which subjective and objective are united. The subjectivity in question is a collective theoretically informed consciousness of a state of affairs from the point of view of its transformation; here theoretical collective subjectivity is collective awareness that *objectivity* is the result of human social activity. Of course, collective theoretical subjectivity must be the attribute of a group having the social power or potential to

14 Marx (1973b), p. 463.

15 The concept of commonsense will be explored further in chapter seven.

16 For more on the theory/praxis relationship see Heller (1976); Livergood (1967); Lobkowitz (1967); Lukács (1971ii, 1971iv); Markus (1986).

17 Perkins (1993), chs. 1 & 2.

effect the desired transformation. Put another way, it must be a class or group 'in' itself; it must possess the structural power to prevent the reproduction of the relations of production, if it so decides.¹⁸ It must be capable of producing significant dysfunctionality in the system. The proletariat as abstract labour personified has the necessary objectivity or causal powers. However, the activation of these causal powers requires communal awareness of this. In effect, without *subjectivity*, *objectivity* in this instance counts for nothing.¹⁹

Marx claims that it is through the working out of its necessary contradictions, as manifested in periodic crises, that capitalism will unwittingly initiate a new kind of social subjectivity expressive of the human causal powers of sociality and praxis. In other words, capitalism itself will bring about the negation of the cognitive and social debilities discussed in chapter five. The working out of contradictions produces *both* of the elements necessary for a revolution: the 'objective' conditions and the collective 'subjective' predispositions and capacities to take action.²⁰ Put another way, the *qualitative* change required to begin to eliminate the kinds of fetishized relations described in chapter five will emerge only because that change *has already* begun to take place within capitalist social relations. It is worth discussing in some detail the Marxian scenario which centres on the reconstitution of individual motivations for communal political action.

Marx identifies (apparently) two major contradictions which produce such tendencies (although I shall be suggesting below that these are merely two formulations, or differences in emphasis, of the one basic contradiction). The first of these is the contradiction between human essence and human existence which capitalism engenders. The essence of capitalism, the institutionalization of the law of value (or the production of surplus value by abstract commodified labour), contradicts the essence of humanity. Capitalism institutionalizes a form of human *existence* which prevents the development of human *essence*. As noted before, essence is used here in an Aristotelian sense to refer to the innate identity of an entity. However this identity may be present potentially rather than actually. Any change which is a movement towards actualizing the true nature (potentialities) of the entity is a *necessary* change; any change which prevents this is an *accidental* change.²¹ From this point of view, what is *necessary* for capitalism is *accidental* for humanity; what is *necessary* for humanity is *accidental* for capitalism. So long as capitalism is dominant, it institutionalizes social relations which are antithetical to the *necessary*

18 For a realist Marxist account of class power, see Isaac (1987).

19 See Miller (1982) for more on this. See also Geras (1994); McCarney (1990), ch. 9.

20 Marx himself notes, 'the objective and the subjective conditions ... are only the two distinct forms of the same conditions'. See Marx (1973b), p. 832.

21 See Meikle (1985).

development of human nature (and yet which, as we have noted, also secrete the potential for emancipation).

The second contradiction is that between forces and relations of production; the social relations instituted by the existing ruling class come to act as 'fetters' on the further progressive development of the 'forces' of production. It is this contradiction which Marx holds to have impelled the bourgeois revolution which overthrew feudalism.²² In fact, in the famous 1859 Preface where this idea is most concisely formulated, the term contradiction is not used but the concept is present:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or - this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms - with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.²³

Here contradiction has been translated into class conflict but it needs to be stressed that this translation (or transition) is not inevitable. We will need to consider whether this 'conflict' or 'contradiction' is likely to be the source of an anti-capitalist revolution as opposed to mass disorder or rebellion.²⁴ For the moment we should note that whereas the first contradiction is undoubtedly a real contradiction whose intra-capitalist resolution is, by definition, impossible,²⁵ the second may be more apparent than real, referring as it does to 'economic' impoverishment and therefore potentially resolvable by means of a reinvigorated capitalism.

The early works of Marx and Engels, including *The German Ideology* and *The Holy Family*, proclaim the first contradiction as the fundamental disintegrative contradiction that becomes experienced as oppression and impoverishment by the proletariat:

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-alienation. But the former class finds in this self-alienation its confirmation and its good, *its own power*: it has in it a *semblance* of human existence. The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in its self-alienation; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. In the words of Hegel, the class of the proletariat is in abasement *indignation* [sic]

22 Marx & Engels (1967), p. 85; Marx 1976a), ch. 32.

23 Marx (1970), p. 21. See Cohen (1978) for an account centred on the famous Preface. For discussions of the implications of this account for a theory of collective action, see Lash & Urry (1984); Levine & Wright (1980); For more on the two kinds of contradiction see Dupre (1983); Heller (1976).

24 We should note here the danger of conflating contradiction and conflict. Giddens (1995) ch. 10 is useful on this matter. See also Elster (1978); Godelier (1972).

25 This requires that we accept Marx's conception of capitalism as dehumanizing and, therefore, his account of human nature.

at that abasement, an indignation to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human *nature* and its condition of life, which is the outright, decisive and comprehensive negation of that nature.²⁶

This is the 'full-grown proletariat' in which the 'abstraction of all humanity, even of the *semblance* of humanity, is practically complete'; the proletariat produced by pure capitalism. It is these dehumanized and dehumanizing conditions of life which bring the true character of liberal industrial capitalism into clear focus so that the proletariat is at once the most dehumanized *and* the most theoretically aware class. In this early work, the dehumanization of the worker is seen as a source of strength because this negativity negates itself through producing a theoretical awareness of the loss of humanity and therefore the will to eliminate it; a theoretical awareness inculcated through 'the stern but steeling school of *labour*'.²⁷ The account presupposes an innate human need for sociality and creativity which somehow 'breaks through' even in the absence of any social conditions of possibility.²⁸ In other words, it appears to require an unsocialized human 'remainder' which has its own causal powers. Here the human capacity for creativity is not some inert property but is experienced as intense need so that the proletariat is driven to 'revolt against that inhumanity' through 'urgent, no longer disguisable, absolutely imperative *need* - that practical expression of *necessity*'.²⁹

It is important to note here that *need* and *necessity* are used by Marx in different senses but it is always related to the *essence* of a thing, as mentioned before (with the exception of 'artificial need' to be explained below). In the remarks just cited, *need* and *necessity* appear to be used in a philosophical sense, to refer to *human* needs. This is a version of a 'radical needs' account of proletarian revolution and refers to truly *human* needs for creativity and sociality.³⁰ So there are *human* needs for an essentially *human* kind of development, as discussed in chapter five. There are the human being's *animal* needs for sheer survival (although Marx is quite aware that these needs *never* appear in a purely 'animal' or non-cultural way). There is *capitalism's* need to expand surplus value. These are all *essential* needs. As a manifestation of capitalism's need for expanded surplus value, human beings institutionalized by industrial capitalism come to acquire 'artificial' needs to 'have'. These needs are described as 'artificial' because from the point of view of the development of the human species being they are accidental rather than essential (these terms being used in the Aristotelian sense as explained earlier).

26 Marx & Engels (1975), p. 51.

27 Ibid., pp. 52 - 3.

28 Meikle (1985).

29 Marx & Engels (1975), p. 52.

30 Heller (1976); Meikle (1985).

These distinctions are important because they enter into the kinds of explanation of collective action offered, not only by Marx, but by subsequent Marxists as well as by other theorists of collective action.³¹ To stay with Marx's own account, we have seen that the contradiction between human and capitalist *essence* is offered by the young Marx and Engels as the principle informing the proletarian revolution. The collective motivation in this case would be derived from a felt sense of frustration of essentially human needs. The contradiction between forces and relations of production as expressed in various forms of crisis might or might not be productive of this kind of motivation. It will certainly be productive of the motivation of 'interest' which can be derived from the combination of *animal* and *artificial* needs. In some places it seems that this is the account being offered by Marx, as will be seen.³²

It is not clear why the experience of misery in the shape of either acute poverty or dehumanizing working conditions or both should result in revolutionary activity of the kind looked for by Marx; that is, revolutionary activity productive of universal human emancipation. While it *may be* believable that either contradiction could produce capitalism's downfall, can we be persuaded that that *downfall* would necessarily result in anything other than chaos?³³ In an attempt to clarify these matters I shall turn to the account of capitalism and proletarian revolution offered in the CM.

II

The Communist Manifesto

The CM describes a world which has been wholly colonized by liberal industrial capitalism. That is to say, all spheres, including those of religion, education and the family, have been rendered functional for the requirements of capitalism in the strong sense that all social relations are commodified. So, for example:

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.

31 Exploitation-centred accounts of class action will logically focus on the contradiction between forces and relations of production. See e.g. Wright (1997).

32 Marx sees the struggles to shorten the working day as a manifestation of the proletariat's recognition of the dehumanizing character of capitalism; or, of the contradiction between the essence of humanity and capitalism. The shortening of the working day is the 'basic prerequisite' of the movement from 'realm of necessity' to 'realm of freedom'. See Marx (1981), p. 820. See Cohen (1977) for a useful motivational analysis of class struggle; also Marcuse (1986), pp. 433 - 439.

33 Geras (1994).

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.³⁴

In effect, the law of value has been instituted in every sphere of human social activity. Another way of putting this is to say that fetishized social relations have been universalized and therefore the kinds of subjectivities discussed in chapter five are in place. The world described in the CM is a world in which a 'world market' has been established; in which production has been institutionalized as 'abstract labour'; in which monetized relationships have penetrated all spheres of human life including that of the family; in which 'feudal relations' have been replaced by 'free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economical and political sway of the bourgeois class'.³⁵ This is a world created by the bourgeoisie 'after its own image'.³⁶ It is a world in which artisans have been replaced by proletarians and in which the progressive impulse identified by Habermas in the notion of the bourgeois public sphere has given way to self-interest.³⁷ It is a world characterized by 'class polarization' i.e. a world which constitutes two significant collective actors, namely the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, these being the only two purely capitalist classes, in Marxian terms. However, this is also a world which will effect the metamorphosis of the proletariat from total dehumanization into an historically unprecedented revolutionary collective actor. This metamorphosis comes about through either the changing or loosening of the institutional grip of capitalism. Both of these possibilities are suggested or implied in the CM.

Regarding the first possibility, the strong suggestion in the first section of the CM is that the lived, daily experiences of the proletariat will be sufficient to form it into a 'class-for-itself'. It is Marx's claim that capitalism itself, under the duress of increasingly severe crises, brings about experiential changes, specifically changes in the character of everyday proletarian life in the factory but also changes in other spheres.³⁸ Under the capitalist imperative to develop the productive forces, the everydayness or workers' direct experience will be broadened beyond the narrow atomistic subjectivity instituted by liberal industrial capitalism. As small factories give way to bigger and bigger factories with large concentrations of workers, a kind of cognitive-emotional effect will take place which will enable the workers to transcend (up to a point at least) the fragmenting, alienating effects of capitalist industrial

34 Marx & Engels (1967), p. 82.

35 Ibid., p. 85.

36 Ibid., p. 84.

37 See Maguire (1978), ch. 2 on Marx's conception(s) of the bourgeoisie. Note the usefulness here of the distinction between non-economic and economic fractions of the bourgeoisie.

38 In relation to the latter, Marx notes the importance of the political experience derived from the formation of tactical alliances between bourgeoisie and proletariat. See Marx (1973a), pp. 262 - 71, especially p. 264. See also Cottrell (1984), ch. 1.

production, to institutionalize new social relations which transcend the competitiveness of existing relations. The objective weight of combined proletarian potential will thereby become actualized through the fusion of objectivity and subjectivity.

Marx offers an account (albeit sketchy) of different kinds of collective action, from early local concrete action oriented to the restoration of feudal worker status to a more recognizably modern form of trades union action (constantly undermined by competitive relations between workers), to 'revolutionary combination, due to association'.³⁹ The latter is the embodiment of proletarian class action and therefore 'entirely foreign to commodity production', as Marx was later to put it.⁴⁰ It is the outcome of a long process whereby a sense of collective identity *and* cognitive and organizational resources develop out of a series of battles with individual capitalists as well as changing (and educational) experiences in the workplace; out of the increasing equalization of poverty among workers; out of a shared experience of precariousness, enslavement and vulnerability. It is this shared experience which begins to transform the atomistic subject into the social subject.

The 'good side' of capitalist exploitation has been that isolated workers have been brought to associate together in an organized, disciplined and social fashion; that they have begun to gain a sense of their combined *social* power through the social and geographical mobility required by the law of value. Here is how this is described by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in a passage which brings out more clearly than does the CM the way in which institutional change initiates changes in motivations and commitments and therefore changes in subjectivities:

The first attempts of workers to *associate* among themselves always take place in the form of combinations.

Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance - *combination*. Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalist. *If the first aim of*

39 Marx & Engels (1967), pp. 89 - 94. Marx comments in a letter written in 1871: '[E]very movement in which the working class as a *class* confronts the ruling classes and tries to constrain them from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempts by strikes, etc., in a particular factory or even in a particular trade to compel individual capitalists to reduce the working day, is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force through an eight-hour, etc., *law* is a *political* movement. And in this way out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a *political* movement, that is to say, a *class* movement with the object of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially coercive force. While these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organization, they are in turn equally a means of developing this organization.' (Letter to Bolte, 23/11/1871 quoted in Sitton, 1989, p.160.)

40 See Geras (1971), p. 85.

resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages. This is so true that English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages in favour of associations, which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in favour of wages. In this struggle - a veritable civil war - all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests.⁴¹

Here we see the isolated, individualistic experience of hardship being replaced by an increasingly strong sense of shared experience which begins to inculcate a sense of class membership as a good in itself.⁴² Put another way, what is in question here is the emergence of *communal* relations, although Marx himself does not use this language at this point. Here, too, we note that the 'interest' motivation as inhering in class action does not denote a-social, egocentrism but rather a sense of the social or communal good.⁴³

At this point, the proletariat has also begun to gain a sense of the capitalist totality and its unique and peculiar functioning. So fetishism in both its cognitive and social aspects has begun to dissolve, opening the way for a realistic appreciation on the part of the proletariat of the true source of value i.e. its own united, cooperative labour power. Put another way, the world-making significance of humanity's capacity for sociality and praxis begins to come into view. If at this point, capitalism becomes plunged in yet another crisis, we find the co-existence of conditions productive of revolutionary proletarian action. The acuteness of the crisis required is described by Marx in terms of the pauperization of a worker *of a specific kind*: one, that is, already escaping from the most dehumanizing aspects of capitalist production. This worker

becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an overriding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him.

41 Marx (1978), p. 168 (emphases mine).

42 See Avineri (1968), pp. 141 - 149.

43 For more on the expanded conception of interest in Marx, see Miller (1982), pp. 72 - 86.

Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.⁴⁴

Here we find a reference to the creation of a vast army of the unemployed, of those, that is, who are released or ejected from the institutional grip of the factory. Since, as we have noted, all spheres will have been commodified by this time, we must suppose the state of the unemployed to be truly wretched. At the same time, decommodification will be an emergent property of the new proletarian associations mentioned before. We must also suppose that proletarian associations and the new kind of social relations which these will have begun to institute will prevent the pauperized from becoming quite speedily a passive or unruly mob i.e. from degenerating into a lumpenproletariat.⁴⁵ At this point we must be persuaded that the development which creates the revolutionary 'nodal point' is that which ejects the worker from the factory (since what is in question here is large-scale factory production) and that therefore escape from institutionalization may constitute the *coup de grace* for capitalism. The intensification of crises together with the alleged depletion of the capitalist capacity to respond effectively to successive crises, can be seen as a state of institutional breakdown in which capitalism loses control of proletarians in the precise sense that these are released from one of the primary interpellative institutions i.e. the factory. At this point, to adopt post-Marxist language for a moment, subjects as 'moments' of a signifying chain have been transformed into 'elements' available for reinterpellation as 'moments' in a new signifying chain.

Here the significance of Marx's suggestion that a stratum of bourgeois intellectuals makes such an escape, under the influence of proliferating capitalist crises becomes apparent.⁴⁶ So we have the simultaneous availability of new organic intellectuals of the proletariat and an increasing pool of unemployed (and unemployable?) proletarians as addressees of the radical theory produced by such intellectuals.⁴⁷ Since these proletarians will have begun to rediscover their capacity for communal social relations within capitalism itself we now have the basis for transformative communal action.

What this means is that deinstitutionalization (unfixity in post-Marxist terms) in terms of capitalist culture must be swiftly followed by reinstitutionalization (a new kind of fixity) within a new emancipatory culture if the emergent sense of social subjectivity is to be fully realized. What is in question is a state of overdetermination

44 Marx & Engels (1967), p. 93.

45 Marx (1973b), pp. 39, 52 - 53.

46 Marx & Engels (1967), p. 91.

47 See Gorz (1982) whose argument about the future emergence of socialism is based on just such a process.

i.e. the condensation of a multiplicity of internally related (constitutive) elements, including pauperism, class polarization, the cognitive and social development of the proletariat as 'class-for-itself' and the presence of organic intellectuals (themselves renegades from the bourgeoisie) capable of undertaking the necessary directive and organizational tasks in a radically democratic manner.⁴⁸

From contradiction to revolution

The first section of CM offers an exciting and dramatic narrative of the rise and fall of the bourgeoisie, a class which is described with a mixture of respect and horror. A direct comparison is made between the past revolutionary activity of the bourgeoisie and the future revolutionary activity of the proletariat, both of whom are thrust into this heroic role due to their capacities to develop the productive forces by removing existing constraining social relations. Here, the contradiction in operation appears to be primarily that between forces and relations of production, rather than that between the essence of capitalism and human essence. In other words, this can be read as an 'interest' account rather than a 'radical needs' account of the emergence of a revolutionary collective actor, although, as we have noted above, 'interest' can be used in a sense which rids it of its individualistic, economistic implications.⁴⁹ In order to make sense of Marx's claim it is necessary to interpret 'interest' in the expanded sense to denote a communal interest in the establishment of humanizing praxis. If this route is adopted, then the two contradictions discussed above become one, in that the contradiction between forces and relations of production becomes an expression of the more fundamental contradiction between capitalist and human essences.

If the contradiction between forces and relations of production is interpreted in an economistic, productivist sense, it becomes impossible to understand how it might be the source of revolutionary proletarian action. Clearly the economism or productivism which supposedly constituted the motive for the earlier bourgeois revolution *would* have been revolutionary in relation to feudalism. There would be nothing revolutionary about it in relation to the capitalist mode of production, though.⁵⁰ While it may happen that proletarian subjects will organize themselves to demand greater productive efficiency as manifested in the capacity to provide jobs and pay higher wages, these demands are not *intrinsically* revolutionary in a capitalist context, although their articulation may have unforeseen revolutionary consequences. Action stimulated by the 'interest' motivation as narrowly conceived is - in principle

48 See Althusser (1996), pp. 112 - 113; Miller (1982), ch. 1.

49 For more on this distinction, see Heller (1976). See also Cohen (1977) for a discussion of Heller's interpretation of Marx on these questions.

50 See Cohen (1982).

at least - action according to the requirements of capitalism. It is not motivated by and cannot be productive of the kind of political commitment required either for proletarian revolutionary action or for the more modest intra-cultural transformative tasks with which we are concerned in this thesis.

However, Marx believes that the need for greater efficiency is at the same time the need for a new goal for production. That is to say, the contradiction between forces and relations of production will be experienced in such a way - i.e. as a contradiction between humanity and capitalism - that 'interest' as a concern with production and distribution as *economically* conceived will give way to 'interest' as a concern with fundamental *cultural* transformation. This will consist in (in addition to more efficient production) production for *humanity* rather than for the *hucksterer*.⁵¹ Here, the use of the term *humanity* alerts us to the qualitative (i.e. revolutionary rather than reformist) dimension of proletarian action. What is required is a *new* kind of motivation for action; one not institutionalized by liberal industrial capitalism. Hence the concept of 'interest' as applied to revolutionary proletarian action refers to quite a different motivation than does that same concept as applied to the bourgeoisie or to subjects who have not yet escaped from the kind of institutions described in chapter five.

What Marx is concerned with is a theoretically-informed, therefore realistic revolutionary demand articulated by a collective actor having the characteristics of a new and universal transformative communal actor, an actor, that is, capable of making history. The catalyst will be the radicalizing interpretation of shared suffering produced by the proletarian capacity to see through appearances to essences. While this interpretation *must* emerge out of the experiences of the proletariat itself, there is a suggestion in the CM - already noted - that the proletarianization of intellectuals (and of other members of the petty-bourgeoisie) will contribute 'fresh elements of enlightenment and progress'.⁵² These 'fresh elements', though, must have been articulated to the proletariat in the sense that they must have cleansed themselves of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois 'prejudices'.⁵³ Under these conditions, they can serve as tutors of the proletariat, but tutelage is merely a moment in a process which is primarily directed and borne by the proletariat itself. If, for example, the CM constitutes an attempt to interpellate the proletariat as revolutionary, the proletariat will only recognize itself in the account offered because that account is derived from knowledge of real processes and real experiences of actual workers. So, the

51 Marx (1975b).

52 Marx & Engels (1967), p. 91.

53 This is a question to which Marx returns in later works. Note particularly his comments in 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' in which he reiterates the requirement that the emancipation of the proletariat must be a self-emancipation and criticizes the proposal that workers' cooperatives be established with the help of the state. See Marx (1974), esp. p. 354.

Communist Party begins with the 'actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes' so as to produce the theoretical knowledge without which true praxis is not possible. Theory, insofar as it is scientific, is connected 'with the real movement of society', as we have seen in earlier chapters.⁵⁴ So the account of class relations and development in the CM is an attempt to crystallize a specific situation, to give systematicity and direction to a growing awareness on the part of the proletariat *both* of itself as a group unified by certain experiences *and* of capitalism as a system necessarily and unavoidably responsible for those experiences felt as suffering, deprivation, impoverishment. Insofar as this theory 'takes hold of the masses', it becomes a force productive of revolution.⁵⁵

So the Marxian claim remains fundamental. It is because the proletariat is the most dehumanized class that it will be receptive to radical theory. Unlike the bourgeoisie, which finds 'absolute satisfaction' in the 'process of alienation', the proletariat 'is a victim who confronts it as a rebel and experiences it as a process of enslavement'.⁵⁶ The key to proletarian receptivity to the Marxian interpretation of collective impoverishment and dehumanization, the element which triggers the leap out of capitalist institutionalization, is the contradiction between human essence and the essence of capitalism. The significance of the contradiction between forces and relations of production is to be interpreted in the light of this more fundamental contradiction whose resolution dictates that the character and goal - as well as the efficiency - of production be transformed; that it be undertaken in the interests of 'humanity' rather than the 'hucksterer'.⁵⁷ At this point, and from the perspective afforded by our discussion of the ISAs in chapter four, we may remain unconvinced by this account of the leap from fetishism to freedom, given that this leap requires transformation at the level of individual proletarian subjects *and* that this transformation will have been initiated within capitalism itself. Although we may have been persuaded by Marx's account of the reconstitution of sociality by means of proletarian associations, we remain to be convinced that the proletarian subject will have attained the necessary individual characteristics of knowledgeability and competence and the quality of expectation and therefore experience implied by the centrality of the contradiction just discussed.

As we noted earlier, the experience of the contradiction as a contradiction between humanity and capitalism is held by the young Marx and Engels to arise from the total

54 Note his criticism of 'scientific socialism' 'which wants to attach the people to new delusions, instead of limiting its science to the knowledge of the social movement made by the people itself'. Marx, (1974), p. 337.

55 See Heller (1976), p. 137.

56 Marx (1976a), p. 990. So alienation and fetishism are experienced in class-specific, more or less debilitating ways.

57 Marx (1975b). See also Postone (1993) for an extended treatment of this.

dehumanization of the proletariat. But it is a requirement of the theory that this dehumanization not be translated into the demand for a return to artisanal production. So in order to experience the contradiction in the required manner, the proletariat must have been 'humanized' in a new way by capitalism itself. That is to say, capitalism must have begun to actualize human potential in a radically new way. Two aspects of this process have been suggested above: the first is the requirement for a new kind of competence at the individual level; the second is the requirement for a new kind of collective competence i.e. national scope and therefore a new kind of organization (association).⁵⁸ However, a great leap is required if the kind of limited (fragmented) individual competence produced by capitalism is to be translated into an *individual* sense of competence productive of a readiness to engage in demanding, highly risky collective action or, if the proletarian subject is to be replaced by the active social subject. If individuals are dehumanized or 'enslaved' in the sense suggested in the CM and discussed in some detail in chapter five above, how do they come to develop this much broader sense of competence? The worker as mere cog in the machine is unlikely to have developed the required capacities for demanding transformative action and, as we have seen, these capacities need to emerge at the individual level if radical democratic activity is to be a possibility.⁵⁹ In short, we need a stronger and more clearly specified account of the constitution of the social self-confident, self-disciplined and knowledgeable subject. Before concluding this section, I shall suggest a way forward in relation to this problem.

While the early Marx & Engels see the workers' total dehumanization as the necessary precondition for the emergence of critical consciousness, we find a difference of emphasis in the later work. In fact, this is more than a change of emphasis since it hints at a more persuasive account of the emergence of the active social subject than we have found in the CM. Capitalism, says Marx in the *Grundrisse*, will have fulfilled its 'historic destiny', as soon as

on the one side, there has been such a development of needs that surplus labour above and beyond necessity has itself become a general need arising out of individual needs themselves - and, on the other side, when the severe discipline of capital, acting on succeeding generations [*Geschlechter*], has developed general industriousness as the general property of the new species [*Geschlecht*] - and, finally, *when the development of the productive powers of labour, which capital incessantly whips onward with its unlimited mania for wealth, and of the sole conditions in which this mania can be realised, have flourished to the stage where the possession and preservation of general wealth require a lesser labour time of society as a whole, and where the labouring*

58 See Marx (1973a), p. 239.

59 See Braverman (1974); Doray (1988); Edwards (1979); Knights & Willmott (1990); Willmott (1990).

society relates scientifically to the process of its progressive reproduction, its reproduction in a constantly greater abundance ... Capital's ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth drives labour beyond the limits of its natural paltriness [Naturbedürftigkeit], and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one.⁶⁰

What this quotation suggests is that the 'paltriness' instituted by capitalism through the law of value (as expressed in the requirement that 'labour' become a mindless appendage of the machine) becomes at some point inadequate to the needs of that law. 'Labour' ceases to do what a mere 'thing' could do i.e. individual labourers become more actively and knowledgeably involved in the labour process. Put another way, the institution of abstract labour begins to dissolve in a manner not considered earlier and from this dissolution follows the dissolution of the dichotomies of subjectivity/objectivity and society/individual which have constituted the passive asocial proletarian subjects of capitalism.⁶¹ The point here is that capitalism's own requirements result in the institutionalization of subjects who begin to develop an awareness of their human potential for 'richness' in the sense of a many-sided individuality expressed in the enjoyment of a multiplicity of truly human needs. These are subjects who will have begun to develop a stronger sense of *individual* competence than is likely to be found among workers shaped by routine factory work; knowledgeable, educated and demanding workers who are encouraged to engaged actively with the production process.

What is required is that the character of factory production become transformed and/or that new kinds of production become increasingly important for the realization of the law of value. Such a suggestion requires detailed institutional specification, which cannot be provided here, although this specification will be sketched in in the concluding chapter. In order to be productive of the *social* individual, though, the new kinds of institutions would need to have changed their character in the social (as well as cognitive) dimension and would, further, require the reinforcement of institutions beyond the 'economic' sphere, as has been made plain in chapter four, particularly in the discussion of Althusser's account of the ISAs. The combined effects would constitute a new kind of awareness of intra- and inter-subjective socio-cultural

60 Marx (1973a), p. 325 (emphasis mine). Postone (1993) offers a comprehensive account of these developments.

61 Habermas (1987b), pp. 48 - 50 offers a different interpretation of this passage. See Postone (1993) for a criticism of Habermas's interpretation of Marx.

dependence and a new kind of realization that the human world is the product of social co-operative activity.

For the moment, we need only note that the kinds of developments suggested in the above quotation open up the possibility of developing a more convincing account of how *individual* proletarians might come to attain the necessary sense of competence (if not the communal motivation) required for voluntary participation in revolutionary action. Here the leap from fetishism to revolution seems less remarkable, so long as we believe that conditions also exist to enable the transition from individual self-interest to 'active union' i.e. that cognitive enrichment is accompanied by communal enrichment. An answer to this question will be suggested in chapter nine. For now, the concept of 'active union' will be explored further by looking at the writings on the Paris Commune.

III

Revolutionary proletarian action as transformative communal action

The concept of active union is not developed in any real sense by Marx. Nevertheless it is possible, by drawing on Marx's own texts, and by keeping in mind the fundamental and general character of his approach, to offer further elaboration of this concept now (specifically in relation to questions about organization). For example, 'active' is a theoretical term relating to the human capacity for praxis. This is an important clue, given the modern propensity to translate organization into bureaucratization. As will be seen, Marx's views on bureaucracy are such as to preclude the translation of 'active union' into bureaucratic organization/integration.⁶²

While Marx is aware of the significance of bureaucracy in the economic sphere, it is as a state-related phenomenon that he mostly tends to explore its significance. The state as the necessary means of *exploitation* also institutes a fetishized (bureaucratized) form of public action.⁶³ This is public action as a process of decision-making carried on by specialists as experts.⁶⁴ As we have seen, revolution requires the transcendence of *fétetishism*; of impersonal, abstract social relations. It also requires the self-activity and self-discipline of the constituent members of the proletariat. Marx never wavers in his conviction that the proletariat must liberate (represent) itself. Bureaucratic social relations are by Marxian definition fetishized

62 As Avineri quite correctly notes: 'an insistence on the importance of understanding bureaucracy both historically and functionally runs through all of Marx's writings after 1843'. See Avineri (1968), p. 49.

63 For example, see Marx (1973b), p. 92. See also Mészáros (1995), ch. 13.

64 Marx (1973a), p. 186; Marx (1974), pp. 206 - 7; Draper (1978).

social relations since they are impersonal, abstract and hierarchized social relations between experts and non-experts. 'Active union' cannot refer to the kind of mechanical or technocratic union arrived at by means of bureaucratic organization. Everything we have noted so far suggests that 'active union' must refer to an impulsion to self-emancipatory action deriving from a strong sense of shared proletarian suffering, misery, enslavement and informed by an account of the social world which stresses the need to dissolve precisely those social relations embodied in bureaucracies. Indeed, Marx ceaselessly proclaims the 'dead', parasitic, anti-democratic character of bureaucracy.⁶⁵ This becomes absolutely clear from Marx's account of the Paris Commune.

The Paris Commune: politics and the end of fetishism

Marx's writings on the Paris Commune will be discussed here in terms of our interest in institutional change of a specific kind i.e. change which consists in counteracting the effects of fetishism and alienation. I take it that this is the sense of Marx's claim: 'The great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence. Its special measures could but betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people.'⁶⁶ In its 'working existence' the Commune instituted defetishized social political relations; social relations of a concrete and transparent kind which undid the political effects of the division of labour as manifested in the bureaucracy and standing army. In the first draft of 'The Civil War in France', Marx refers to the five 'ubiquitous organs' to be abolished and focuses on the contrast between the standing army and the militia. The former '*defends the government* against the citizens'; the latter '*defends the citizens against the power (the government)*'.⁶⁷ In addition to this key change, the Commune sought to make all public officials 'elective, responsible, and revocable' and to free knowledge production and education from clerical and bourgeois power.⁶⁸

The Paris Commune was to 'serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France.'⁶⁹ That is to say, local government of a specific kind i.e. based on the election of revocable *delegates*, rather than *representatives*, was to be the real power centre in France, with central institutions fulfilling necessary but few functions in a manner strictly accountable to the localities. Note here Marx's approval of delegation (as opposed to representation) as proposed by the Paris Commune.⁷⁰ Delegation refers

65 See, for example, his comments on the French state in Marx (1973a), p. 186. See Poulantzas (1978a), pp. 331 - 359.

66 Marx (1974a), p. 217.

67 Ibid., p. 251.

68 Ibid., p. 210.

69 Ibid., p. 210. See also Gilbert (1981); Hunt (1984); Johnstone (1978).

70 See Cottrell (1984), p. 53.

to an active, informed relationship between individuals or groups and their political representatives. This is a relationship which prevents the congealing of representation into expertize and of sociality into fetishism. In relation to this point, the operation of the Commune requires constant, informed and competent participation in public affairs on the part of all parties to the relationship. In effect, delegation requires and promotes a strong sense of membership and the willingness to contribute in an active and effective manner to the activities of the group in question. So delegation suggests an active, self-conscious and confident form of group integration. An organization based on the principle of delegation will have instituted 'dialogical' social relations whereas one based on the principle of representation will have instituted 'monological' social relations. The former sustains a sense of communal identity and therefore political commitment of the kind in question here. The latter is likely to produce and maintain opportunist or instrumentally rational forms of action.⁷¹

Conclusion

The class action which Marx hopes for is transformative communal action. It is action carried out by active social subjects with a strong sense both of self and of group membership; with dedicated commitment to transformation as well as the necessary theoretical knowledge of the object to be transformed. This is action which is motivated by an expanded conception of 'interest' (interest in humanization rather than merely distribution) and strengthened by a strong sense of sociality as a good in itself. At the end of this discussion of the theory and practice of proletarian action, we are left with the conviction that while Marx produced a promising outline of a theory of transformative communal action, he did not give us convincing reasons for believing that the proletariat institutionalized by liberal industrial capitalism would be capable of engaging in such action. In terms both of the goal and of the means needed to attain the goal, Marx's account depends heavily on the idea of the active human subject prepared to engage in highly risky and heroic endeavours. Indeed, his emphasis on the radically democratic character of the action in question requires this.⁷² This is a notion which demands the liberation of human beings from any form of tutelary relations.⁷³ That he can conceive of such subjects is due, not only to the influence of Aristotelian and Kantian ideas, but to his own constitution as a bourgeois subject (albeit a renegade bourgeois subject) and to his interpretation of the political

71 Offe & Wiesenhal (1980). These authors claim that by the mid-twentieth century monological forms of organization had come to prevail in European trades unions.

72 See Hunt (1984); Miller (1982).

73 See Rundell (1987).

significance of a class composed of such subjects, as manifested in the French Revolution.⁷⁴ We have seen in chapter four what kinds of institutions were required to produce this subject. However, we remain to be convinced that a superior version of this subject can emerge out of liberal industrial capitalism. (The active social subject would be superior because he would not be vulnerable to the corrupting effects of the law of value.) The contradiction between human and capitalist essence has to bear more explanatory weight than it will hold. The point is not to say that the contradiction does not produce manifold effects. It is to question the likelihood that such effects will be as Marx expects.⁷⁵ Marx produced a powerful, systematic and still relevant account of capitalism. He produced a less powerful, less systematic but nevertheless highly suggestive account of the prerequisites for transformative communal action. Whether or not such action will emerge out of the capitalist mode of production is a separate question to which I shall return in chapter nine where Marx's later perception that capitalism comes to 'enrich' the life of the worker by virtue of its own requirements will be considered in relation to the contemporary preoccupation with producing knowledgeable workers.

While Marx was aware of the need to recreate immediate *felt* social bonds between individuals subject to capitalism's fragmented institutionalization, he did not theorize this requirement, as we have seen. We remain unclear as to how the demanding combination of social and cognitive capacities are to be developed if transformative communal action is to be undertaken. It will be the purpose of the next chapter to show how Gramsci's analysis of political commitment can help us to make good these deficiencies.

74 See Marx & Engels (1976), p. 92; Feher (1984). Cohen criticizes Marx for superimposing the *French* experience of revolutionary politics on the early *English* experience of industrialization to produce his account of proletarian revolution. See Cohen (1982), pp. 97 - 103. Wood (1991) notes the general disposition among nineteenth century theorists to conflate these two revolutions so as to arrive at a model of progress. Avineri (1968) has a different account of Marx's evaluation of the French Revolution.

75 For example Bauman (1982) suggests that much trade union activity should be interpreted in terms, not of 'self-interest', but rather of workers' need for autonomy and self-respect. While Bauman does not suggest that this is an expression of the contradiction between human and capitalist essence there are good grounds for interpreting it in this way.

Chapter seven

Transformative communal action: the Gramscian perspective

Marx's analysis of proletarian revolutionary action has been read here as an analysis of the subjective requirements for the constitution of radically democratic political commitment i.e. of an active, educated collective sense of individual obligation to the achievement of collective purposes. As has been seen, this commitment requires the transcendence of the cognitive-affective limitations which were discussed in chapter five. For Marx this transcendence is an emergent property of the changing requirements of capitalism itself. Therefore its initiation will require only marginal help from intellectuals. While he does offer some reasons for expecting the required intra-capitalist institutional change, these reasons are not supported by the kind of specific theoretical development that might render them completely persuasive. A more detailed account of the transition from passive a-social to active social subject is required. In this chapter, the task is to search the work of Antonio Gramsci for such an account. As will be seen, Gramsci shares Marx's concern with the constitution of political commitment; with the formation of the active social subject as voluntary and self-disciplined class member. This is the 'new type of person that we must work towards'.¹ However, his point of departure is not a proletariat somehow recovering from the effects of fetishization, but a fragmented population composed of classes unevenly incorporated into capitalist culture.² Partly for this reason, he is more preoccupied with theorizing political leadership than is Marx. As will be seen, Gramsci considers that replacement of radical fragmentation requires dedicated visionary leadership of a very specific kind.

In this connection, Gramsci's conception of the kind of subjectivity required to advance the transformative project is that of the 'democratic philosopher' or organic intellectual: 'his personality is not limited to himself as a physical individual but is an active social relationship of modification of the cultural environment'.³ Indeed, Gramsci, as does Marx, equates universal emancipation with the realization for all of active social subjectivity.⁴ Unlike Marx, though, Gramsci allocates to the state the major tasks of conception and execution and/or supervision of the activities and

1 Gramsci (1995), p. 274.

2 Gramsci (1978). For an account of the historical-cultural context, see Clark (1977); Fiori (1977); Forgacs (1990). The fragmentation with which Gramsci is concerned is of the kind analyzed by Althusser in CO.

3 Gramsci (1971), p. 350, quoted in Buci-Glucksmann (1980), p. 387.

4 As Piccone puts it: '[T]he goal is none other than the realization of what this [Western] tradition has been aiming for; that free social individual described by Marx in the *Grundrisse* and prefigured even earlier in the citizen of the Greek *polis* or in the Christian *soul*.' Piccone (1976), p. 493. See Gramsci (1995), pp. 14 - 16, pp. 269 - 277.

processes required. These tasks are conceived of by Gramsci as the 'remaking of the people'. In this chapter, I shall be concerned with one aspect of this multi-dimensional process: namely the constitution of a population of patriot-citizens, the inculcation of a form of active political commitment which is a matter of the heart as well as of the head.⁵

The following discussion will be organized in three sections, all of which are united by the concern to theorize further Marx's concept of active union. The first section will examine Gramsci's conceptual contribution to the dialectical approach.⁶ Here we will find new concepts - such as concrete phantasy - which will enable us to theorize the capitalist totality from the point of view of its transformation. We also find an explicit preoccupation with culture. As we noted in chapter three, post-Marxism adopts some of these Gramscian concepts precisely for the purpose of theorizing radical collective action. However, the adoption of discourse analysis and the rejection of dialectics introduce an unwitting idealism into post-Marxist analysis which forecloses on the full development of these concepts. Resituating these within a dialectical theory and method will guard against both idealist and materialist reductions. The second and third sections will elaborate on the Marxian concept of 'active union' by means of the further exploration of the force/meaning relationship which was discussed in chapters three and four. In fact, post-Marxism's usage of the concept of nodal point directs our attention quite fruitfully to the psychic component (and implications) of the constitution of political commitment; it makes us aware of the utility of articulating psychoanalysis to Gramsci's Marxism. At the same time, a return to Gramsci's analysis affords the means of developing a more systematic and rigorous explanation of the required processes than has been found in post-Marxism. In the second section, these processes will be discussed from the point of view of knowledge production. As will be seen, what we get from Gramsci is an argument about the way in which knowledge functions to constitute subjects of a specific kind. The synthesis of different kinds of knowledge is a key to the transcendence of social and cognitive debility. Here we get a new perspective on the concept of 'active union'. In the third section, this concept will be discussed from an organizational point of view. The vehicle for this discussion will be Gramsci's analyses of the relative institutional merits of trades unions, factory councils and party. In these analyses we will find both confirmation and elaboration of Marx's views on bureaucracy.

⁵ The other is the creation of a population of self-disciplined, self-aware social subjects willing and able to conform 'actively' to the demands of the collective (therefore communal) project which involves the completion of industrialization in an unevenly developed Italy. See Gramsci (1971), pp. 279 - 318. So, in addition to active and educated political engagement on the part of individual subjects, Gramsci is also looking for a specific kind of self-discipline in relation to the requirements of mass industrial production. It is not clear that Gramsci is sufficiently aware of the contradictions involved in these requirements. However, this is a problem that need not concern us here. See Rutigliano (1977).

⁶ See Adamson (1980); Finocchiaro (1988); Paggi (1979).

I now turn to sketch in, briefly, Gramsci's development of a Marxist theory adequate to his specific political concerns with active, radically democratic collective action.⁷

I

Gramsci as dialectical Marxist⁸

Gramsci's development of Marxism has three major strands. First is the reinstatement of the centrality of the dialectic; second and relatedly, the retrieval of Hegel's account of the state as educator and 'producer' of the community - that is of the 'ethical-political' or integral state - and third, the articulation to Marxism of a Machiavellian 'politics of inclusion' involving the constitution of popular citizenship i.e. of the 'national-popular'.⁹

The reinstatement of dialectics effects the recognition that capitalism is a total way of life with a specific fragmented form, as we have noted in chapter two. Along with this goes the further recognition of the centrality of the state as 'culture maker' as well as of the active historical (rather than evolutionary law-driven) character of human social life. This dual recognition becomes particularly important given the absence in Italy of a hegemonic bourgeois class and connectedly of a hegemonic state at a time when the transition from liberal to organized capitalism - which Gramsci takes to be wholly progressive - requires the most demanding form of political leadership.¹⁰ Neither the economic nor political 'class' is capable of providing such leadership. Hence the attraction of Machiavelli's work which draws our attention to the importance of a certain kind of engaged and committed leadership in the constitution of political commitment to demanding collective tasks.

Overall, the emphasis is on the production of knowledge facilitating activity rather than passivity. It is from this point of view that Gramsci makes his most stringent criticisms of orthodox Marxism and it is from this point of view that the dialectic approach is most useful.¹¹

The dialectic and collective action

7 Germino (1990); Piccone (1983); Togliatti (1979).

8 See Adamson (1980); Finocchiaro (1988); Mansfield (1993); Paggi (1979)

9 See Boggs (1984); Buci-Glucksmann (1982, 1982); Fontana (1993); Mouffe (1981).

10 Piccone (1983), ch. 3, argues that Gramsci seriously underestimates the quality of the Italian bourgeoisie as exemplified in e.g. Agnelli and Olivetti. See Boggs (1984) for a different view.

11 See Gramsci (1971), pp. 378 - 472. For more on this see Buci-Glucksmann (1980); Golding (1992); Salamini (1981).

An understanding of Gramsci's dialectical concepts and the way in which they relate to one another will lay the foundation for developing the argument about identity-formation and political commitment in the next section, while at the same time carrying out the task of refurbishing Marxism. As should be expected, all of these concepts refer to the necessary relations between entities considered to be independent when viewed from an analytical point of view. Here, as with Marx, the master concept is praxis, which has been discussed in earlier chapters. In addition, Gramsci offers new or refurbished concepts which will need a brief discussion. The first of these is the historical bloc.

The historical bloc. This concept is used in various ways, but always to alert us to the connectedness (or to the project of connecting or reconnecting) elements which are conventionally considered to be contradictory or mutually exclusive). These apparently contradictory elements include feeling and knowing, as will be seen later, although Gramsci himself uses the concept explicitly in two senses. Thus it is used both to refer to the fusion into a new organic unity - the unity of a new collective subject - of previously opposed social classes or strata and to the necessary unity of the ideal and the material.¹² As Gramsci himself suggests, the conception of the historical bloc denotes the mutually constitutive relationship of ideology and 'material forces':

Material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces¹³

This statement is a claim about the inadequacy of the base-superstructure model and, relatedly, about the centrality of a programme of action, or ideology, for the constitution of the collective subject.¹⁴ Since ideology is the means whereby the fragments of the totality are knit together, a new worldview - in this case the philosophy of praxis - needs to develop an ideology capable of fulfilling this function. The concept which Gramsci introduces to capture the character of such an ideology is the concrete phantasy.

Concrete phantasy. This concept, while seeming to convey a logical and empirical contradiction, in fact relates to the concept of change as *Aufhebung*. That is to say, it draws our attention to the requirement that the end desired must exist as a potential

12 Laclau & Mouffe (1985), ch. 2.

13 Gramsci (1971), p. 377.

14 Laclau and Mouffe (1985) make this point, referring in the process to the *historical bloc* as a 'new totalizing category'. p. 67. See also Adamson (1980), p. 179. See also Golding (1992), ch. 5.

within a particular culture. Gramsci introduces this term in the context of his discussion of the political party and its requirement for a specific kind of ideology, whose character is conveyed by means of Sorel's notion of the myth.¹⁵ This is a

political ideology expressed neither in the form of a cold utopia nor as learned theorising, but rather by the creation of concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organise its collective will.¹⁶

If a transformative ideology fails to engage with the actual so as to identify accurately the potential for change, it will be 'arbitrary' rather than 'necessary'. Put another way, it will be, not a concrete phantasy, but phantasy pure and simple. We will see in the second section of this chapter that the actual or given enters the concrete phantasy in two forms: first, through scientific knowledge of the structurally given i.e. of those aspects of the culture which evade commonsense knowledge; second, through interpretive knowledge of the humanly/psychically given as this is manifested in such commonsense knowledge.¹⁷ The latter becomes available by means of a specific kind of interaction between *organic* intellectuals and people which leads to the fusion of intellectual and popular thought and practice so as to render the project of transformation feasible. In this way, transformative praxis emerges organically (but not in the absence of dedicated human action) out of an existing state of affairs.

The organic. In general, the concept of the 'organic' signals *necessary* connectedness in senses to be explored further in what follows. Organic relations are mutually constitutive, necessary (but also necessarily historical) relations. Insofar as the term organic is used to refer to social relations it adds to necessity the realization of necessity which expresses itself in an affective-cognitive way. That is to say, the realization of necessary connectedness should result in a strong *felt* sense of membership; of membership as active, engaged and morally imperative. This is the opposite of bureaucratic, mechanical relations and, as will be seen, bureaucratism and mechanicism are the enemies of the kind of democratic transformative action which Gramsci desires. In the sense intended by Gramsci, organic social relations are also *hegemonic* social relations.

15 See Golding (1992), pp. 114 - 117.

16 Gramsci (1971), p. 126.

17 This will be discussed in section two below.

Hegemony.¹⁸ Hegemony refers to a form of political activity which is dictated by the peculiarly fragmented character of capitalist cultures.¹⁹ To describe a form of rule as hegemonic is to suggest that it has gained the active consent of the ruled; that the values of the culture in question have been internalized - or become experienced at the individual subjective level in imperative moral-affective terms - in a manner to be explored further in chapter eight. What this means is that insofar as the existing bourgeois state is a hegemonic state, organic intellectuals espousing the philosophy of praxis will need to engage in an extended period of political and cultural education - the war of position - so as to build up mass political commitment prior to taking over the state apparatus which they need to complete their transformative tasks.²⁰ From Gramsci's point of view, orthodox Marxists have failed to understand the necessity of this task and have therefore failed to arrive at the kind of knowledge necessary for effective transformative action. Their economism and rationalism have led them to neglect the necessary political and cultural dimensions of revolutionary praxis. These Marxists have failed to follow up the hints which we have found in Marx's political sociology about the importance of 'superstructural' phenomena; they have also forgotten Marx's warnings about the dangers of bureaucratism. It is in relation to these phenomena that Gramsci's preoccupation with the integral state can be understood.²¹ What is also quite clear, when Gramsci's work is reread in the light of that of post-Marxism and Althusser, is that the character of hegemony is better understood once psychoanalysis has been articulated to Marxism, since what hegemony requires is the cathexis of a new worldview by individuals who by means of an educative process (of a kind to be explored below) become active social subjects.

The integral state

In reconceptualizing the role of the state in industrial capitalist cultures Gramsci is reminding Marxists of an important political task, namely the constitution and reconstitution of subjectivities in fragmented and rapidly changing cultures. The theorization of this task requires that the coercive conception of the state be expanded as follows.²²

18 See Adamson (1980); Buci-Glucksmann (1980, 1982); Femia (1987); Fontana (1993); Laclau & Mouffe (1985); Mouffe (1979); Williams (1960) for more on hegemony.

19 Buci-Glucksmann (1980) in a thorough discussion of this matter, argues for continuity between Lenin and Gramsci here. See Piccone (1976) for a counter argument, with which I agree.

20 See Gramsci (1971), pp. 125 - 136; Fontana (1993); Sassoon (1980).

21 Bellamy & Schechter (1993); Buci-Glucksmann (1980); Mouffe (1981).

22 In addition to Althusser's (1984a) contribution in this area, see Isaac (1987), ch. 5; Poulantzas (1978a, 1978b).

The integral state is the ethical-political state concerned not merely with coercing the intransigent minority, but with educating the majority.²³ The aim of the state, according to Gramsci

is always that of creating new and higher types of civilisation or of adapting the 'civilisation' and the morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production; hence of evolving even physically, new types of humanity.²⁴

Without the integral state, there is no hegemony. A class (or class fraction) seeking hegemony will become a progressive class in the full sense only insofar as it gains possession of the complex apparatuses of the modern state (as well as of the forces of production) to provide a better way of life for most members of the culture.²⁵ It is the modern state as hegemonic state which is the necessary instrument of fundamental and progressive social change.²⁶ This kind of state cannot rely on coercion; it must create consent through the achievement of hegemony. This is the state as political society plus civil society, or, as Gramsci himself describes it, the state as 'hegemony protected by the armour of coercion'. In this sense, civil society as a multitude of 'so-called private initiatives and activities' constitutes the creative arm of the state.²⁷ So the hegemonic state is 'the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only maintains its dominance but manages to win the consent of those over whom it rules'.²⁸ It is this kind of state which is needed if progress of both a qualitative and quantitative kind is to be achieved. The ethical state is necessarily concerned with the *cultural* improvement of its people which cannot be left to chance and which should not be expected to emerge automatically from economic development.²⁹ Gramsci's explicit preoccupation with culture marks a significant

23 See Bellamy & Schechter (1993).

24 Gramsci (1971) p. 242. This is an example of what Bellamy & Shechter (1993) refer to as Gramsci's 'productivism'.

25 'Better' here refers to qualitative (cultural) and quantitative improvements. See Gramsci (1971), p. 357 for his conception of progress.

26 Gramsci's writings include both narrow and extended definitions of the state, the former indicating the governmental apparatus and emphasizing the coercive face of the state; the latter encompassing the broader functions of the state as creator and maintainer of civilisation or culture, of a whole way of life for a given population. Much has been made of the contradictions and 'antinomies' in Gramsci's writings on the state and civil society and his conceptualizations of the relationship between them. See Anderson (1976-77). What becomes clear from the examples cited by Gramsci himself is that the relationship between the state and civil society is fluid and changing, rather than static; it varies from place to place and over time.

27 See Adamson (1988); Bobbio (1988); Boggs (1984); Cohen and Arato (1992);

28 Gramsci (1971), p. 244.

29 Ibid., p. 258.

development in Marxist theory so it will be of interest here to explore his usage of this capacious term.³⁰

Gramsci on culture and identity

While the concept of culture occupies a crucial place in Gramsci's account of subjectivity and transformation, it is not always clear whether he is using this term in the broad inclusive sense to refer to a total way of life or in the narrower sense whose referent is the meaningful or symbolic as a separable dimension of human social life. If we take philosophy to refer to a worldview,³¹ then, in this sense, the philosophy of praxis - i.e. an active philosophy oriented to world transformation - represents culture as total way of life. (This is ideology in Althusser's usage.) This is a materialist conception of philosophy in that it requires philosophers to engage actively with the historical process in an historically novel way, as will be seen in section two. However, Gramsci is also and necessarily concerned with the specialized production of culture as meaning and, therefore, of culture as the aesthetic-expressive-affective dimension of human life which, under conditions of capitalist fragmentation, becomes the object of specialized production in a dedicated cultural sphere.³² So both usages can be found, the point being to establish how the philosophy of praxis (culture in the broad sense) ensures the production of culture (in the narrow sense) which will have the desired progressive transformative effects.

In his concern with culture, Gramsci displays his conviction that forms of knowledge function as institutions i.e. they help to constitute human individuals as specific kinds of subjects. In this connection, the following should be noted:

We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling their owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world. This form of culture is really dangerous, particularly for the proletariat.

If culture is thus conceived and transformed into practice, what will emerge will be the passive proletarian subject. What Gramsci looks for is the following:

Culture is something quite different. It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is the attainment of a

30 The contemporary widespread preoccupation with culture (however conceived) is discussed in relation to social movements and collective action in Johnston & Klandermans (1995); Melucci (1996).

31 Gramsci (1971), pp. 323 - 377.

32 Gramsci (1985).

higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations. But none of this can come about through spontaneous evolution, through a series of actions and reactions which are independent of one's own will - as is the case in the animal and vegetable kingdoms where every unit is selected and specifies its own organs unconsciously, through a fatalistic natural law. Above all, man is mind, i.e. he is a product of history, not nature.³³

Here we have an expression of the cultural requirements for the constitution of the active social subject who will be capable of voluntary, devoted and self-disciplined political commitment.

The politics of transformation is necessarily a politics of culture as well, in the two senses discussed above. Because of the differentiation of spheres, culture in the narrow sense can be seen as an optional extra or as the mere epiphenomenon of more fundamental processes and activities. However, culture is in no sense merely an ornamental element, or an additional wing added to an already functional building. On the contrary, culture is part of the foundations of a sound and enduring structure, since it is a constitutive element of group and individual identity and therefore of the kinds of relationships and practices which dictate the very nature of the social. Progressive transformation is the work of culture, as well as of economics and politics. The concrete phantasy becomes concrete through the constitution of a new active progressive culture which comes to emerge out of the fusion of existing 'high' (philosophical) and 'low' (commonsensical) cultures.³⁴ I now turn to discuss the process by means of which such a fusion takes place. This discussion will enable me to elaborate further on Marx's concept of 'active union'.

II

The formation of the transformative communal actor

It has been noted in chapter six that Marx expects the proletarian revolutionary actor to emerge out of institutional changes brought about by capitalism itself. Radical intellectuals will have the function of rendering more coherent and systematic emergent proletarian theoretical knowledge of the object to be transformed. In Gramsci's work, as noted earlier, the emphasis is different, particularly in the work

33 Gramsci (1977), pp. 10 - 11.

34 Note Althusser's failure to understand this part of Gramsci's theory and therefore his failure to appreciate the significance of Gramsci's conception of the philosophy/science relationship. See Althusser and Balibar (1970), p. 134 - 5. See Buci-Glucksmann (1980), ch. 1 on Althusser on Gramsci.

produced in prison.³⁵ However, the idea of emergence remains important, in terms both of the 'objective' and 'subjective' dimensions of change. That is to say, the desired transformation must exist as a potential. It is the task of intellectuals to draw attention to this and to indicate how the potential can be actualized. We have seen how Marx undertakes this task in the CM by describing the actual in terms of its openness to transformation and by suggesting to the proletariat good reasons for the necessary transformation. We will now see how Gramsci theorizes this task.

A revitalized Marxism will constitute the intellectual and institutional framework within which redescriptions and reemphases can be formulated:

[N]ecessity exists when there exists an efficient and active *premiss* consciousness of which in people's minds has become operative, proposing concrete goals to the collective consciousness and constituting a complex of convictions and beliefs which acts powerfully in the form of "popular beliefs". In the *premiss* must be contained, already developed or in the process of development, the necessary and sufficient material conditions for the realisation of the impulse of collective will; but it is also clear that one cannot separate from this "material" premiss, which can be quantified, a certain level of culture, by which we mean a complex of intellectual acts, and, as a product and consequence of these, a certain complex of overriding passions and feelings, overriding in the sense that they have the power to lead men on to action "at any price".³⁶

The moment at which such consciousness is achieved is referred to by Gramsci as the 'cathartic moment', which is the moment at which strongly felt political commitment to the collective goal becomes established.³⁷ This is the moment at which cultural membership will have been internalized; at which the values of the proposed cultural transformation will have been cathected by individuals. It is the founding moment of a new kind of active social subjectivity. In short it is the moment at which the transformative communal actor is formed; at which force and meaning are fused so that 'ideas become material forces'.³⁸

In order to understand how this important stage has been reached, it is necessary to understand how intellectuals gain access to 'popular consciousness'. 'Popular consciousness' refers to modes of knowing (and of acting) of the uneducated, or relatively uneducated, therefore, in this instance, of a factory proletariat coming to be shaped by industrial capitalist institutions *and* a peasantry whose knowledge of the world does not extend beyond its own locality.³⁹ It is the task of organic

35 See Boggs (1984); Germino (1990) who stresses the continuity between 'early' and 'late' Gramsci.

36 Gramsci (1971), pp. 412 - 3.

37 Ibid., p. 366.

38 I shall be arguing in chapter eight that Freud's psychoanalysis offers us a means of grasping the mechanisms whereby this process is completed.

39 See Gramsci (1978), pp. 441 - 507.

intellectuals to constitute a historical bloc out of these classes i.e. to constitute a new collective identity through the transcendence rather than elimination of pre-existing characteristics and interests.⁴⁰

Gramsci's argument centres on the necessary dialectical relationship between being and knowledge. What we know - the knowledge we produce - is intimately related to the kind of world we inhabit, to the kind of beings we are *and* to the way in which we reproduce or transform that world (ourselves included). The constitution of the concrete phantasy involves a process of knowledge renovation which is simultaneously a process of subjectivity-reformation, for both 'educators' and 'educated', as will be seen. This process is an extended one involving relations of a specific character between organic intellectuals and people.

Gramsci's awareness of the need for cultural, psychic change leads him beyond the 'rational' to a stress on the centrality of directly experienced, felt social relations between intellectuals and people. The formation of a new collective actor involves the modification of ways of feeling as well as of knowing. The intellectual will not achieve this state of affairs

without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in a particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated.⁴¹

Popular feeling and intellectual knowledge will be fused through the 'passage from knowing to understanding and to feeling' on the part of intellectuals and 'vice versa from feeling to understanding and to knowing' on the part of the people. In fact, there is a process of mutual education in feeling *and* knowing here ('the educator must be educated') and it is this mutuality which leads to the creation of a particular kind of social bond between intellectuals and people which results in the formation of a true national-popular, therefore integral state. It is in this way that the cognitive and social debility effected by capitalism can be transcended.

Gramsci and the role of organic intellectuals

Gramsci's reflections on political commitment are strongly influenced by Machiavelli's writings, which he interprets as an account of visionary politics centred on the constitution of a 'national popular' or popular republican nation, that is, of a

⁴⁰ The discussion that follows does not replace, but rather expands on, that undertaken in chapter three above.

⁴¹ Gramsci (1971), p. 418.

population of active, confident, educated and public-spirited citizens.⁴² So Gramsci's Marxism is a Marxism in which Marx's implicit republicanism is brought to the fore but which is, in addition, inflected by a kind of nationalism which brings back into politics the affective dimension of which it has been drained, apparently, through the division of labour. In effect, Gramsci reads Machiavelli through Marxian lenses and Marx through Machiavellian lenses. The concept of organic intellectual serves as a kind of conceptual bridge between the two. In effect, it is the means of showing how the politics of virtue and passion which is implicit in Marx's account of revolutionary action can be both theorized and pursued by Marxist intellectuals.⁴³

An active culture will be brought about by intellectuals of a specific kind using a variety of means (to be discussed further below) to fuse knowledge, emotion and morality. The necessary process of production will require the combined efforts of intellectuals as philosophers, scientists and artists who are united as Machiavellian (that is creative) politicians to mobilize a population behind a politics of transformation.⁴⁴ These will be new kinds of intellectuals, being neither philosophers in the idealist sense nor narrow technicians. Rather, they must combine philosophy and practice through the development of an awareness of both the theory underlying every practice and of the importance of human activity in the making of history.⁴⁵

Organic intellectuals, organized in the Party as 'new Prince', set out neither to distance themselves from the people as had nineteenth century Italian intellectuals,⁴⁶ nor to establish hierarchical technocratic/bureaucratic relations with a population viewed as an object to be controlled. Rather, their goal must be to establish social relations which will constitute a socio-cultural-political movement oriented to the institution of a new collective subject i.e. the united and educated people as citizenry, therefore as *active* collective subject. Put another way, organic intellectuals in this sense are embarking on a process whose successful conclusion will herald their own redundancy. The logical terminus is that: 'only the social group that poses the end of the State and its own end as the target to be achieved can create an ethical State - i.e. one which tends to put an end to the internal divisions of the ruled, etc., and to create a technically and morally unitary social organism'.⁴⁷

42 Ibid., pp. 125 - 205; Boggs (1984), ch. 6; Fontana (1993), esp. ch. 7.

43 Gramsci sees Machiavelli as the prototype of the organic intellectual who seeks to teach 'those who do not know' the means whereby they can found a new state. See Gramsci (1971), p. 126.

44 Gramsci (1971), p. 325.

45 Ibid., p. 10.

46 Gramsci (1985), pp. 256 - 7.

47 Gramsci (1971), p. 259.

Collective action and the power/knowledge nexus

The production of new knowledge oriented to the transformation of social relations is constrained but not determined by existing social arrangements, including existing forms of knowledge.⁴⁸ It is the task of organic intellectuals, guided by philosophy, to break through these constraints and renovate these existing forms of knowledge, most importantly commonsense and science, so as to render them congruent with the requirements of progressive transformation. At the same time, philosophy itself will not remain unchanged and therefore neither will the philosophers.

The concrete phantasy will be composed of three knowledge components. Two of these components - philosophy and science - are produced by the educated. The third - commonsense - comes from the people. It is only if these different kinds of knowledges are fused into a historical bloc - i.e. if each is modified by its relation to the others so that a new coherent unity emerges - that the concrete phantasy will come into being. In fact the constitution of the concrete phantasy is an institutional process involving the constitution and reconstitution of social relations between organic intellectuals and people.

I shall now discuss each of the constituent knowledges.

*Philosophy*⁴⁹

The philosophy of an epoch is 'the ensemble of all individual philosophies and philosophical tendencies, plus scientific opinions, religion and commonsense'.⁵⁰ Philosophy in this extended sense can be equated with a hegemonic ideology and what is contained implicitly in this apparently catch-all definition is Gramsci's theory of how a new concrete phantasy can be developed and institutionalized.

As noted earlier, philosophy is here used in the sense of worldview or potential culture. The philosophy of praxis constitutes a worldview of a material kind in that, unlike earlier speculative philosophies, its goal is to translate this worldview into praxis outside the dedicated philosophical sphere.⁵¹ Philosophy in this sense works on real historical problems, not on preexisting philosophical thought, although clearly, the way in which these problems are conceived is informed and constrained by existing philosophies, hence Gramsci's polemics with, among others, Croce and Gentile.⁵² However, the point of the polemics is not to build a more beautiful philosophical system but to prepare oneself to engage more effectively with real

48 Gramsci (1995), pp. 138 - 159.

49 Gramsci (1971), pp. 323 - 377.

50 Ibid., p. 455. See Bellamy & Schecter (1993) ch. 4 esp. pp. 90 - 9.; Boggs (1984), ch. 4.

51 Gramsci (1971), p. 435.

52 Bellamy & Schecter (1993); Finocchiaro (1988); Germino (1990); Piccone (1973).

historical problems.⁵³ It is this historical-practical approach which will enable philosophers to gain the knowledge needed to carry out transformative, rather than merely interpretive, tasks, in particular the task of mass cultural transformation. It is to this important question that I now turn.

Transformative politics as cultural revolution

Gramsci develops his ideas on the importance of culture in relation to his criticisms of *both* orthodox or scientific Marxism *and* Italian liberal intellectuals, whose neglect of this question he considers to have been politically disastrous.⁵⁴ Explicit and systematic cultural development is, in effect, a kind of education of the emotions which is a constitutive and ongoing element of emancipatory transformation requiring that intellectuals gain access to the 'passions and feelings' of the population.⁵⁵ This access can only be gained, and the task of renovating commonsense knowledge carried out, through knowledge of an interpretive rather than scientific kind. As Jay points out, Gramsci is in a line of thinkers going back to Vico who focus on the impoverishing effects of scientism on the 'sensus communis'.⁵⁶ These impoverishing effects are related to the idea of a universality based on abstract rather than concrete reason. The latter is reason embedded in social relations and practices. Organic intellectuals will be alert to this distinction and will seek to draw local concrete reason (commonsense) into a broader concrete reason by initiating a dialogue between themselves and the population in question. This is a dialogue guided by the imaginative reconstruction of that commonsense as derived (in part at least⁵⁷) from the study of the cultural artefacts of everyday life. Through the interpretation of these artefacts, intellectuals can begin to take the pulse of the people, as it were.

Organic intellectuals communicate with the people through a variety of media and mechanisms, through education in the sense of schooling, through directly political mobilization in workplaces, but also in a broader sense e.g. through the creation of a literature that is at once national and popular.⁵⁸ In Gramsci's view, it is because Italian intellectuals have failed to carry out their educational-cultural tasks of popular integration that the Italian state is a legal fiction rather than a cultural reality.⁵⁹ For example, and in contrast to that of France, Italian national literature has not been popular and Italian popular literature has not been national. The former has been the

53 Gramsci (1971), p. 324.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 419 - 72; Bellamy & Schechter (1993), pp 85 - 90; Femia (1981); Morera (1990).

55 See Cirese (1982) on Gramsci on popular culture.

56 For comments on the hermeneutic or interpretive aspects of Gramsci's work, see Jay (1984), ch. 4; Salamini (1981).

57 Mansfield (1984) is useful here.

58 Entwistle (1979).

59 Gramsci (1985), pp. 196 - 286. See Forgacs (1990) for a discussion of modern Italian culture.

product of a 'caste tradition' and is characterized by 'bookish images' and feelings; the latter consists of translations of popular novels written in other European languages. Italian writers have not assumed a 'national educative' function; 'they have not and do not set themselves the problem of elaborating popular feelings *after having relived them and made them their own*'.⁶⁰ An educational-interpretive process of interaction between intellectuals and people is essential if transformative communal action is to become possible. I shall now consider this more closely as the renovation of commonsense.

*The Renovation of Commonsense*⁶¹

If philosophy is to become a concrete phantasy it must be grounded in existing commonsense. The task then becomes one of renovating that commonsense; of cleansing it of those aspects which will prevent the emergence of the new culture i.e. the emergence of active social subjectivity. Expressed in psychoanalytic terms, this is the route to cathexis of the new culture i.e. to the internalization of the culture's values by the relevant individuals.

Existing reality as it is expressed in commonsense is open to renovation because it already contains elements which are critical of the existing state of affairs. More than this, though, it contains elements - lacking in philosophy and science - whose incorporation are vital for the constitution of the concrete phantasy. The critical elements are captured by the term 'contradictory consciousness'. The other salient characteristics of commonsense are its *felt* and *local* nature. Since the latter characteristic is no longer significant in relation to contemporary liberal capitalist cultures, I shall discuss only the first two characteristics here.

*Contradictory consciousness*⁶². Popular consciousness - i.e. the consciousness of the uneducated - consists in contradictory elements in the following way. First, it contains radical critical, implicit elements derived from directly experienced social relations, or everyday activities; second, it contains explicit or verbal elements which have been passively accepted or inherited from the past. This imposed or inherited consciousness prevents subordinate strata from developing their implicit consciousness into an active awareness of things as they actually are and of how they might be improved. While Gramsci takes human nature to be 'a historical fact', that is, historically variable,⁶³ he also assumes an innate human potential for reflection and

60 Ibid., pp. 206 - 7. Emphasis mine.

61 Gramsci (1971), pp. 323 - 343; 418 - 425.

62 Ibid., p. 324.

65 Ibid., pp. 351 - 357.

creativity. This is the meaning of his claim that everyone is an intellectual.⁶⁴ It is this innate human capacity for critical reflection which the organic intellectual must work on, must bring to life as it were, so as to induce the dissolution of the taken-for-grantedness of the given. Implicit critical consciousness is 'displayed in effective action', that is to say that on occasions when the grip of the hegemonic class weakens, for whatever reason, it is possible to witness the contradiction in action testifying to the existence of an implicit critical account of the world, the contradiction of verbal affirmations of the official account.⁶⁵ Implicit radical consciousness is the point of entry for a dialogue between organic intellectuals and people; a dialogue which therefore makes sense to the groups appealed to in terms of their daily experience. It must work on feelings of unease and unarticulated discontents so as to transform them into 'good sense'. Through the fusion of this 'good sense' and the world view of the intellectuals, a single and coherent conception of the world will be developed, a conception grounded in the sociological and psychological realities of popular everyday life.⁶⁶ This is the passage from a consciousness which takes reality for granted to a critical self-consciousness which questions that reality; it is the passage from passive to active social subjectivity.

Commonsense is felt. We can translate this characteristic into psychoanalytic terms by saying that commonsense is cathected i.e. it is invested with libidinal energy. This is what makes it so vital to the constitution of a new kind of political commitment. Commonsense knowledge ignores (is unaware of) the divorce of knowing and feeling allegedly required for the acquisition of scientific knowledge and of philosophy.⁶⁷ Commonsense is knowledge based on, indeed embedded in, group membership; it is the means whereby the moral demands placed upon people by their necessary membership of a group are expressed. The taken-for-grantedness which is an important characteristic of commonsense is derived from its embeddedness in group membership. Commonsense is sense that is shared; it is 'our' sense and, as Gramsci puts it, it is founded on 'faith'. It therefore has an imperative character with respect to norms of behaviour. In commonsense, cognition and affect are inextricably related. Commonsense conceptions of the world have a solidity which grounds individuals in a specific social environment and shapes and controls their behaviour in that environment.

As is made clear in his discussion of education, Gramsci seeks to endow philosophy with the solidity which is one of the defining characteristics of

66 Ibid., p. 9.

67 Ibid., p. 326.

68 Ibid., pp. 330 - 1.

69 This was always a questionable claim which is now being undermined by science itself. See Damasio (1994).

commonsense. In making this point, he uses Vico's distinction between 'certum' and 'verum'.⁶⁸ By articulating certain elements of commonsense knowledge to philosophy, the narrow local disabling nature of commonsense will be transcended while philosophy will lose its abstract universal nature; it will be embedded in a community and acquire the solidity and imperative nature of commonsense.⁶⁹

The renovation of commonsense is the basis on which the conjoining of 'impulse and will'⁷⁰ proceeds so as to constitute the transformative communal actor. Commonsense is transformed into 'good sense' through its fusion with philosophy and philosophy becomes concrete or practical through the absorption of certain characteristics of commonsense. Put another way, the process of constituting the concrete phantasy serves also to reintegrate elements of a world fragmented by the division of labour and the differentiation of spheres. In this case, the division of mental and manual labour has led to the fragmentation of thought and feeling, so that the thinking faculty of intellectuals has been overdeveloped at the expense of the feeling faculty, as intellectuals have been required to 'privatize' the emotional element of their being in order to carry out their functions. The people, on the other hand, have suffered the underdevelopment of their rationality but have not experienced the fragmentation of rationality and affect undergone by intellectuals. In short, the purpose of this process of knowledge reconstitution is to transcend the division of labour between mental and manual and the fragmentation of knowledge and affect.

It is through the process of interpretation that the organic intellectual gains the kind of knowledge required to fuse progressive elements of commonsense with philosophy and science so as to produce an ensemble of practical norms of conduct capable of generating a new historical reality for a given people. What will render these new norms imperative is that they are the outcome of a dialogue between intellectual and people oriented to extracting from commonsense those critical and progressive elements which it is likely to contain, while at the same time retaining (by virtue of the nature of the relationship between intellectuals and people) that imperative felt moral character referred to above. It is to this situation that Gramsci's concept of the national-popular refers.⁷¹ The national-popular state is a hegemonic state which has succeeded in constituting active-democratic popular political commitment to collective goals. We may say that it is the form which 'active union' takes under specific historical conditions. For Gramsci, certainly, the national-

70 Gramsci (1971), p. 35. Gramsci's attitude to commonsense is more astringent and judgemental than is that of Vico. For more on the latter, see Berlin (1969), also Shotter (1981).

71 It is necessary to agree here with Bellamy and Schecter (1993 p. 110) that this approach entails the strong risk of degenerating into a more efficient method of social engineering.

72 Gramsci (1971), p. 360.

73 See Nimni (1991) for more on Marxism and nationalism.

popular is the most progressive form of state at a specific stage of capitalist development i.e. that of the transition from liberal to organized capitalism.

However, if the national-popular as a historically and culturally specific form of collective political commitment is to be realized, intellectuals will need to have at their disposal also more impersonal or 'structural' kinds of knowledge - knowledge which Gramsci designates as science. Commitment to achieving the goals set by philosophy must be informed, not only by an openness to and understanding of popular conceptions and concerns but also by knowledge of the 'necessary and sufficient material conditions' for transformation. It is scientific knowledge which provides this knowledge. What follows is a very brief discussion of science which will stress the dangers of scientism in constituting the transformative communal actor.

*Science and transformation*⁷²

It should be noted here that Gramsci's account of science is rather simplistic. However, it is of interest because it does pinpoint the subject effects of specific kinds of knowledge in a way that advances the argument of this thesis. For Gramsci, science is the handmaiden of philosophy in the sense that it produces the technical knowledge required for instituting the world view proposed by philosophy. Science ensures that philosophy remains within the bounds of the possible and that it attains its goals in the most efficient way possible.⁷³ It is not the case, for Gramsci, that scientists acting as objective observers of an independently-existing reality gradually amass a body of increasingly accurate and comprehensive knowledge of that reality. The questions that are asked, the problems that are taken to be worth investigating, are given neither by 'objective reality' nor by disinterested intellectual curiosity, but by the social context. Philosophy produces the questions to which science will seek to provide accurate answers.⁷⁴ What this means is that the content of science is constrained but not determined by philosophy and politics. Correct scientific knowledge of those elements of the culture and of the natural world which are susceptible to being known scientifically (that is, in terms of 'laws' and regularities) is possible, and indeed is necessary, for successful transformation. However, the necessity and universality of scientific knowledge is dependent on the historical affirmation of a group which endows scientific knowledge with its objectivity. For Gramsci, objective always means 'humanly objective'. Nature and reality are always

74 Gramsci's chief merits do not lie in his account of science as knowledge but rather in pointing out the dangers of scientism. See Golding (1990), ch. 3. See also Morera (1990) for a realist interpretation (with which I concur) of Gramsci's historicist account of science. See Callinicos (1983) and Hoffman (1984) for a different view.

75 Quoted in Salamini (1981), p. 169.

76 Gramsci (1971), p. 368.

nature and reality for us, as we have encountered and reconstructed them. Objectivity as a universal state or condition may be achieved through political action oriented to the cultural unification of humanity.⁷⁵ Objectivity then is culturally/politically constituted but it is constituted on the basis of accurate knowledge of the real properties of its constitutive raw materials. Phantasies only become actualities if they are constituted on this basis, as we have seen above.

What Gramsci is concerned with is 'human activity (history-spirit) in the concrete, indissolubly connected with a certain organised (historicised) "matter" and with the transformed nature of man'.⁷⁶ It is not an idealism which is being asserted (for as has been seen, Gramsci sees material/ideal as false dichotomies) but the unavoidable historicity of knowledge as well as the present limits of human understanding and the potential for transcending those limits. This potential will only be realized if we become more aware of the historical nature of our knowledge and of the human potential to imagine the new.

From this point of view scientific social science is a cultural, political danger whose character Gramsci is determined to expose. In effect, scientific social science has the effect of institutionalizing passivity by stressing the evolutionary and law-driven character of human social life and by forgetting the historically and politically constituted nature of these phenomena; it emphasizes the 'passive' rather than 'active' components of culture.⁷⁷ It therefore has the effect of naturalizing the historical-cultural in a manner similar to that of the classical political economists, as pinpointed by Marx.⁷⁸ The knowledge produced by this kind of science is not just wrong; it has the most deleterious political-cultural consequences, producing, as it does, the most passive kind of conformism thereby subverting (albeit unwittingly) the whole Marxian project.⁷⁹ There is an affinity between knowledge thus conceived and bureaucratic forms of administration. They are both informed by the same philosophy or worldview and they both constitute fetishized social relations - therefore passively conformist subjects. I now turn to the final section of this chapter, where Gramsci's thoughts on the dangers of bureaucratism will be explored further. This exploration will enable us to understand more clearly the importance of 'active union' to the constitution of a democratic communal transformative actor.

77 Regarding the existence of an extra-historical and extra-human objectivity, to have access to that reality would require a super-human perspective or 'a standpoint of the cosmos itself'. See Gramsci (1971), p. 372.

78 Ibid., p. 372. His example of the imposition of the concepts of North and South, East and West, on the natural world and the resulting expansion, increased complexity and capacity for organising that complexity makes clear what he means by this statement.

79 See Timpanaro (1980) for more on these terms. Timpanaro is a dedicated opponent of Gramsci's 'voluntarism'.

80 See Gramsci (1971), pp. 399 - 402; 425 - 488.

81 Gramsci is particularly critical of the scientific turn in Marxism, as he identifies this in the work of Bukharin, which reduces the philosophy of praxis to a 'sociology'. Gramsci (1971), p. 426.

III

Organization and transformative communal action: the Gramscian solution

In this final section I provide a more detailed discussion and evaluation of Gramsci's organizational prescriptions for the initiation of the concrete phantasy. This will enable me to consider further the way in which 'active union' as required by Marx, can be brought about, that is, a union composed of social subjects who actively, knowledgeably and voluntarily engage in the collective action. As will be seen, Gramsci has much to tell us about the kind of organization needed to secure this state of affairs. Although he does not provide a theory of institutions, it is clear from remarks and insights scattered throughout his work that Gramsci understands the way in which institutions shape individuals.⁸⁰ So he evaluates them in terms of their potential to constitute a new kind of active, critical conformity.⁸¹ His evaluation of the dangers of bureaucracy can be considered from this point of view.

From his earliest writings, his concern to eradicate bureaucratism from workers' organizations is clearly visible. Organization matters but the problem of organization is subordinate to that of instituting hegemonic relations in the sense discussed above and solutions to the problem must be such as to allow such relations to flourish.⁸² In other words, the organizational means must be such as to produce the active social subject needed if collective subjectivity (will-formation) of a voluntary, enthusiastic, self-disciplined and knowledgeable kind is to emerge. We have seen in section two that the constitution of subjectivity of the desired kind is secured through an extended and democratic process of cultural transformation. A discussion of the organizational prerequisites for this task should clarify matters further. As will be seen, Gramsci assesses organization in terms of its compatibility with the elimination of the kinds of cognitive and social debility with which we are concerned here. It must be such as to allow of the recovery of humanity's innate sociality while at the same time revealing the real character of capitalist fragmentations. So organizations must put in place emancipatory - i.e. non-bureaucratic and non-technocratic - social relations which will enable individual members of the organization to gain knowledge of the totality as a totality of many determinations. They must set up an educational process which will transform 'society', 'politics' and 'economics' into a total domain of

82 Although this insight seems to desert him when it comes to evaluating the institutional effects of Fordism. See Piccone (1983) on Gramsci's failure to comprehend the institutional effects of technology.

83 See particularly the comments in Gramsci (1995), pp. 269 - 277.

84 Piccone (1983), ch. 4.

transparent human activity. Through organization of a certain kind the theoretical knowledge needed to inform effective transformative action will become the property of all individual members of the group. In short, organizations must be such as to advance the cognitive and emotional education required for emancipatory transformation. It is in this light that we can understand Gramsci's contrasting and changing evaluations of trades unions and factory councils.⁸³ Insofar as these will effect the transcendence of 'economic corporative'⁸⁴ motivations for collective action, then they are to be welcomed. His final verdict on trades unions and factory councils is that such transcendence cannot be expected from intra-capitalist institutions and that a radically new kind of organization, more directly political and more systematically and nationally organized - i.e. the political party - must be put in place by organic intellectuals. Before discussing this organization, it will be useful to explore briefly Gramsci's (later abandoned) positive evaluation of the factory council, since this encompasses a more detailed analysis of the processes necessary for the constitution of a new kind of individualized and educated sociality than we have found in Marx's work. The logic of Gramsci's argument here is that knowledge of real human connectedness will emerge out of directly experienced social relations in the factory. The argument is therefore quite Marxian in its form.

*Factory councils*⁸⁵

The recovery of a sense of sociality depends on the realization of necessary social connectedness and interdependence. The early Gramsci hoped that such a recovery would be effected through the factory councils. Unlike the trades unions which enable the 'bad' (individualistic, competitive and narrow-minded) side of factory life to flourish, the factory councils have the following effects:

The Council is the most effective organ for mutual education and for developing the new social spirit that the proletariat has successfully engendered from the rich and living experience of the community of labour ... It is a joyous awareness of being an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system which, through useful work and the disinterested production of social wealth asserts its sovereignty, and realizes its power and its freedom to create history.⁸⁶

85 See Gramsci (1977), especially sections II and V. See Bellamy & Schecter (1993) ch. 2; Germino (1990), ch. 6; Schecter (1991), ch. 4.

86 Gramsci (1971), p. 16.

87 See Bellamy & Schecter (1993); Buci-Glucksmann (1980); Postone (1983); Sassoon (1987); Schecter (1991).

88 Gramsci (1977), pp. 100 - 101. Gramsci was not to maintain this lyrical conception of factory councils. See Schecter (1991) for a detailed account of Gramsci's changing evaluations of the factory councils.

Here we find expressed the hope that factory councils will provide both cognitive and affective means of instituting the social subject. They will effect the transcendence of the debilitating dichotomy discussed in chapter five. They will do this by inculcating in the individual worker a consciousness of himself as producer rather than wage earner, as part of a collective producer oriented to the production of real objects rather than profits. The producer is one who 'has acquired an awareness of his role in the process of production, at all its levels, from the workshop to the nation and the world'. Contrary to what we might think, the 'producer mentality' is the 'mentality of a creator of history'.⁸⁷ So the term producer is here drained of its economism and takes on instead active, future-oriented, transformative-cultural associations. Factory councils will constitute producers rather than capitalist workers because they constitute a kind of active orientation which is expressed through the delegative rather than representative character of its organization. Moreover, this is an active orientation towards the whole productive process.⁸⁸ Through participation in factory councils, workers will become aware of the complexity and connectedness of the fragments of capitalist culture. They will become capable of questioning taken-for-granted fragmentations of the world into 'economic' and 'political', into 'private' and 'public'. Factory councils will engender in individual workers the awareness that objectivity is, to a significant degree, the product of their combined subjectivity. In doing so, they will render transparent the necessary connectedness of apparently isolated fragments of the capitalist world and work to reconstitute the felt social bond even beyond the individual factory.

Furthermore, factory councils emerge out of the capitalist labour process; they are the workers' own organizations and therefore the immediate expression of their commonsense insofar as this is 'good sense'. They are institutions which are rooted in and grow out of the everydayness of workers' experience, not rationalist abstractions which are imposed on workers by radical elites.⁸⁹ The councils, then, meet Marx's stringent requirements for democratic transformative politics. In fact, they appear to be the emergent solution to the fatal split between citizen and subject first discussed by Marx in 'On the Jewish Question'.⁹⁰ However, while they may transcend fragmentation within the factory, they leave us with the problem of articulation at the broader level beyond the factory. In any case, there is a more fundamental objection to the councils in that, emerging as they do out of that most capitalist of institutions -

89 Gramsci (1977), p. 101.

90 Ibid., pp. 316 - 7.

91 Here the Marxian tone of Gramsci's comment on the bureaucratic, undemocratic character of German Social-Democracy should be noted. See Gramsci (1977), p. 143.

92 Marx (1994). Schecter (1991, p. 183) comments on this aspect of council communism. From this point of view, factory councils would be the means of transcending the economy/politics fragmentation. He nevertheless sees Gramsci's enthusiasm for the councils as an expression of 'economism'. See Germino (1990) for a different view.

the factory - they cannot carry out either the cognitive or social tasks required. Hence the need for a more explicitly political and national social movement.

*From council to party*⁹¹

The party is needed to ensure the emergence of new kinds of social relations and subjectivities conducive to radically democratic transformative politics. So Gramsci notes:

The Communist Party is the instrument and historical form of the process of inner liberation through which the worker is transformed from *executor* to *initiator*, from *mass* to *leader* and *guide*, from brawn to brain and purpose.⁹²

The element of 'spontaneity' is not sufficient for revolutionary struggle; it never leads the working class beyond the limits of the existing bourgeois democracy. The element of consciousness is needed, the 'ideological' element: in other words, an understanding of the conditions of the struggle, the social relations in which the worker lives, the fundamental tendencies at work in the system of those relations, and the process of development which society undergoes as a result of the existence within it of insoluble antagonisms, etc.⁹³

The party will be the means of constituting a new nodal point out of fragmented capitalist cultures. That is to say, it will ensure the emergence of mutually reinforcing institutions governed by the principle of praxis. The party will effect the collective realization of necessary social connectedness and interdependence. At the same time, the new party will be a mass party, not a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries, although it will need a strong leadership or General Staff. However, this leadership will be composed of organic intellectuals, whose character has been explored in section two above.⁹⁴ In effect (and this is one of the significant ways in which the Gramscian party differs from the Leninist party) the party is articulated to a social movement with which it is in continuous and radically democratic communication.⁹⁵ This processual and democratic connectedness between social movement and party minimizes the danger that the latter will come to constitute an institution 'for itself' over against the movement's interest. We have seen in section two how Gramsci hopes to avoid the institutionalization of hierarchy, bureaucratism

93 See Bellamy & Schecter (1993); Davidson (1974); Schecter (1991).

94 Gramsci (1977), p. 333.

95 Gramsci (1978), p. 288

96 Germino (1990) wants to argue for continuity between councils and party. See his extended and partisan discussion (ch. vii) of Gramsci's January 1924 letter in which he (Gramsci) criticizes Bordiga's sectarianism and rationalism and outlines a new strategy for a party of organic intellectuals.

97 See Melucci (1996), ch. 15.

or paternalism. A few concluding remarks will be sufficient here in relation to this problem.

The political party as New Prince

Gramsci's conception of the political party is derived not only from Bolshevism, but also from the work of Machiavelli, whose influence on Gramsci was noted earlier. It is in the centrality (derived from Machiavelli's *The Prince*) of the character of membership - namely personal, felt, intensely loyal - and on the related cultural transformative work discussed in section two above that the Gramscian party is to be distinguished from that of Lenin.⁹⁶ While Bolshevism is a powerful influence in the formulation of Gramsci's ideas about the party, his Machiavellian turn serves to give these ideas a nationalist republican and therefore very unLeninist flavour.⁹⁷ For this reason, he is able to offer prescriptions for the neutralization of bureaucratism which were not available to Lenin (who was also, it should be noted, apprehensive in relation to this matter⁹⁸). It is these prescriptions that I want to discuss briefly here because they reveal Gramsci's hope that the immediacy, democracy and organicism which he held to be the great strength of the factory councils could be transferred to the party.

In pursuit of this aim, he makes a strong distinction between bureaucratic and democratic centralism which we can understand as a distinction between mechanical and organic relationships or between inflexible and flexible organizational forms.⁹⁹ The former requires unthinking and immediate 'passive and servile' obedience to orders rather than the 'conscious and lucid assimilation of the directive to be fulfilled' which Gramsci sees as desirable.¹⁰⁰ The significance of an intermediate stratum of party members between the General Staff and the masses is that it will prevent the kind of isolation of the leadership which might result in its bureaucratic degeneration.

Nowhere is Gramsci's concern with the institutional/relational (as opposed to organizational) aspects of organs of political mobilization expressed more clearly than in the following:

The error of the party has been to have accorded priority in an abstract fashion to the problem of party organization, which in practice has simply meant creating an apparatus of functionaries who could be depended on for their orthodoxy towards the official view. It was believed, and it is still believed,

98 Gramsci (1971), p. 125

99 see Sassoon (1987); Golding (1992).

100 Lenin (1949); See Colletti (1976); Lewin (1969).

101 Gramsci (1971), p. 21; Finocchiaro (1988), pp. 162 - 3.; Sassoon (1987), Pt. III.

102 quoted in Sassoon (1987), p. 215

that the revolution depends only on the existence of such an apparatus; and it is sometimes even believed that its existence can bring about the revolution.¹⁰¹

What matters is that the party create a multiplicity of links with the population to be mobilized, that it unite organically intellectuals and the 'largest and most numerous national popular energies'.¹⁰² Unity and discipline must be based on loyalty and conviction, rather than on formal bureaucratic mechanisms. Neither a loose unity of interrelated parties nor a mass loyalty manipulated by 'moralising sermons, emotional stimuli, and messianic myths of an awaited golden age' provides a model for the kind of party Gramsci envisages.¹⁰³ The party is not merely the means to an end; in the character of its membership's relationships and the constant work of education which it undertakes it is the embryonic form of the culture which it hopes to universalize. Gramsci's prescription of a 'monolithic' character for the party should be understood in these terms. What the 'monolithic' signifies here is that no fundamental cultural divide exists between leaders and led, or, that such a divide is seen as a dangerous problem requiring speedy solution. It is on the basis of such a divide that the organic party may degenerate into the bureaucratic party. The call for 'homogeneity between the leadership and the rank and file, between the leaders and their mass following' is a call for intensive and energetic commitment to education in pursuit of a culture of active social subjects and for the elimination of inequalities as speedily as possible. Thus the significance of its activity on all 'fronts', cultural as well as economic and political.

What Gramsci wants is a party neither of 'volunteers' nor of the marginalized but of homogeneous social blocs. Here homogeneity refers to active voluntary conformity of the kind we have examined in chapter four in the discussion of the bourgeois subject.¹⁰⁴ It is an expression of the Marxian concept of active union. Parties of volunteers are like 'vanguards without armies or commandos without infantry or artillery'.¹⁰⁵ The passion and activity of the volunteers is matched by the passivity of the mass membership which is left untouched and unchanged by its membership of the party. It is the active, ongoing, organic engagement of leaders and led which will produce the homogeneous social blocs and which will coax individuals into a new kind of group membership, a membership which transcends the 'economic corporate' level. The constantly reiterated importance of the organic character of relationships between leaders and led relates to Gramsci's conviction that collective political commitment should be the outcome neither of purely rational adherence to a

103 Gramsci (1978), pp. 197 - 8

104 quoted in Sassoon (1987), p. 215

105 Gramsci (1971), pp. 149 - 50.

106 See Gramsci (1995), p. 274, on active conformity.

107 Gramsci (1971), p. 203.

body of ideas ('abstract rationalism') nor of the kind of manipulated unquestioning loyalty to a charismatic leader found in the fascist movements of his day. Gramsci's goal is to create sustained, intelligent, intense commitment to a set of collective goals on the basis of the fusion of rationality and emotion. As stated before, the fusion of feeling, knowing and understanding is what determines the character of relationships between leaders and led and, therefore, establishes the character of the party itself. It is what ensures that the party will be 'organic' rather than 'bureaucratic'. It is only on the basis of such relationships that 'interest' ('economic corporative') motivations will be replaced by 'national popular' motivations (interest in the broader sense discussed in chapter six). Gramsci's constant reiteration of the virtues of the organic and the vices of the bureaucratic and of rationalism is an expression of his awareness of the need for the felt social bond in order to combine intensity of commitment and radical democratic participation with the scope and efficiency of modern and large-scale organizational forms.¹⁰⁶

Unfortunately, there are reasons (both theoretical and empirical) to be pessimistic about the likelihood of such a party remaining true to organicism in the sense just discussed.¹⁰⁷ As we have seen, intellectuals attempting to establish a position of hegemony (in the Gramscian sense) need the most exquisite combination of political skills: the most intense dedication, high levels of accurate knowledge of specific kinds and the capacity to empathize with groups whose experience of life is quite different from their own. Hence Gramsci's admiration for Machiavelli whom he considers to have exemplified these characteristics. His writing on the New Prince anticipates (and attempts to avoid) the excesses which were to emerge in the Soviet Union. However, Gramsci's depiction of the organic party is unlikely to be persuasive today.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, his theorization of emancipatory social relations between intellectuals and people retains its force and relevance in terms of contemporary conditions in liberal capitalist cultures, as will be argued in the concluding chapter.

Conclusion

Having argued in chapter six that Marx's conception of 'active union' refers to a process of group formation whereby a new kind of political commitment to transformative action is formed, I turn in this chapter to show the way in which Gramsci's work seeks to complete Marx's account of this process. Gramsci takes as his primary theoretical object the constitution of political commitment under

¹⁰⁸ for more on these questions, see Calhoun (1982, 1991).

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. Rowbotham (1979).

¹¹⁰ See Boggs (1982, 1986).

conditions of radical fragmentation and unevenness. In order to analyze that object Gramsci expands on Marx's dialectic by developing some new 'totalizing' categories i.e. historical bloc and concrete phantasy. These facilitate the development of a non-reductive analysis of necessarily related social processes and activities. In thinking beyond the economic, he begins to show us how the cognitive-affective limitations discussed in chapter five can be transcended. In effect, Gramsci elaborates on Marx's claim that effective collective action in the modern world demands a 'feeling of community, national links ... [and] a political organization'.¹⁰⁹ Here Marx's hope that the process in question will be initiated and controlled by a proletariat more or less adequately educated to the demands of its task through its experience in the factory, is replaced by the certainty that organic intellectuals organized in a specific kind of political party will be needed to initiate, design and control the necessary educative process. We have seen in the discussion of the factory councils that the goal of the process is the restoration of sociality at a translocal level through a growing awareness of the true character of the capitalist totality. So here theoretical knowledge is internally related to the restoration of sociality, since it is through theory (as opposed to commonsense) that awareness of real (rather than merely directly experienced) connectedness is possible. This is not to diminish the importance of direct lived experience but to suggest that its character needs to change if political commitment is to be sustained in fragmented capitalist cultures. However, if this is to happen, the character of relations between elites and people must also change; hence Gramsci's constant reiteration of the virtues of the organic and the vices of the bureaucratic. His insight that the theoretical knowledge needed to initiate transformative action under modern conditions must be fused with feeling - that knowing alone (rationalism) will not be adequate to the task - retains its power and relevance as does his stress on the required character of social relations between organic intellectuals (as visionary politicians) and people. His analysis of the subject effects of different kinds of knowledge adds an important dimension to our understanding of the requirements for active union. In this connection, as we have seen, Gramsci depends for the reconstitution of the social bond on a pre-capitalist form of commonsense possessing an imperative moral affective character. However, our discussion of post-Marxism's account of contemporary liberal capitalist cultures has given us reasons to believe that no such commonsense exists in these cultures, so that sociality must be reconstituted *ex nihilo*, as it were. I shall return to this matter in chapter eight, where a psychoanalytic analysis of different forms of subjectivity will be undertaken so as to bring out more clearly the significance of the various institutional analyses developed up to this point. Psychoanalysis offers the resources for theorizing beyond the

¹¹¹ Marx (1973a), p. 239

feeling/knowing (and therefore also the rationality/irrationality) dichotomy which capitalist fragmentation has institutionalized.

Chapter eight

Capitalism and collective action: a psychoanalytic perspective

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin to draw together the different strands of the argument by carrying out a systematic integration of the psychoanalytic and Marxist components of the thesis. This will be done by relating different accounts of subjectivity - the bourgeois active, social subject, proletarian passive subject and the decentred, volatile or 'virtual' subject - to the periodization that informs this thesis. While such exercises have been carried out up to a point as we have seen (by e.g. Habermas, Althusser and post-Marxism), these are underdeveloped because their conceptual borrowings from psychoanalysis are un- or undertheorized. Moreover, the different components of these accounts of subjectivity are unevenly developed, leaving us with an incomplete and sometimes confusing analysis.

In an attempt to rectify this situation, I shall proceed as follows. Following the Frankfurt School's attempted synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis, the Freudian theory of the psyche will be read uncontroversially as an account of the bourgeois subject.¹ That is to say, the subject whose development Freud is interested in nurturing is taken to be quite close to the active, social subject whose institutional requirements have been indicated by Habermas and discussed in chapter four. Habermas's analysis will have shown that the theory and (up to a point) actuality of this subject emerged before the real subsumption of labour under capital (as discussed in chapter five) had been completed. It is important to remember that this real subsumption proceeded unevenly both in class and spatial-temporal terms. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the requirements of organized capitalism were beginning to produce institutions which would have the effect of transforming the bourgeoisie, as well as the proletariat, into functionaries i.e. into proletarian subjects. It is this transformation that the Frankfurt School seeks to chart, stressing in the process the transition from a relatively autonomous to a conformist subject. However, from the point of view of this thesis, the bourgeois subject is also, and necessarily, a conformist subject, the difference being that this is an active conformity based on culturally constituted intra- and inter-subjective processes of deliberation, whereas the conformity of the proletarian subject can be wholly passive

¹ Adorno (1967-68); Adorno & Horkheimer (1979); Fromm (1971); Horkheimer (1947, 1972, 1974); Marcuse (1970, 1987).

i.e. can be the product of unreflective acceptance of rules generated systemically.² Expressed in Freudian terms, the bourgeois subject is constituted mainly, but not wholly, through a process of sublimation whereas the proletarian subject is constituted solely through repression, although it is an open question whether or not this subject possesses a strong super-ego.³ The decentred subject as described by post-Marxism appears to be governed mainly by id.

As Freud's work is read as a psychically-focussed account of the bourgeois subject, so the work of Lacan is read as a psychically-focussed account of the subject of pure capitalism, although, as noted before, I am making a distinction between the proletarian and decentred subject. If we accept that internalization productive of a strong super-ego rather than ego depends on intensely-felt intimate relations with a parental figure (normally the father) who is also strongly feared, then we should not look for internalization in either the proletarian or decentred subject.⁴ However, the possibility of internalization is also related to the degree of responsiveness to his needs experienced by the subject-in-information.⁵ I shall be arguing in chapter nine that this is an important distinction between the proletarian and decentred subject.

Lacan's work suggests a subject wholly repressed, but, more than that, it suggests the impossibility of sublimation as a fate for the instincts. In fact, talk of sublimation is interpreted by him as theoretical apologetics for a utilitarian culture.⁶ The subject according to Lacan is 'nothing but what is said about him.'⁷ This subject is the product of a culture in which the reality principle is inoperative and in which, therefore, sublimation is not available.⁸

The articulation of psychoanalysis to a clearly-specified Marxist analysis of everydayness will enable us to understand more clearly that individual subjects are simultaneously embodied, individual, social, cultural and historical.⁹ In addition, as Kovel points out, Freud's conception of the human organism shares the following

2 Reich (1957). See Gramsci (1995), pp. 269 - 277 on individualism and conformity. Note particularly his (partly but not wholly dismissive) comments on Freudianism (pp. 273 - 4).

3 Freud himself is not clear on the relationship between repression and the super-ego. See Brennan (1992), esp. chs. 2 & 5. If we accept the 'end of internalization' position adopted by Adorno and Horkheimer, then we must assume that proletarian subjects do not have a strong super-ego. See Adorno & Horkheimer (1979); Adorno (1967-68); Benjamin (1977).

4 Poster (1978) is useful on this question.

5 Freud (1985iv), p. 337; Freud (1985iii), pp. 191 - 2. See also Lasch (1978, 1985); Lichtman (1982); Marcuse (1987); Schneider (1975).

6 Lacan (1980i, 1980iv).

7 Borch-Jacobsen (1991), p. 157.

8 Wilden (1980), p. 29, notes: 'Lacan's analysis has opened up the text of Marx to new readings.' It is vital, though, to complete this thought by reminding ourselves that Lacan, in turn, needs to be read through Marx's eyes. Piccone's (1980) interesting suggestion that Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* can be read as an analysis of the narcissistic personality should be noted here.

9 See Flax (1990), p. 17; Marcuse (1987), ch 2, pp. 34 - 5. In addition to Marcuse and other members of the Frankfurt School, the following argue for the fruitfulness of the articulation of Marxism and psychoanalysis: Jacoby (1975); Kovel (1988i); Lichtman (1982); Osborn (1965); Schneider (1975).

characteristics with that of Marx: 'a concrete, dialectical psychology, not bound to conscious subjectivity yet postulating a subjective core of resistance; an inner realm which cannot be counted down into exchange value; one, therefore, that contains the wish to be free.'¹⁰ Not mentioned by Kovel but of equal importance is the concept of sublimation which opens the way to the development of a psychic account of capitalist dehumanization. Marxism and psychoanalysis are complementary in ways not explored by Habermas,¹¹ Althusser¹² or post-Marxism.

The chapter is organized in three parts. Parts one and two develop further the psychic analysis of historically specific forms of subjectivity first indicated in chapters three and four. In the first part, Freud's work is read as an attempt to rescue the bourgeois subject by showing the familial basis of his constitution. In effect, it is an expression of the decline of the bourgeois subject as the real subsumption of labour by capital comes to affect the bourgeoisie itself i.e. as ownership of productive property becomes 'systemic' and impersonal.¹³ The second part discusses the significance of Lacan's 'return' to Freud as an attempt to capture the subjective realities of a fetishized world of commodity production. Here, the significance of the social and cognitive debility produced by this mode of life is explored in terms of psychic functioning i.e. in terms of the apparent institutionalization of the primary process and of the unavailability of sublimation. The third part returns to the questions raised in chapters six and seven and shows that the active social subject required to undertake communal transformative action is a subject constituted by sublimation rather than repression and governed by the secondary rather than primary process. In order to make this argument, I shall return to Freud's general account of mental functioning which will be read as an account of the necessary affective and relational basis of thinking. It is through the combination of sublimation and secondary process thinking that the required mix of sociality and rationality is ensured and that the kind of knowledge adequate to effective action on the capitalist world - i.e. theoretical knowledge - can be acquired and understood at the level of the subject. In short, these psychoanalytic concepts constitute the theoretical basis for understanding the psychic requirements for the kind of radical democratic mass mobilization looked for by Marx and Gramsci. They will also enable us to understand more clearly the erosion of political commitment in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.

10 Kovel (1988i), p. 183.

11 For a relevant criticism of the Frankfurt School, see Postone (1993); Schneider (1975), pp. 271 - 282.

12 But see Althusser (1996), pp. 105 - 124.

13 Habermas (1989). Schorske (1980) analyses the cultural and cognitive fragmentation forming the background to Freud's work. See also Gay (1995).

I

Freud, materiality and meaning

The ambiguous, even contradictory character of Freud's corpus has been frequently noted. Real or apparent contradictions between the drive theory and object relations theory, between a biologicistic (scientistic) and a culturalist (hermeneuticist) Freud have been discussed at great length.¹⁴ Here Freud's work will be used as a source for thinking such apparent oppositions as a unity.¹⁵ So, for example, the concept of the drive (instinct in Strachey's English translation) will be understood as a dialectical concept which enables us to discuss the biological-cultural as a unity.¹⁶ It enables us to understand that the biological is accessible only by means of the cultural without at the same time effacing the biological itself. Interpreted in this way, Freud's work becomes compatible with the reading of Marxism offered in earlier chapters, in that it also stresses the individual-culture nexus as a nexus of simultaneous constraints and enablements founded on the innate plasticity (historicity) of the human organism, but informed also by an account of that organism in terms of its capacities for creativity and sociality, as noted above.¹⁷ Freud's texts are a resource for understanding the human organism as a mode of necessarily meaningful materiality. It is the political implications of this unavoidable cultural fact about human life which Althusser draws to the attention of Marxists. A return to certain Freudian texts affords the possibility of improving on Althusser's rather muddled analysis of subjectivity as the establishment of culture within the individual human organism.

14 Greenberg & Mitchell (1983).

15 The dialectical character of Freud's work has been noted by e.g. Althusser (1996); Rycroft (1991). But see Lichtman (1982) for a different view. For an interpretation of Freud along the lines suggested here see Flax (1990). For the 'mixed'- i.e. hermeneutic/energetic - character of Freud's work, see Brennan (1992); Ricoeur (1970), also Wollheim (1973).

16 At this point, Freud's ambiguity in his usage of the term 'drive' should be noted. As the editor of Freud's work points out, Freud's usage of the terms *Trieb* (translated by Strachey as instinct) and *Triebrepsentanz* (translated as instinctual representative) is ambiguous. At times he makes no distinction between these two, as in the following which claims that instinct is 'the concept on the frontier between the somatic and the mental... the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body' (Freud, 1985ciii p. 118). Elsewhere, though, he makes a sharp distinction between instinct and psychical representative as when he claims that 'An instinct can never become an object of consciousness - only the idea that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea ...When we nevertheless speak of an unconscious instinctual impulse or of a repressed instinctual impulse... we can only mean an instinctual impulse the ideational representative of which is unconscious' Freud, (1985v, p. 179). (For the editor's comments, see *ibid.*, pp. 108 - 9.) Furthermore, he claims that an instinctual representative is 'an idea or group of ideas which is cathected with a definite quota of psychical energy (libido or interest) coming from an instinct' (Freud, 1985iv, p. 152). See Bettelheim (1982) for a relevant critique of the English translation of Freud's work. See Althusser (1996), pp. 102 - 3.

17 The latter is a controversial claim in relation to the work of Freud himself (although not to later Freudians). My argument to this effect is based on the inherent logic of the concept of sublimation.

Freud and the psychic dimensions of culture

Freud's work is read here as an analysis of the entry of the human organism into culture which is effected by means of biological (material-energetic), social and cultural (symbolic) elements.¹⁸ It is the prematurity of the human organism which forces it into culture i.e. into extended meaningful social relations.¹⁹ More specifically, and of great relevance to questions about agency and commitment, it is the human organism's extended period of dependence on others which requires or enables it to develop the capacity for a kind of thought which produces the characteristics needed to act intentionally and effectively in relation to its environment.²⁰ That is to say, the capacity for thought and the way in which this capacity is developed is ineradicably connected to, on the one hand, human bodily needs and, on the other, culturally specific relations with other humans. So, as Marcuse expresses it, the 'memory of gratification is at the origin of all thinking'.²¹ Therefore, relations with other human beings are also at the origin of all thinking. This is the implication (or sometimes outright declaration) of a number of works which inform the following discussion.²² In *Civilization and its Discontents* (CD), the significance of malleability is explored in terms of 'civilization's' requirement for 'an expedient distribution of ... libido'.²³ This flexibility is achieved through the exercise of 'displacements of libido' which benefits the individual human organism too, since it is the means of fending off suffering on the part of the psyche.²⁴ Libido, says Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (GP), is 'the energy, regarded as a quantitative magnitude ... of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word "love"'.²⁵ Love is used here in an inclusive sense to refer, not only to sexual love but to 'love for parents and children, friendship and love for humanity in general, and also devotion to concrete objects and to abstract ideas'.²⁶ However, since, for Freud, sociality is imposed rather than innate and also bound up with memories of frustration as well as satisfaction, it is never completely accepted by individuals so that: 'A good part of the struggles of mankind centre round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation ... between this claim of the individual [for an original 'primitive'

18 At the same time Freud warns of the danger of ignoring the limits to malleability. See Freud (1985iv), p. 337.

19 See Greenberg & Mitchell (1983), for different post-Freudian accounts of sociality.

20 Freud (1966, also 1976, chs 6 & 7); Bion (1962a, 1962b, 1970); Brennan (1992); Marcuse (1987); Winnicott (1991).

21 Marcuse (1987), p. 31. For a discussion of (and disagreement with) this account of the origin of intellection, see Hamilton (1993).

22 See Freud (1966, 1976, 1984vi).

23 Freud (1985iv), p. 293.

24 Ibid., p. 267.

25 Freud (1985ii), p. 119. See also Laplanche & Pontalis (1973), p. 239.

26 Freud (1985ii), p. 119.

freedom] and the cultural claims of the groups'.²⁷ It is the innate flexibility of the instinctual structure which constitutes the basis for achieving some kind of balance here.

While the distribution of energy and the way in which it can achieve discharge has a somatic source, the character and behaviour of the instinctual structure becomes known to the emergent subject 'beyond the somatic' as it were. Put another way, it becomes known at the point at which the somatic becomes the psychic or, at which the biological becomes the cultural. As noted earlier, this is a process into which the individual human organism is drawn by virtue of its 'prematurity'. It is a differentiating process whereby this individual becomes individuated as a subject i.e. comes to have a culturally specific sense of itself as both distinct from and related to others.²⁸ This sense of an inside/outside comes about through the subordination of the pleasure principle to the reality principle, to be discussed further below. It is a sense whose emergence cannot be accounted for from either purely causal-energetic-passive or hermeneutic-intentional-active perspectives. Both strands must be synthesized in a satisfactory explanation of both the emergence of subjectivity and of significant differences between different kinds of subjectivity.²⁹

What Freud claims is that instincts which have their source in the body, are open to change in terms of 'pressure', 'aim' and 'object'.³⁰ Pressure refers to the quota of 'affect' (or quantity of energy) which is attached to a particular instinct.³¹ Aim refers to the apparently straightforward goal of discharging energy so as to experience gratification i.e. the reduction or elimination of tension (to be discussed further below). Object can refer to another person, to a part-person, or to an idea, doctrine etc. Of the four 'fates' or 'vicissitudes' which Freud suggests for an instinct, we will be concerned mainly with two in this chapter, namely repression and sublimation.³² In relation to these two fates, Freud's notion of the primary and secondary processes are also important, since sublimation requires that the subject be governed by the secondary process. While Freud himself takes these processes (and the transition from one to the other) to be universal, it is more likely that the distinction and trajectory involved and implied in the argument are culturally specific.³³ Read in this way, the distinction will be of prime importance in aiding understanding of the requirements for the formation of the bourgeois subject and therefore for the

27 Freud (1985iv), p. 28 (square brackets mine). However, a more ambiguous account of sociality is given in Freud (1985ii).

28 See Lichtman (1982), ch. 7.

29 Ricoeur (1970).

30 See Freud (1984iii).

31 See Laplanche & Pontalis (1973), pp. 13 - 14.

32 Freud (1985iii), p. 123.

33 See Cavell (1993), ch. 8 for a critical discussion of the primary process. For claims about the cultural specificity of Freud's distinctions, see Baudrillard (1993), ch. 6; Kakar (1981); Obeyesekere (1990).

constitution of political commitment in the strongly individuated cultures of liberal capitalism, as will be argued in section three of this chapter.

For the moment, we need note merely that repression and sublimation are two modes of accommodating the needs of the human organism to the requirements of culture. They differ in that the first involves the individual in sacrifice without compensation whereas the second does not. As will now be seen, it is Freud's intention to show us how sublimatory rather than repressive redistributions of psychic energy (by means of libidinal cathexes) may be effected to the benefit of both individual subject and 'civilization'. The Oedipal family, when functioning optimally, is the institutional means of effecting this outcome. I now turn to discuss this family. What this discussion should reveal is the centrality of directly experienced, sustained and stable intimate relations to the emergence and sustenance of the bourgeois subject.

Freud on the constitution of the bourgeois subject

We need to understand how it is that the different principles of distribution, as well as the different processes introduced above, are brought into alignment with specific socio-cultural requirements. Freud takes the subject (in this case the subject as 'organized ego') to be the result of a painful and long-drawn out process of reconciliation of the pleasure and reality principles. Expressed in terms of the bourgeois subject, the completion of this process is secured through the resolution of the Oedipal complex. At this point, the boy child manages to reconcile, however precariously, his need for gratification with specific cultural (reality) requirements.³⁴ At the same time, he comes to develop a strong sense of a self with enduring and specific inner 'contents'. The constitution of the apparently autonomous subject is a process of active and painful engagement between the individual human organism and others, in particular the father, with whom the child has an ambivalent relationship. This is a highly personal, affect-laden process whereby the child comes to cathect (invest) certain objects, i.e. his parents, with psychic energy. These objects are always and necessarily culturally constituted objects (objects as subjects) which means that the apparently private process of subject formation described by Freud (and taken by him to be a universal human process) is in effect the formation of culturally specific bourgeois subjects who (if the process reaches successful completion) actively conform to the strenuous requirements of their (early liberal

34 Freud (1977i, 1977iii). See also Benjamin (1990); Brennan (1992); Mitchell (1975) on the peculiar trajectory of the girl child.

capitalist) culture.³⁵ Here the constitution of the subject is a process in which the individual concerned plays an active part, initially through resistance but subsequently through 'voluntary' conformity. That is to say, there is a kind of dialectical relationship between the individual human organism and its environment, between an 'inside' and an 'outside'.

It is important to note here that the emergent bourgeois subject requires an environment which is not unresponsive to his needs. The environment in question offers enablements as well as constraints. In fact, as will be seen, the constraints form a necessary component of the enablements. As Brennan notes, the threat of castration constitutes a powerful motivation for the internalization of accommodation between instinctual and cultural needs.³⁶ This is a crucial distinction between the Freudian and Lacanian conception of the 'inside'/'outside' relationship to which I shall return to in section two below. The environment of the bourgeois subject is both knowable and (up to a point) lovable. It is this combination which enables the bourgeois subject to act in and on that environment in an effective manner. The 'completed' or relatively formed bourgeois subject does not experience the sharp sense of discontinuity between the socio-cultural and himself, since the socio-cultural can be experienced as the purposeful outcome of the combined, voluntary, intra- and inter-subjective deliberations and actions of individual bourgeois subjects, as was noted in chapter four. The further implication is that the socio-cultural is experienced as 'friendly', as responsive to the requirements (wants, needs, wishes) of the individual subject.

As was suggested in chapter four, the bourgeois subject is the fragile achievement of an unprecedented nexus of institutions which apparently maintained a balance between the communal and the radically individuated (atomistic) subject.³⁷ These institutions constituted social relations which remained explicitly and experientially social and personal, while at the same time allowing the privacy and cultural raw materials necessary for the constitution of introspection.³⁸ The bourgeois subject is both point of departure and of arrival for Freud's psychoanalysis in the sense that he assumes the constitution of this subject as both possible and desirable. It is in this uncontroversial way that his dictum 'Where id was there ego shall be' can be interpreted.³⁹ The replacement of id by ego means that prematurity has given way to

35 See Cascardi (1992) for a critical account of the bourgeois subject. Touraine (1995) is more enthusiastic.

36 Brennan (1992).

37 But see Benjamin (1990) who emphasizes the affective impoverishment of the bourgeois subject.

38 The historicization of the Oedipal family began in the 1930s with the work of Horkheimer and Lacan. See Dews (1995). See Lyons (1986) on the 'disappearance of introspection'.

39 Freud (1973i), p. 112. Lacan's significantly different understanding of this should be noted. See Lacan (1980iv), pp. 128 - 9. Lacan (1979), p. 44. See also Bowie (1987), pp. 122 - 3; Ragland-Sullivan (1986), pp. 51 - 2.

maturity in the form of the ability to make correct judgements about oneself and the external world and to act on those judgements so as to secure for oneself more substantial and enduring forms of satisfaction. As will be argued below, these forms of satisfaction can be understood by means of the concept of sublimation and the process whereby sublimation is effected is the secondary process. Here the concept of sublimation is interpreted as requiring libidinal ties i.e. sociality. Understood in this way, the resolution of the Oedipal complex takes us out of a solipsistic Hobbesian world and into the world of the active social subject. As noted before, I am stressing here the sociality of the bourgeois subject, as described by Habermas. This is a subject constituted by a rising bourgeoisie, that is, by a bourgeoisie which has not yet institutionalized pure capitalism, as described in chapter five. As we have seen, until the real subsumption of labour under capital (and eventually the real subsumption of the bourgeoisie itself under the law of value), institutions retain the sociality which characterizes all human institutions prior to the advent of pure capitalism.

For the moment, following Freud, I shall take it that sociality is an emergent rather than innate property of the individual organism who is forced into sociality as he is forced into culture.⁴⁰ Freud's account of the development of the ego enables us to understand this process.⁴¹ The ego is formed out of that part of the id which is in immediate contact with the outside world. Whereas the id is totally governed by the pleasure principle (and therefore by the primary process) and seeks immediate instinctual satisfaction, the ego has the task of guarding against the damage wrought by the id's insatiable demands while at the same time attempting to ensure the maximum amount of satisfaction congruent with the requirements of culture. So it works both to satisfy and to influence the id, to bring it to bridle its passions and modify its aims or even to give these up in return for some compensation. In short, the ego is that part of the psyche which seeks to advance the pleasure principle by rendering the demands of the id compatible with cultural (reality) requirements. Freud compares the relationship of the ego to the id to that of a rider to his horse:

The horse supplies the locomotive energy, while the rider has the privilege of deciding on the goal and of guiding the powerful animal's movement. But only too often there arises between the ego and the id the not precisely ideal situation of the rider being obliged to guide the horse along the path by which it itself wants to go.⁴²

40 In fact, as Freud makes clear, the bourgeois subject constitutes a fragile synthesis of contradictory instincts towards separation and fusion. This state of affairs is finally expressed in the idea of the life and death instincts. See Freud (1984vi, also 1985iv). See also Freud (1984iii) on ambivalence. See also Borch-Jacobsen (1988); Marcuse (1987).

41 Freud (1984vi).

42 Freud (1973i), pp. 109 - 110.

Ego's control over the id is always precarious and dependent on the amount of energy which it can attract to itself from the id. One means of 'borrowing' energy from the id is through identifications as 'precipitates of object-cathexes'. That is, the ego finds favour with the id by identifying itself with actual or abandoned objects, thereby attracting to itself the energy previously cathected to (invested in) these objects.⁴³ At this point, I shall say a few words about the role of identifications in Freud's account of subject-formation.

Freud on identifications

Identifications are the foundation of cultural membership.⁴⁴ They are the means whereby culture is internalized or cathected by the human organism. Identifications are initiated within the family, which, for Freud, is necessarily the Oedipal family. The Oedipal family is that family in which the role of the father, rather than the mother, is held to be the key to the successful transition from prematurity to maturity or, from the pleasure principle to the reality principle.⁴⁵

In 'The Dissection of the Psychological Personality', Freud defines the process of identification as

the assimilation of one ego to another one, as a result of which the first ego behaves like the second in certain respects, imitates it and in a sense takes it up into itself. Identification has been not unsuitably compared with the oral, cannibalistic incorporation of the other person.⁴⁶

Freud stresses that identification should not be confused with object-choice. Whereas the former leads the individual to wish to be like the object in question, the latter leads him to wish to have the object in question.⁴⁷ Identification is related to object-choice in the sense that loss of an object-choice may result in identification with that lost object as a means of compensation. It is identification which constitutes cultural membership i.e. the installation of the super-ego. The latter is the result of 'successful' identification with the 'parental agency'.⁴⁸ In this case, identification is a

43 Ibid., p. 109.

44 Freud (1985ii), ch. 7; (1985e), p. 359. For an account of the aporias in Freud's account of identifications, see Borch-Jacobsen (1988); Wollheim (1974).

45 Benjamin's (1990) critique of this account should be noted.

46 Freud (1973i), p. 94.

47 However, as Freud himself suggests in a late paper, in the beginning identification and object-choice (i.e. the wish to be like and to have) are one. (Indeed, the words just cited contain this suggestion.) This idea is encapsulated in the words: 'I am the breast'. See Freud (1964), p. 299. See also Borch-Jacobsen (1988).

48 Freud (1973i), p. 95.

compensation to the child for the renunciation of 'the intense object-cathexes which he has deposited with his parents'.⁴⁹ This is the first, and in terms of emotional intensity and importance, the most important of a series of identifications which will take place throughout life, identifications with educators, teachers and people chosen as ideal models, although later identifications lack the emotional intensity of those of early childhood.

Identification, as manifested in the resolution of the Oedipus complex, is, for Freud, 'the earliest and original form of emotional tie'.⁵⁰ There are other versions of identification, one of which - identification through the perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct - I shall discuss in the third section of this chapter. It is important to remember that those ties that are lasting between people are achieved through the inhibition of the aims of 'sexual impulses'.⁵¹ To inhibit an aim is to replace immediate and complete instinctual gratification by a more limited and long-term form of gratification. This inhibition accounts for the origin of feelings of affection and sociability; it is an incipient form of sublimation, to be discussed further in section three below.

Identification and the super-ego⁵²

The super-ego represents society's values within the individual.⁵³ It is observer, regulator and punisher; it is the source of powerful guilt feelings.⁵⁴ It is installed within the individual by a process of identification with the father at the point at which the Oedipus complex is abandoned. The abandonment of the Oedipus complex is brought about through a mixture of motives including fear of castration and the dawning realization that possession of the mother is beyond the capacities of the child. So the instantiation of the super-ego comes about through a combination of intensely-felt intimate relations (primarily with the father, for Freud) and intense fear of castration. If the forced relinquishment of the mother as a love object is accompanied by a consolatory identification with the father, the entry into culture will

49 Ibid.,

50 Freud (1985ii), p. 136.

51 Ibid., p. 146.

52 Lasch (1985), ch. 5 offers a lucid account of the changes in Freud's own views on the ego ideal and super-ego, as well as on the confusion of views about these matters among contemporary psychoanalysts. Borch-Jacobsen (1988), p. 25, denies any conceptual significance to the distinction. But see Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985).

53 See Freud (1985iv), chs. 7 & 8. Freud also claims that the super-ego is the 'representative for us of every moral restriction, the advocate of a striving towards perfection...the higher side of human life', in Freud (1973), p. 98. However, it can also be interpreted as the individual's own aggressive impulses directed at and projected onto parents or parental surrogates and, finally, against the ego itself. See Lasch, (1985), p. 175; Reich (1953, 1954).

54 Freud (1984iv) chs. 5 & 6.

not be experienced as wholly coercive, frustrating and painful and the possibility emerges of sublimating, rather than repressing instinctual needs.

In identifying with the father, the child seeks to become as like the father as possible.⁵⁵ Here it should be remembered that Freud has in mind the strong, patriarchal father, the father whose constitution, as we know from Habermas, requires private, personal ownership of productive property (of means of production). This is a father as subject both 'in' and 'for' himself. The importance of this cannot be overstressed.⁵⁶ Identification, then, involves the introjection of parental objects i.e. the transposition of the qualities and characteristics of those objects from 'outside' the child to its 'inside'. This involves a judgement on the part of the child that this transposition will result in deferred rather than abandoned gratification. That is to say, by identifying with his father, the child is assured that in the future he will enjoy possession of a mother-like object. Here the intense wish for immediate and total satisfaction of instinctual needs is transmuted into loving family relations of a culturally specific kind. What this means is that cultural membership - i.e. the constitution of subjectivity - is grounded in bodily processes as these are shaped and experienced by means of culturally constituted social relations with parental figures. Identification leads to imitation which in turn leads to empathy, as Freud notes in GP.⁵⁷ What identification suggests is that cultural membership is grounded in a strong emotional commitment to the culture, albeit one marked by ambivalence. Cultural membership involves the experience, recognition and acceptance of limits and boundaries. However, the ambivalence which marks the genesis of bourgeois cultural membership is also the source of struggle against these limits.⁵⁸ Hence the claim of Horkheimer and Adorno that the Oedipal family represents the possibility of individual autonomy.⁵⁹

At this point it is important to note that identification must be such as to produce in the child an awareness of the distinction between self and other (that which is 'not-self', rather than a complete absorption of the child by the father. This is attained, as Borch-Jacobsen points out, by the exhortation to both be like and not be like the father e.g. and especially, the child must be unlike the father in that he cannot possess his mother.⁶⁰ With the resolution of the Oedipus complex, the child loses its illusion of omnipotence together with the feeling of 'oceanic' peace and union. At the same time, it is this loss of the 'oceanic' feeling which institutes (if all goes well) a love

55 See Freud (1984vii), ch. 3.

56 What Freud fails to note, except in passing, is the need for a strong mother capable of offering the necessary emotional support to the child during the painful passage to adulthood. Hamilton (1993) offers a lucid account of this need.

57 Freud (1985ii), ch. 7.

58 See Melucci (1996), ch. 6, on the significance of limits for identity-formation.

59 Horkheimer (1947, 1972). See also Benjamin (1977); Dews (1995).

60 Borch-Jacobsen (1988), esp. pp. 221 - 222,

within the child for the external world as an external world. It institutes a form of sociality in which subjectivity is social and active. That is to say, objects viewed as external to the child and as sources of satisfaction can be loved without being incorporated into the ego.⁶¹ The subject is not dissolved in the socio-cultural and the socio-cultural is not dissolved in the subject. Put another way, what we find in the culture which constitutes the bourgeois subject is neither the horde nor the Hobbesian war of all against all. I shall return to this question in section three below.

To sum up, Freud's work has been read as an account of the biological-cultural constitution of the bourgeois subject. This subject emerges out of a specific trajectory involving a triangular relationship between mother, father and boy child, although, as we have seen, Freud has little to say about the mother.⁶² The bourgeois subject is the subject with a strong 'organized' ego, that is, an ego which establishes a relatively comfortable balance between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The successful resolution of the Oedipal complex consists in a consolatory introjection of (or identification with) the father by the (male) child.⁶³ It is this process which paves the way for the displacement rather than renunciation of gratification; for sublimation rather than repression. Sublimation connects to the idea of voluntary self-discipline. That is to say, the subject experiencing sublimation is governed by the secondary process in an active, self-consciously social and voluntary way. Given the optimal functioning of the Oedipal family and the extra-familial institutional conditions described by Habermas and discussed in chapter four above, this outcome will have been achieved.

I now turn to discuss quite a different state of affairs, namely, the constitution of the proletarian and decentred subjects, as read from the work of Lacan.

II

From Freud to Lacan: from Oedipus to Narcissus

Turning to Lacan, we see that, whereas the preoccupation with the Oedipal complex remains, what we find is in fact something quite different than the bourgeois subject. The subject with whom Lacan is concerned is a subject whose culture has eliminated the conditions productive of the bourgeois subject although the ghost of the latter

61 Freud (1984iii). Freud discusses these questions further in 'On Narcissism', in which he says: 'we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love', in Freud (1984ii), p. 78.

62 See Freud (1985vii), n1, p. 370. See also Benjamin (1990); Mitchell (1975).

63 See Brennan (1992) for a discussion of these matters from the woman's point of view.

lingers in the shape of the Law of the Father. Lacan is writing of a culture in which directly experienced social relations (whether intimate or not) are being overwhelmed by systemic imperatives. Personal authority has been replaced by impersonal authority or even by the dissolution of all authority.⁶⁴ (I shall be arguing in chapter nine that the end of authority is a characteristic of the disorganized stage of capitalism.) The individual is in the grip of a system which - while promising total satisfaction - cannot or will not satisfy his desires. This is a system, moreover, which is unknowable at the level of everyday or commonsense experience. In short, this is the pure capitalism with which Marx is concerned in *Capital 1*.⁶⁵

As Ferrell has pointed out, the Lacanian subject has no 'essence' but is nevertheless highly specific.⁶⁶ What needs to be added is that the Lacanian subject is highly specific in contrast to the bourgeois subject in that he experiences himself as having no essence. He experiences himself as being without an inner self with a unique history which has laid down layers of memory and of ways of being in the world which have durability and continuity. This is what I seek to show by adopting a Marxian approach to Lacan's work, one, that is, which is informed by a weak, rather than strong version of anti-humanism. Such an approach takes its point of departure from Marx's claim that 'the properties of a thing do not arise from its relations to other things, they are, on the contrary, merely activated by such relations'.⁶⁷ In relation to the human being this assertion needs to be modified in the sense that human properties are both activated and developed by social relations. What the statement reminds us of is that there are both 'entities' and relations, rather than either one or the other. Psychoanalytic drive theory⁶⁸ privileges the entities at the expense of relations; Lacanian psychoanalysis (and post-Marxism, as we have seen) privileges the relations at the expense of the entities which bear the relations. Most interestingly, though, and contrary to the object relations school of psychoanalysis, Lacan conceptualizes relations largely in systemic, impersonal terms.⁶⁹

The significance of Marx's reminder in the present context is that Lacan's emphasis (derived from Saussure's work which was discussed briefly in chapter three) on the relational constitution of subjectivity must be interpreted in historical institutional terms. The claim that there exist nothing but relations whose bearers (entities) are merely the nodal points of such relations, is expressive of a specific culture which constitutes subjects without substance. That is to say, it must be read,

64 See Horkheimer (1972i).

65. Schneider (1975) points to the complementarities between psychoanalysis's account of repression and Marx's of alienation.

66 Ferrell (1996), p. 83.

67 Marx (1976a), p. 149.

68 See Greenberg & Mitchell (1983).

69 Benjamin (1990) offers a relevant example of the object relations approach. See also Greenberg & Mitchell (1983) for a general discussion. See Goux (1994) for a criticism of Lacan on these grounds.

not as a claim about universal human subjectivity, but about historically, culturally specific forms of subjectivity. So we must historicize the universalist tenor of much of Lacan's work.

Lacan's work will be read as an account of the psychic constitution of the subjects of pure capitalism, of the subjects produced by a fetishized, abstract culture.⁷⁰ As MacCannell points out, Lacan is writing about a post-Oedipal culture which, as she says '... marches on dividing, disconnecting and making (pseudo-) unifications - but no longer in the familiar forms of love, family, sociability.'⁷¹ His work expresses the sense of fragmentation and external control that characterizes capitalist cultures.⁷² This claim will be argued for on the basis of the following related characteristics of that work. First is the stress on the symbolic as wholly impersonal and systemic i.e. the marginalization or even effacement of directly-experienced embodied social familial relations. Second, is the virtual naturalization of narcissism and of the primary process. Third is the ejection of sublimation as a desirable or indeed possible instinctual fate. What connects these three characteristics is the unwillingness or inability to conceive of a reality which is, one, relatively stable and durable and therefore knowable, and two, relatively benign and therefore loveable (in the sense in which love has been used in section one above). As we will see, the subject as described by Lacan is incapable both of satisfying the pleasure principle and of accommodating himself to the reality principle.⁷³ The significance of this will be made clear in section three.

70 Wilden (1980), p. 30, offers this suggestion but does not develop it. As MacCannell (1986) points out, Lacan's patient is culture itself. He sets out 'to criticise human culture and its misadventures' (p. xiv). MacCannell remarks that Lacan's readers have tended to 'over-identify Lacan's analysis of the culture of the signifier with Lacan, with his own stance on that culture', *ibid*, p. 19. Read against its apparently universalist grain, Lacan's work offers us a psychoanalytic perspective which is in effect a profound criticism of the capitalist mode of life and its subject effects. See Borch-Jacobsen (1991); Dews (1989); Jameson (1988); MacCannell (1986). However, as Dews notes following a sympathetic discussion of his views, Lacan's theory has a debilitating rather than radicalizing effect. See Dews (1987), p. 108. Others e.g. Finlay (1989); Flax (1990) Goux (1991, 1994) are harsher in their criticisms. Goux (1994), p. 141, charges that Lacan saw the shift from 'living dialogical speech' to the machine but decided to privilege the latter.

71 MacCannell (1986), p. 70. Brennan (1993) also stresses the historical-cultural, critical character of Lacan's work.

72 See Finlay (1989); Frosh (1989); Wilden (1980).

73 Lacan's deconstruction of the bourgeois subject can also be read as a revelation of the inherently bogus character of symbolic promises and therefore as an instigation to the refusal of the reality principle. See Borch-Jacobsen (1991); MacCannell (1986).

From ego to system

Beyond the bourgeois subject

As we have noted, liberal industrial capitalism is historically deviant in terms of the radical fragmentation of culture which it necessarily institutes and of the character of subjectivity and experience which results from that fragmentation. It is a culture which renders sociality (the directly-experienced social bond) voluntary rather than necessary; which institutes subjects who experience themselves as subjectively (personally) independent and objectively totally dependent. During the stage of organized capitalism, the bourgeois subject gives way to the proletarian subject. The bourgeois subject is the self-motivating subject who achieves self-discipline through a process of identification with a strong father (self-discipline strengthened by libidinal bonds and motivated in the first instance partly by fear of castration⁷⁴). The proletarian subject produces reliable, disciplined behaviours as a result of an imposed disciplinary process which involves repression but which may or may not involve internalization i.e. the instantiation of the super-ego.⁷⁵ The decentred subject (as posited by post-Marxism) appears to be governed more by id than by either ego or super-ego. It is this development that Lacan's work in part expresses and it is to the banishment of ego and super-ego that he appears dedicated.

The symbolic

While it is Lacan's stated aim to recover the 'real' Freud by reinstating the unconscious as the central psychoanalytic discovery, his work effects some significant and fundamental departures from Freud whose character will alert us to the nature of cultural changes effected by the transition from liberal to organized capitalism.⁷⁶ These departures include most significantly the marginalization of the drives and of face-to-face social relations in the constitution of subjectivity and the decentering of the ego. Whereas Freud starts with and centres on individual actors and their directly-experienced social relations as bearers of the symbolic or cultural, Lacan takes the symbolic (linguistic) order, rather than embodied, directly encountered social relations, as the force which shapes individuals as specific kinds of subjects.⁷⁷ That is to say,

74 See Brennan (1992), ch. 1.

75 As we have seen, Althusser apparently claims internalization. However, see Adorno (1967-8). See also Benjamin (1977).

76 See Lacan (1979), ch. 2. For differences between the Freudian and Lacanian unconscious, see Archard (1984), ch. 3; Bowie (1987); Dews (1987), pp. 81 - 6. See also Fink (1995).

77 In taking the symbolic as his point of departure, Lacan is intending to counteract the biologism (and therefore determinism) of certain forms of psychoanalysis by privileging the social or symbolic

culture is rendered largely in impersonal, systemic terms. For Lacan the symbolic is the moment of Oedipal resolution whereby the small child is introduced to the Law of the Father which is the 'order of objectifying language' whereby cultural membership is secured. That is to say, the 'Oedipal' stage of subject-formation is an impersonal, disembodied process whose dynamic appears to derive wholly from culture rather than from the drives.⁷⁸ As he says: 'It is the world of words that creates the world of things. ... Man speaks ... but it is because the symbol has made him man.'⁷⁹ Furthermore, the pre-Oedipal moment, as captured by the concept of the imaginary, is also presented in disembodied terms.⁸⁰ The infant's misrecognition of himself as a subject (as whole and empowered) comes, not so much through the loving gaze of the mother, as through the infant's own gaze as reflected in the mirror

In Lacan, we find the mirror stage as producer of the virtual subject, of the subject as simulacrum.⁸¹ The stress on the symbolic as constitutive, when allied to the interpretation of Saussurean linguistics discussed in chapter three (i.e. on an interpretation which makes the referent disappear) results in the withdrawal of the possibility of being for the subject, who becomes the mere artefact (unstable, volatile artefact) of a language which refers to nothing but itself.⁸² Here the human organisms - child and mother - are spoken by the language and therefore, logically, are incapable of entering into a dialogue productive of a relatively enduring sense of subjectivity on the part of the child. Indeed the mother, given her own subjectivity, is incapable of offering the child the kind of recognition needed to experience himself as an active social subject. Therefore, the moment of misrecognition is nothing but that and, moreover, can never be anything but that. Subjectivation is nothing but alienation. The secondary process is in the language, as it were, leaving the subjects at the mercy of a primary process which can produce nothing but frustration, as will be seen.⁸³

While this disjunction of the biological and the symbolic is intended by Lacan to counteract the alleged functionalism of ego-psychology,⁸⁴ it can also be read (and is indeed read here) as an expression of the novel, peculiarly abstract character of capitalist culture.⁸⁵ As we noted in Althusser's account (and indeed in that of post-

moment in the constitution of the subject. For a discussion of Lacan's 'structuralism', see Dews (1987); Merquior (1986). See also Zizek (1989), ch. 4.

78 See Forrester (1981).

79 Lacan (1980iii), p. 65. Lacan is here rejecting the word/thing distinction advanced by Freud. See Bowie (1987); Flax (1990).

80 See Lacan (1980i); Flax (1990), ch. 4.

81 Ferrell (1996); Finlay (1989); Frosh (1991).

82 Finlay (1989), pp. 50, 61.

83 From this point of view, psychoanalytic prescriptions for healthy subjectivation - such as we find in Winnicott, for example, are nothing but (furthermore can be nothing but) utopian dreams. It is informative here to contrast Lacan's and Winnicott's accounts of this stage of infant development. Lacan (1980i); Winnicott (1971). For a useful comparison, see Finlay (1989).

84 Lacan (1980ii, 1980iv).

85 Brennan (1993) stresses the historicity of Lacan's account of the subject, as does Dews (1995) and MacCannell (1986). See Lacan (1980ii), esp. pp. 28 - 9.

Marxism) culture is experienced as an imposition on the to-be-humanized infant. Expressed otherwise, what is in question is an organism without the innateness to humanness which might render the process of humanization not wholly painful. The infant posited by Lacan (and by post-Marxism and Althusser) appears to be wholly nonhuman (pure animality), as resistant to the disciplines and as blind to the joys of humanization as we must assume other kinds of animals to be.⁸⁶ Furthermore, this state of affairs is posited as universal or innate. However, and relatedly, this infant, unlike the Freudian infant, is doomed to repression and frustration. It does not have the option of finding a path midway between no satisfaction and complete satisfaction. So, we find no basis at all for the emergence of sociality i.e. of the capacity to engage in relatively satisfying and enduring, directly experienced social relations. We find no basis for the emergence of the organized ego or indeed for the super-ego as an internalized 'conscience'. Given this state of affairs, the subject as depicted by Lacan can only experience itself as in a state of captivity.⁸⁷ The possibility of transcending the contradiction between individual and culture (which exists in Freud's work because of the contradiction within the developing human organism between sociality and self-absorption) does not exist. The Lacanian decentred subject is, in effect, the narcissistic subject.

The narcissistic subject

As Benjamin points out, 'Narcissus rivals Oedipus as the dominant metaphor of contemporary psychoanalysis.'⁸⁸ The transition from Oedipus to Narcissus is related to the weakening of the father's role, therefore the weakening of personal authority and the superego. The narcissistic subject is condemned to a world of unbridgeable gaps between himself and others. In fact, others are merely internally constructed representations or ideas whose reality appears to depend wholly on the libidinal energy invested in them. In a sense, reality is experienced by the narcissistic subject as a changing figment of his own imagination.⁸⁹ This subject was first encountered in chapter three. As discussed there, the Lacanian analysis of humanization - as interpreted by Žižek and incorporated (up to a point) in post-Marxism's analysis - privileges a universal resistance to this process deriving from the experience on the

86 The difference is that this particular kind of animal, unlike other kinds of animals, has the potential to be humanized. Nothing much is concluded from this remarkable distinctiveness, though.

87 Honneth (1995), ch. 13.

88 Benjamin (1990), p. 137. Freud (1984ii) is the point of departure for the theorization of narcissism. See also Brennan (1992, 1993); Frosh (1991); Grunberger (1979); Kovel (1988ii); Lasch (1978, 1985); Reich (1953). Marcuse (1987) offers a more benign interpretation of narcissism which he, following Freud (1984ii), relates to the possibility of sublimation.

89 Flax (1990).

part of the subject-to-be of an ineliminable gap, lack or the 'non-realized'.⁹⁰ This in turn derives from the 'fact' that culture (the symbolic) produces desires that it inevitably fails to satisfy. More strongly, it is the production of unsatisfiable desires which instantiates *both* the unconscious *and* subjectivity and cultural membership. So the subject according to Lacan is either a subject governed by repression (therefore a subject open to discipline) or a subject whose acute sense of frustration is such as to render him totally resistant to any discipline whatsoever. The former is in danger of regressing to primary process functioning since secondary process functioning is based on sacrifice of rather than compensation for loss of gratification. The latter is in some respects constituted so as to function according to the primary process.⁹¹ In both cases, if culture conquers the subject, this is an incomplete and uneasy conquest which necessarily produces restless and unhappy subjects.⁹²

Lacan's return to Freud is in fact a specific reading of Freud which marries the narcissistic conception of the ego found in 'On Narcissism' to selected elements of 'The Ego and the Id'.⁹³ In a very real sense, it takes as 'normal', a form of subjectivity which Freud had taken to be neurotic.⁹⁴ For Flax, it transforms Freud's concept of narcissism into an 'incontestible and ontological theory of human nature'.⁹⁵ That is to say, narcissism is taken to be an unavoidable human fate.⁹⁶

From secondary to primary process

The naturalization of the primary process necessarily follows from what has just been said, since its replacement by the secondary process requires a strong sense of both inner and outer reality. As noted above, the subject with which Lacan is concerned does not possess such a sense. In order to explain the theoretical steps which result in Lacan's apparent naturalization of the primary process, I need to return briefly to Freud's work on dreams which, as he claimed, contained the essential concepts of his discoveries of the unconscious. Condensation and displacement, the two central modes of functioning of dreams, are also those of the functioning of the unconscious. They refer to real processes based on two principles of distribution of psychological energy. Lacan claims that the same functions and processes are to be found in

90 Lacan (1980ii).

92 I shall return to this point in chapter nine.

92 Freud (1985iv) himself offered a tragic account of this contradiction.

93 See Freud (1984ii, 1984iii).

94 See Flax (1990), ch. 4; Hamilton (1993). Flax reads Lacan as 'a phenomenology of what it is like to be confined within the narcissist's universe'. Flax (1990), p. 93.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

96 However, as we have seen, Brennan and MacCannell interpret Lacan as a critic of this narcissism. I do not need to adjudicate on this here, since the important point is that Lacan's work, however he intended it, is useful for revealing the subjectivity instituted by pure capitalism. It is the psychoanalytic complement to Marx's account of pure capitalism.

language, so that condensation is equated with metaphor (the replacement of one signifier by another) and displacement is equated with metonymy (signifier to signifier movement). These two constitute the signifying function as such. They are the 'two great poles of language' by which meaning is constituted.⁹⁷ By making this connection, Lacan unites psychoanalysis and linguistics, unites the unconscious and discourse in a relationship in which the latter constitutes the former, as noted above. So, he claims

The unconscious from Freud onwards is a chain of signifiers which somewhere in another scene...repeats itself and insists so as to interfere in the breaks offered by the discourse and the thought that the discourse informs. In this formulation ... the crucial term is the signifier, revived from ancient rhetoric by modern linguistics.⁹⁸

Saussure's claim about the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified is the basis of Lacan's claim about the fundamental volatility and slipperiness of the signifier. The signifier, unlike a sign which is a vehicle for stable meaning - e. g. smoke/fire - has its own laws since it signifies nothing beyond itself.⁹⁹ It is not tied to a referent.¹⁰⁰

We need to mark and beware of Lacan's naturalizing thrust here.¹⁰¹ Recall that, for Freud, condensation and displacement are the laws of functioning of the primary process. We are now being told by Lacan that these laws of functioning are constitutive also of language as such, therefore constitutive, not only of the unconscious, but of culture as such. If subjects are constituted by the symbolic i.e. if 'things' are constituted by 'words', if 'the unconscious is structured like a language'¹⁰², if language itself is governed by processes of condensation and displacement claimed by Freud to be primitive or primary, then we must conclude that culture is also governed by the primary process.

Lacan is here apparently forgetting that the state of affairs being described is culturally and historically specific. It is not culture as such, but the culture of pure capitalism, which (in relation to the achievements of the bourgeois subject at least) traps subjects in the primary process.¹⁰³ So his claim about the universal character of

97 see Coward & Ellis (1977), p. 99.

98 quoted in *ibid.*, p. 100.

99 See Dews (1987), ch. 2. Lacan's discussion of Poe's short story 'The Purloined Letter' is an extended illustration of his claim about the signifier. See Lacan (1980v) and the discussion in Bowie (1987). See Borch-Jacobsen (1991), ch. 5 for the 'slipperiness' of Lacan's usage of these different linguistic terms.

100 See Ragland-Sullivan (1991a); Thom (1981).

101 We noted a similar naturalizing thrust in post-Marxism's analysis, discussed in chapter three.

102 Lacan (1980ii), p.20. For more on this opaque claim, see Althusser (1996); Bowie (1987); Brennan (1992), p. 105; Ferrell (1996).

103 As noted before, this distinction between primary and secondary process is also a culturally specific distinction which may not be applicable in non-capitalist cultures.

language must be translated into a claim about the immaturity of subjects constituted by an innately narcissistic and a-social capitalist culture.¹⁰⁴

In universalizing the primary process, Lacan is universalizing the cognitive and emotional debility which necessarily accompanies this process. Since volatility, slipperiness and instability are constitutive features of the constitutive signifier, there appears to be no way out. The search for satisfaction is futile and its futility is intrinsically associated with the substitutability (metonymy) which is characteristic of the primary process and of language itself. As MacCannell puts it, substitutability reigns because there is no ultimate, real satisfaction so 'one thing is as good as another in attempting the impossible'.¹⁰⁵ This is a forceful expression of the obsolescence of judgement in the Lacanian account of subjectivity and therefore in the lived experience of decentred subjects (since I read Lacan as an analysis of that experience). What this means is that substitutability is not merely an intra-psychic attribute but is rather culturally constituted. Substitutability is the result of the displacement (metonymic causality) which characterizes pure capitalism as instituted in contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.

However, the sense gained from Lacan's analysis is that substitutability/volatility derive from the constitutive and therefore unavoidable sense of lack which constitutes all kinds of subjects. If this is the case, there is no hope of effecting a reconciliation between the pleasure-seeking subject and his environment. So there is no motivation for the demanding and sustained engagement with 'reality' which may produce secondary process thinking and a form of cultural membership based on sublimation rather than repression.¹⁰⁶ If the possibility of 'reality-testing' is foreclosed, then the subject necessarily remains caught up in a phantasy world. A brief return to Freud will be useful at this point.

Freud, reality and phantasy

For Freud the capacity for thought is derivative of the capacity to test reality and is therefore related to the capacity to act effectively on reality. Central to the development of these capacities is a strongly felt and stable relationship with primary carers i.e. a reliable, stable but also fairly responsive external world (reality). As he puts it: '[A] precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction.' Identifying such objects is a matter of judgement based on memory of past satisfactions:

104 Frosh (1991); Kovel (1988ii).

105 MacCannell (1986), p. 166.

106 Marcuse (1987), chs. 2, 10.

Judging is the intellectual action which decides the choice of motor action, which puts an end to the postponement due to thought and which leads over from thinking to acting.¹⁰⁷

Where no satisfaction is possible, the development of memory- therefore of the capacity for making judgements (testing reality and arriving at reliable conclusions) - is foreclosed. Movement beyond the pleasure principle is impossible. This results in the situation naturalized by Lacan i.e. it produces an insatiable subject forever trapped in a state of desire which has been constituted by a culture as inherently unsatisfiable. Being left in a state of permanent frustration, the individual is left necessarily in a state of emotional and cognitive debility.¹⁰⁸ The urge to relieve frustration produces the habit of daydreaming, as discussed by Freud.

For Freud, day-dreaming involves a 'disorder of attention', an 'absence of mind' or state of distraction from reality. It involves the turning of attention inwards, away from the world towards a kind of 'private theatre'.¹⁰⁹ The introduction of the reality principle involves the splitting off of one species of 'thought activity', namely 'phantasying, which begins already in children's play, and later, continues as day-dreaming, abandons dependence on real objects'.¹¹⁰ It follows from what has been said above that the inward-turning of attention involved in day-dreaming results in a diminution of this capacity to engage in action.¹¹¹ Since day-dreams also provide instant gratification, it may be further supposed that this is also a diminution in the capacity to exercise self-discipline. Finally, since satisfaction is sought from phantastic rather than real objects, sociality either fails to emerge or, where it is emergent or present as a capacity, is bound to atrophy. The capacity for thought, for sustained attention directed towards a given object is constitutively related to the exercise of self-discipline, or the capacity to delay gratification but also to the availability of (human) objects in the environment capable of and willing to grant satisfaction. It is only on the basis of this relatively reliable availability that the kind of cognitive and affective development required for political commitment in strongly individualized and complex cultures will emerge. What is in question is an affective-cognitive complex. Day-dreaming arises where the development of these capacities is rendered difficult and it then becomes an additional obstacle to any further development of these related capacities. It is partly in these terms that we can begin to understand the subject effects of different institutional clusters characterizing

107 Freud (1984i), p. 440. See also Freud (1984i), p. 38; Freud (1976), pp. 758 - 9.

108 Bion (1962a).

109 Brennan (1992), p. 99.

110 Freud (1984i), p. 39.

111 Brennan (1992), p. 93.

different stages of capitalism and therefore different capacities for action and relationship.¹¹² For the moment we must note that the subject posited by Lacan is a daydreaming subject. Daydreaming subjects are subjects who fail to undergo action-strengthening identifications and who therefore experience passive rather than active forms of gratification.¹¹³

Daydreaming subjects are necessarily incapable of fulfilling the requirements for transformative communal action which have been discussed in chapters six and seven. They are also incapable of the more modest requirements for commitment to intra-cultural collective tasks. I shall now go on to support this claim by elaborating on the psychic requirements for the constitution of such commitment in strongly individuated capitalist cultures. This will take the form of an analysis of the concepts of sublimation and secondary process.

III

In this section I shall argue that the constitution of a transformative communal actor requires subjects who are, first, governed by the secondary process and second, capable of sublimating rather than repressing their need for instinctual gratification. These are essential requirements for the kind of radically democratic political mobilization called for by Marx and Gramsci. The use of psychoanalytic concepts should enable us to develop a more clearly specified analysis of the requirements for such action by, for example, offering a psychoanalytical analysis of the organic character of the relations between intellectuals and people held by Gramsci to be necessary if radically democratic transformative action is to get under way. Freud's account of the optimally functioning Oedipal family is an account of the requirements for instituting a strongly-felt individual sense of cultural membership; one, moreover, in which the individual is not 'oversocialized' or engulfed in his culture. This is precisely the kind of cultural membership looked for by Marx and (more explicitly) by Gramsci. In all three theorists there is a stress on self-mastery of a specific kind as a good, both for the individual and for the culture.¹¹⁴ This stress is expressed in Marx's concept of praxis; it is elaborated in Gramsci's concept of culture; it is given its psychic expression in Freud's concept of sublimation. It is to a discussion of the latter that I now turn.

112 Hyperbolic claims about the end or murder of reality, as made by Baudrillard (1996) can then be interpreted as claims about the world as lived experienced in liberal capitalist cultures. At the same time, the experience of the world has constitutive - or deconstitutive - effects as well, as I have been arguing.

113 Jacobson (1954).

114 For more on this question see Jacoby (1980); Piccone (1980).

The bourgeois subject: from repression to sublimation

Subjectivity and repression

In terms of the problems explored in this thesis, the fundamental difference between repression and sublimation is that the former takes place behind the back of the subject whereas the latter is the product of conscious reflection and judgement. Expressed in this way, the reason for the mapping on of these terms to the proletarian and bourgeois subjects respectively should become clear. In fact, as Freud himself acknowledges, civilization, (late nineteenth, early twentieth century capitalism) is based almost wholly on repression as opposed to sublimation.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, insofar as sublimation exists, it is enjoyed only by a minority of the population concerned.¹¹⁶

The fate of the instincts is related, on the one hand, to the organism's need to relieve tension by maintaining a bearable level of energy and, on the other, its need to comply with (or evade) the 'super-ego' i.e. the requirements of its culture. If we think of the matter in terms of 'internal' and 'external' stimuli, then in the case of the latter, evasion or flight is possible up to a point, but not in relation to the former. The unavailability of the flight option leaves the possibility of repression, judgement or condemnation of an instinctual impulse which is forbidden by the culture. Repression is considered by Freud to be midway between condemnation and flight.

The original or foundational repressions are of incest and patricide, both being direct expressions of the Oedipus complex.¹¹⁷ In relation to these two related instinctual impulses, it is clear that the individual is in a contradictory situation since gratification of these impulses is almost bound to lead to punishment (whether inflicted by himself or the culture) and therefore a simultaneous loss of gratification.¹¹⁸ Given an unfavourable balance in favour of the latter, the forbidden impulse will be repressed. Repressed items are either items which fail to emerge from the unconscious into consciousness, or which have been pushed down from consciousness into the unconscious. From the point of view of the individual organism, repression is clearly the most undesirable fate of the instincts since, unlike sublimation, it involves renunciation without compensation and produces painful symptoms whose

115 This is conceptualized by Marcuse (1987), ch. 2, in terms of 'surplus repression' and the 'performance principle'

116 Freud (1985iii), pp. 191 - 2. We have the beginnings here of a class-inflected account of sublimation. and repression.

117 Freud (1984iv). In this sense, Freud considers repression to be a universal fact of human life, coexistent with the unconscious. In this sense, too, the unconscious is both culturally and biologically constituted. Marxists such as Lichtman (1982) and Schneider (1975) will want to argue though, for the historical specificity of the unconscious and of repression.

118 See Freud (1974i), for a clear account of this point.

precise nature need not concern us here.¹¹⁹ The maintenance of repressions requires high levels of energy; energy which would otherwise go to strengthen and nourish the ego. Put another way, where cultural membership is based largely on repression, what we find is a weakly-organized ego - one who is subject to the contradictory dictates of the id and the super-ego. The subject constituted by repression is clearly not the subject required for communal transformative action since this subject is a fragile, guilt- and anxiety-ridden subject whose repressions are likely to erupt in various forms of neurotic behaviour. Let us now see how sublimation differs from repression.

Sublimation

Sublimation is one of Freud's most underdeveloped concepts.¹²⁰ Ricoeur goes so far as to describe it as an 'empty' concept.¹²¹ Nevertheless, it is an indispensable concept here for two related reasons. First, it is central to the general project of articulating psychoanalysis to Marxism. Second, it is the means of developing a theoretically enriched account of the institutionalization of a transformative communal actor.¹²² It is this concept which can help us to understand the requirements for reintegrating individuality, self-discipline and self-realization with communal social relationships. It will be of interest then, to see what Freud has to say about it.

Whereas repression results in the non-satisfaction of instincts, sublimation brings about substitute satisfactions, thereby effecting the best possible reconciliation between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. According to Freud, sublimation makes possible 'higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological'.¹²³ It is related to the forming of an ideal and is

a process that concerns object-libido and consists in the instinct's directing itself towards an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon deflection from sexuality. Idealization is a process that concerns the *object*; by it that object, without any alteration in its nature, is aggrandized and exalted in the subject's mind.¹²⁴

However, it should be remembered that the formation of an ego ideal can lead to repression rather than sublimation. Idealization is not in itself sublimation. It

119 Freud (1984iv, 1984v). See Brennan (1992), ch. 2.

120 See Freud (1985iii).

121 See discussion in Ricoeur (1970), pp. 483 - 92.

122 Seve (1978), p. 149, in assessing Freudian psychoanalysis as a possible candidate for providing Marxism with its necessary psychology, rejects it on the sole grounds that it has nothing to say about 'labour'. In fact, Freud's concept of sublimation is the basis for a thorough critique of abstract labour and commodity fetishism.

123 Freud (1985iv), p. 267.

124 Freud (1984ii), p. 88, (emphasis in original).

involves an overestimation of an object and therefore the impoverishment of the subject.¹²⁵ While the ego ideal demands sublimation, it cannot enforce it.¹²⁶ In fact, insofar as the ego ideal is interpreted as a response to a 'narcissistic hurt', it is unlikely to result in identifications productive of either the strong ego (sublimation) or superego.¹²⁷ Sublimation is the outcome of 'an abandonment of sexual aims'; it requires the displacement but not the repression of energy. It is connected with the alteration of the ego by means of identifications. It requires, not the engulfment of the ego in an idealized object, but, rather, a strong ego with an active and libidinal orientation towards objects. It is in this way that we can understand the psychic requirements for membership of radically democratic cultures and therefore for communal transformative action.

Freud relates the phenomenon specifically to social relations, as when he says 'A certain kind of modification of the aim and change of the object, in which our social valuation is taken into account, is described by us as "sublimation"'.¹²⁸ At this point, Freud refuses to follow through, or turns away from, his own insight. That is to say, he balks at stating that sublimation as a possible fate for the instincts is dependent, not only on innate human characteristics, but on cultural conditions, although many of his own statements imply this.¹²⁹ The sublimation of instincts relates to the capacity, as well as the culturally-available opportunity, to turn outwards, to act upon the world in a transformative manner. While Freud himself does not always insist on the necessary sociality of sublimation, this is implicit at least in most of his formulations and it is clearly a crucial component of the concept if it is to be articulated to Marxism.

This is what Freud has to say about the relationship between the transition from pleasure to reality principle and its relationship to sublimation:

[T]he endopsychic impression made by this substitution [of the reality principle for the pleasure principle] has been so powerful that it is reflected in a special religious myth. The doctrine of reward in the after-life for the -voluntary or enforced - renunciation of earthly pleasures is nothing other than a mythical projection of this revolution in the mind. Following consistently along these lines, religions have been able to effect absolute renunciation of pleasure in this life by means of the promise of compensation in a future existence; but they have not by this means achieved a conquest of the pleasure principle. It is science which comes nearest to succeeding in that conquest;

125 Mitchell (1975), p. 35.

126 Freud (1984vii) discusses this further, p. 369. See also Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985); Jacobson (1954); Reich (1953, 1954).

127 Reich (1954), p. 219.

128 Freud (1973iii), p. 129.

129 See Freud (1985iv) particularly.

science too, however, offers intellectual pleasure during its work and promises practical gain in the end.¹³⁰

So, the true conquest of the pleasure principle is through sublimation, not repression, whether the latter be achieved through coercion or mystification.¹³¹ At times, Freud seems to suggest that sublimation, in relation to the demands of civilization, is possible only for the exceptional, as in the following:

Another technique for fending off suffering is the employment of the displacements of the libido which our mental apparatus permits of and through which its function gains so much inflexibility. The task here is that of shifting the instinctual aims in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world. In this, sublimation of the instincts lends its assistance. One gains the most if one can sufficiently heighten the yield of pleasure from the sources of psychical and intellectual work. When that is so, fate can do little against one. A satisfaction of this kind, such as an artist's joy in creating, in giving his phantasies body, or a scientist's in solving problems or discovering truths, has a special quality which we shall certainly one day be able to characterize in metapsychological terms.¹³²

Note here again, as in the quotation above, the reference to science, as well as art, as offering a particularly fruitful avenue to sublimation. However, this avenue may be also open to those without exceptional talents or capacities. So

When there is no special disposition in a person which imperatively prescribes what direction his interests in life shall take, the ordinary professional work that is open to everyone can play the part assigned to it in *Candide*, to cultivate one's garden, Voltaire's wise advice. It is not possible, within the limits of a short survey, to discuss adequately the significance of work for the economics of the libido ... The possibility it offers of displacing a large amount of libidinal components, whether narcissistic, aggressive, or even erotic, on to professional work and on to the human relations connected with it lends a value by no means second to what it enjoys as something indispensable to the preservation and justification of existence in society. Professional activity is a source of special satisfaction if it is a freely chosen one - if, that is to say, by means of sublimation, it makes possible the use of existing inclinations, of persisting or constitutionally reinforced instinctual impulses.¹³³

As Freud is aware, then, sublimation is fundamentally and constitutively a socio-cultural rather than intra-psychic phenomenon. It requires institutional means of development i.e. it requires the cultivation of human sociality through appropriate

130 Freud (1984i), p. 41.

131 See Freud (1985iii).

132 Freud (1985iv), p. 267.

133 Ibid., p. 268, n. 1.

intimate familial relations. However, the concept and the empirical possibility to which it refers depends heavily on a capacity for, and striving towards, sociality, as well as a related capacity for self-fulfilment in 'freely chosen' activity in the world. In Freudian terms, the institutionalization of sublimatory rather than repressive social relations renders less painful the contradiction (within the individual) between self-absorption and sociability. As noted before, Freud's account of sublimation is assimilable to Marx's account of 'labour' as praxis as discussed in chapter five above. Both sublimation and praxis are the most satisfying, humanly-fulfilling 'fate' for the subject. Both require and nurture sociality (libidinal bonding) and the capacity for directing sustained, self-disciplined attention at valued objects in the world. As noted before, this latter capacity is developed as the subject makes the transition from primary to secondary processes.

The primary process

In order to understand this process, we need for the moment to view the human organism as a mental apparatus (psyche) at the service of a system of matter-energy whose goal it is to observe the constancy principle.¹³⁴ The observance of this principle requires the 'mastering [of] stimuli'.¹³⁵ It is the infant's dawning realization of the impossibility of this endeavour which leads it to progress from the primary process to the secondary process, as follows.

The primary process is based on a hallucinatory reaction to stimulation. That is to say, it involves the indiscriminating, instant cathexis of psychical energy to hallucinatory objects. The psyche governed by the primary process has neither memory nor the capacity for judgement and attention. Put another way, it cannot tell reality from phantasy. There is no sense of judgement or discrimination in terms of the object cathected with energy. By the process of displacement one idea may yield to another (or receive from another) the whole of its energy; by the process of condensation it may receive the total sum of energy previously cathected to several other ideas. In fact, the processes of displacement and condensation are the distinguishing marks of the primary psychical process, as noted before. That is to say, the extreme mobility of energy or lack of fixity is a mark of the early stages of development of the human being.

134 This can be interpreted as either (a) maintaining the level of energy at a dynamic equilibrium or (b) reducing it to a minimum level. See Freud (1966) Sect. 1, Pt. III; (1984iii), pp. 115, 117; (1984vi) especially p. 360. See also Brennan (1992), pp. 108 - 9; Laplanche & Pontalis (1973), p. 346.

135 Freud (1984iii), p. 116. See also Freud (1966) where this idea first makes its appearance.

This extreme mobility led Freud to speculate in 'The Dissection of the Psychological Personality', that the energy of the 'instinctual impulses' arising from the id is different than that found in other regions of the mental apparatus, being 'far more mobile and capable of discharge'.¹³⁶ This is free energy which 'flows towards discharge in the speediest and most direct fashion possible',¹³⁷ as opposed to bound energy which accumulates and remains within particular neurones or systems of neurones. Bound energy 'holds fast' to its cathexes.¹³⁸ It is necessary both for thinking and for the formation and maintenance of strong and stable social relations.

The attempt to master stimuli leads the human organism to an understanding of the difference between itself (an 'inside') and an independently existing environment (an 'outside') as it comes to identify different sources of stimuli and different ways of mastering, failing to master, or of accommodating itself to these. At the same time, the infant is somehow required to 'take in' to himself what is outside. In the Freudian account of subject-formation, this 'taking in' is crucial. If all goes well - i.e. if the external environment is neither too indulgent nor too indifferent - the child will develop its human capacities for thought and self-discipline (capacity to delay gratification) and for libidinal cathexis. Such developments allow the infant to identify real, as opposed to hallucinatory, sources of satisfaction. This involves the development of a sense of a reality which is the source simultaneously of frustration and of satisfaction.¹³⁹ Moreover, it requires that the infant learn to overcome (rather than being overwhelmed by) its sense of frustration. Here cognition and affect are inextricably intertwined as the need to get to know the world initiates in the infant a process of thinking *and* of libidinally bonding with objects in the world

From primary to secondary process

The development from primary to secondary process can be understood in terms of the emergence of the capacity to direct attention outwards.¹⁴⁰ It should be stressed, though, that the direction of attention outwards also requires a direction of attention inwards. Attention connotes the self-conscious, active and sustained direction of psychic energy towards specific objects, purposes or projects. However, as noted above, this kind of attention is produced only as the result of a process of differentiation which is also an educative process whereby the individual human organism develops a strong sense of both a self and an independently existing external world. Chapter four

136 Freud (1973i), p. 107. This is attributed to Breuer in Freud (1984v), p. 190.

137 Laplanche & Pontalis (1973), p. 171.

138 Freud (1966). See also Freud (1984vi); Brennan (1992).

139 See Bion (1962a); Brennan (1992); Winnicott (1991).

140 Brennan (1992), ch. 3.

has offered a discussion of the institutional requirements for the production of this dual inward and outward orientation in bourgeois subjects. In effect, my argument is that the secondary process becomes institutionalized under specific cultural historical conditions rather than being, as Freud takes it to be, the universal form of human development.¹⁴¹

It is in the 'Project' that Freud first discusses attention.¹⁴² The term connotes 'an active deployment of psychophysical energy, or rather is an act of deployment of that energy', activity here being associated with externality.¹⁴³ As Strachey points out, in the 'Project' Freud treats attention, which he relates to the function of 'reality-testing', as 'one of the principal forces at work in the mental apparatus'.¹⁴⁴ It is based on a correct assessment of the possibility of gratification. In order to make a correct assessment, delay between the point of stimulation and gratification is essential. Reality-testing requires inhibition (delayed gratification) and can only take place on the basis of memory. Through the development of memories of occasions of past satisfactions and frustrations, the psyche learns to discriminate between imagined objects of desire and real objects of desire. This is a turning outwards towards an independently-existing 'real world'. In fact, the first memory is the point from which the ego develops, since it is the capacity to discriminate between reality and phantasy which is the defining characteristic of 'ego organization'. Unlike the primary process which involves hallucination and extreme volatility of cathexes, the secondary process involves a strong sense of the relative stability of internal and external objects, i.e. of a self and a knowable and known environment. The latter is known and knowable because it affords fairly (but not wholly) predictable, reliable sources of gratification to the individual subject. It is a source, not only of constraints or frustrations, but also of enablements or gratifications. It is this combination which is vital for the emergence of the active social subject.

The ego is, as Brennan puts it, 'a mass of constantly cathected neurones or established pathways; it is the totality of psychological cathexes at a given time'.¹⁴⁵ The subject with a well-developed ego is a subject with the capacity for exercising judgement by the fixing of attention on (cathecting) the external world in a sustained and knowledgeable manner. This ability in turn elicits an active attitude towards the world. For Freud, there is a relationship between the ability to concentrate, to think systematically and the capacity to bind energy.¹⁴⁶ Here we have a biological-cultural explanation - which is also an affective-rational explanation - for the origin and

141 See Baudrillard (1993), ch. 5; Kakar (1981).

142 Freud (1966).

143 See *ibid.*; also Brennan, (1992), p. 96; Ricoeur (1970), pp. 69 - 86; Wollheim (1973).

144 in Freud (1984v), Fn. 2, p. 197.

145 Brennan (1992), p. 112.

146 Ricoeur (1970), p. 82.

development of intellection.¹⁴⁷ This is an explanation which maps onto Gramsci's account of the relational and knowledge requirements for the constitution of the transformative communal actor, as discussed in chapter seven.

The replacement of the primary process by the secondary process is, in effect, the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, or as Freud puts it, the emergence of the 'definitive reality-ego' out of the 'initial pleasure-ego'.¹⁴⁸ It should be noted though that this is a development which does not negate, but rather advances the purposes of the pleasure principle. It does this by aiding the correct identification of objects which are not only 'good' (i.e. potentially satisfying) from the point of view of the emergent subject but also 'real' i.e. are available in the external world so that the child has access to them whenever necessary.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, these objects are considered to be 'good' on the basis of real experience, that is to say, they are objects which have become lost but 'which once brought real satisfaction'.¹⁵⁰ In this way: 'A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time.'¹⁵¹ The emerging capacity to think, to correctly evaluate the character of oneself and one's environment leads both to postponement of satisfaction and the later enjoyment of a more genuine and enduring satisfaction. It is in this way that we can come to understand how apparently a-social (or even anti-social) human organisms can come to have cathected (invest with energy) objects which do not afford the possibility of immediate gratification; that they can come to love in the broad sense mentioned above. To the degree that sociality is taken to be innate, then the trajectory becomes both more understandable and more reliably to be expected. It becomes less open to anti-social eruptions. Where the external environment (the culture) is inherently confusing, indifferent or even hostile, then, as Freud himself notes, internalization is not to be expected and sublimation is therefore impossible.

I now turn to relate the concepts of sublimation and secondary process to the account of radically democratic political mobilization.

147 See Moi (1989).

148 Freud (1984i), p. 439.

149 Ibid.

150 Freud (1984i), p. 440.

151 Ibid., p. 41, (emphases in original). For a more extended discussion of religion and science in terms of effecting a reconciliation (or even transcendence) of the pleasure principle and reality principle, see Freud (1973ii).

Psychoanalysis and political mobilization

Identifications

The concept of identification is central to Freud's account of political mobilization.¹⁵² It is through identifications based on a shared emotional quality that lasting bonds are constituted between individuals, for Freud. That shared quality is likely to consist in a 'tie with a leader', although it may also be a shared ideal or doctrine.¹⁵³ In fact group members experience a double tie, with each other and with the leader.¹⁵⁴ A path leads from identification, through imitation to empathy. At this point, it is important to note the character of relationship deemed by Freud to obtain between leader and led.

As will be seen, Freud's own work on groups (or on 'political love', as Borch-Jacobsen¹⁵⁵ puts it) cannot be used in conjunction with that of Gramsci, since he (Freud) can conceive of groups only as 'hordes' i.e. as groups characterized by a specific kind of manipulative relationship between leaders and led. That is to say, he privileges the role of the group leader and, furthermore, equates the relationship between leader and led with that between hypnotist and subject. What this means is that group members are deemed to be in a passive relationship with the leader whose commands are followed in an automatic, unselfconscious and uncritical manner, although, from the followers' point of view, 'as if' the actions were their own. This is a kind of 'heteropathic' identification whereby the group becomes absorbed in the leader.¹⁵⁶ It is emphatically not the kind of ego-strengthening, enriching identification which Freud sees as necessary for the emergence of the bourgeois subject and which Gramsci sees as necessary for proletarian revolutionary action and therefore for a strong form of political commitment. The boy child's identification with the strong father is a nurturing, enabling identification which will result in a strong ego and therefore the emergence of those capacities which have been discussed above. Here submission to (internalization of) authority is the basis for achieving some distance from that authority (and therefore a sense of individual personal efficacy and competence). Insofar as the parental relationship to the male child is both loving and demanding, it lays the basis for a relatively autonomous adult; one who experiences a balance between attachment and detachment i.e. a strong active social subjectivity.

Since it is precisely those capacities which are required for the emergence of the transformative communal actor, as described by Gramsci, then Freud's essay on group psychology is not the place to look for a psychoanalytic account of political

152 Freud (1985ii), ch. VII.

153 Ibid., p. 137.

154 Ibid., ch. V.

155 Borch-Jacobsen (1988), pp. 153 - 163.

156 Ibid., pp. 211, 213, 275 en. 57.

mobilization. This essay shows precisely what is not required if transformative communal action is to take place. In the Freudian account, rationality rests with the leader and libidinal bonding does not eventuate in sublimation. Rather, it has a religious character, and therefore rests on repression.¹⁵⁷ I shall now return to Gramsci so as to pursue the matter further.

Political mobilization: the Oedipal model

Recall that both Gramsci and Marx are aware of the political significance of the affective and cognitive debility brought about by capitalism as well as of the inadequacies of purely local pre-capitalist knowledge. To remain with Gramsci, what he seeks to bring about is the synthesis of the affective strength of local face-to-face relationships and the cognitive strength of philosophical and scientific knowledge. By these means, it will be possible to constitute a transformative communal ('national popular') actor i.e. a group which is not a 'horde', or a tactical coalition of sub-national groups, or an aggregate of self-interested individuals. Moreover this synthesis is to be achieved by means of the voluntary, educated and enthusiastic commitment of individual members of the collective actor. Expressed in psychoanalytic terms, this is a synthesis of sublimation and the secondary process.

I suggest that it is fruitful to think of the Gramscian (and indeed the Marxian) organic intellectual in terms of the categories of sublimation and secondary process. Whereas all intellectuals are necessarily governed by the secondary process, not all have sublimated their need for instinctual gratification by channeling their energies into socially valuable and demanding activities of the kind with which we are concerned, activities, that is, requiring empathy, or - in Freud's terms - activities requiring libidinal bonds. The Gramscian term 'organic' as applied to intellectuals refers to the latter capacity, while the terms 'mechanical' or 'rationalistic' refer to intellectuals as experts and bureaucrats who are incapable of engaging in the kinds of relationships needed to effect progressive (voluntary and self-conscious) transformation in a given population. Bureaucrats (of the kind discussed by Marx and Gramsci) are governed by the secondary process but are unlikely to be capable of sublimation. Whereas sublimation is impossible without the secondary process, it is possible to find the secondary process without sublimation. Where the secondary process is undiluted by sublimation, what we find is rationalization.¹⁵⁸ Or at least, there is a constant temptation towards rationalistic, mechanistic relations, relations moreover which are inherently and permanently hierarchical.

¹⁵⁷ Freud (1985iii).

¹⁵⁸ For Benjamin (1990), this is the most likely (even inevitable) outcome of the Oedipal complex, given Freud's stress on the father.

As we have seen, the emergence of the bourgeois subject was effected through a nexus of institutions productive of directly-experienced personal social relations in different spheres. Through these institutions, neither the individual nor the social was effaced. Directly experienced social relations enabled the emergent subject to experience his environment as separate but not wholly hostile or deaf to his desires. We have found when examining Gramsci's work in chapter seven that he is concerned with providing a similar nexus of institutions productive of the active, social, self-disciplined subject. Hegemony requires attentiveness to the needs (both 'economic' and 'cultural') of the population to be mobilized. Through such attentiveness, that population will come to identify with (will cathect with libidinal energy) the goal of universal human liberation as a real concrete goal i.e. as embodied in social relations. As the constitution of the bourgeois subject is an ongoing process which is challenging and difficult (but also ultimately rewarding) for parents and children, so too is the constitution of the transformative communal actor. Both require the development of affective and cognitive capacities (which are in any case intertwined). In this sense, the psychoanalytic account of the origin of intellection offers support for Gramsci's sense that thought, affect and the capacity for transformative action are inter-related.¹⁵⁹

*The party: sublimation or repression?*¹⁶⁰

Before concluding I need to address the question of the party. As we have seen in chapter seven, Gramsci is hoping that an organically constituted party will be capable of avoiding the rationalizing, bureaucratic character of modernizing politics. The stress on organic intellectual rather than professional revolutionary is intended to convey this point. Such a party would function as a law of the stern but loving father; it would be a new and genuine source of authority (genuine in the sense that it would educate and bring to maturity the population over whom it exercised its authority). Gramsci's 'New Prince' would be, in effect, a mass social movement whose activities would be coordinated by a vanguard party which would avoid the dangers of vanguardism because of the kinds of social relations which it had been set up to foster. Such a party would constitute a new source of authoritative relations which would be at the same time relations between (equal) active social subjects. In effect, the constitution of the party - the very source of its authoritative power - would be simultaneously the constitution of such subjects who would, by definition, be available for neither coercive nor manipulative forms of mobilization. The law of the

159 See Bion (1962a); Moi (1989). See Damasio (1995) for more recent evidence from the world of neurology.

160 Lichtman (1982) touches on this question, but unfortunately fails to develop a coherent argument.

father would be transmuted into the law of the party i.e. the principle of universal human emancipation. This would be the only acceptable form of authority in a radically democratic age.

In fact, any talk of authority is likely to be translated by its critics into talk of domination.¹⁶¹ In addition, unified and all-embracing projects of emancipation such as that proposed by Gramsci are now viewed with universal suspicion as either fundamentally misguided or as a disguise for power politics of the most oppressive kind.¹⁶² Local and pluralistic politics is the form taken by radical politics now. The claim that a 'New Prince' could be the means of transcending the social and cognitive debility instituted by pure capitalism is unlikely to attract many adherents, post-Marxism being exemplary in this respect.¹⁶³ Those seeking to initiate transformative communal action must look elsewhere for the necessary organizational means of education/coordination. The Gramscian party cannot now be the basis of a concrete phantasy.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have begun to bring together the different elements of the argument by developing further its psychoanalytic component. The task has been to reveal the psychic aspect of both the social and cognitive requirements for transformative communal action and the peculiar social and cognitive debility instituted by pure capitalism. The work of Freud on the founding and development of the ego (the bourgeois subject) has been the vehicle for the first; the work of Lacan on the proletarian and decentred subjects (the subjects of pure capitalism) has been the vehicle for the second.

Whereas Freud's own work is marked by the kind of suspiciousness of the emotional which we would expect from modern scientific intellectuals (most marked in his confused work on social psychology) he does afford the theoretical means of transcending dichotomous and disabling thought. Indeed this is one of the great virtues of his work. Freud's account of the Oedipal family has afforded the means of thinking systematically about the cognitive-affective foundations of the bourgeois subject. We have seen the importance of directly experienced, embodied, stable and reliable social relations in the emergence and development of an active social

161 Benjamin (1977) is a useful and relevant example here.

162 Of the new school of collective action theorists, Touraine (1981) comes closest to Gramsci in that he focuses on the role of radical intellectuals in facilitating the emancipation of marginalized groups. At the same time he resolutely rejects any notion of the vanguard party.

163 In this respect, it is interesting to note post-Marxism's reticence on the matter of organic intellectuals. See Laclau (1990iii), pp. 177 - 196.

subjectivity of the kind required for the constitution of political commitment in strongly individuated capitalist cultures. These social relations constitute the first reality for the emergent subject. We have noted the significance of a strongly felt sense of a stable, enduring and not wholly hostile or unresponsive (but also not wholly accommodating) reality outside of the subject for the development of individual capacities for thought, judgement and a reliable sense of memory. This development endows the individual with the necessary sense of sociality and of competence as well as the motivation to engage in an active social manner with the outside world.

Turning to Lacan, we receive the message that no such world exists or, that the world of directly experienced social relations is the mere artefact of an impersonal and overwhelming system i.e. the symbolic. Lacan's stress on the symbolic has the effect of subsuming the embodied and relational character of subject-formation under the symbolic as systemically experienced imperative and of ejecting both innate and emergent sociality from his account of human nature.¹⁶⁴ Hence the expected painfulness of and resistance to the humanization process, as we have seen above. While Lacan sees this as the necessary effect of the universal logic of language, I am arguing that this painfulness is also (and more significantly) related to the cognitive opacity and lack of responsiveness of the world in which the capitalist subject finds himself. Hence the preoccupation with the 'gap', 'lack' or insatiability experienced by the subject as conceptualized by Lacan. Hence the erosion of political commitment as pinpointed by post-Marxism.

From my point of view, the profound significance of the impossibility of filling the 'gap', or sense of fragmentation and lack which characterizes the decentred subject is that it eliminates the possibility of achieving sublimation, since sublimation requires a strong 'organized' ego which is formed by means of identifications of a particular kind.¹⁶⁵ This is a subject who has effected a consolatory identification with a parent (most importantly the father in Freud's account) through the inhibition of libidinal aims. The ability to inhibit aims in this way is directly related to the capacity to form 'permanent ties' with others.¹⁶⁶ What should be clear from the discussion of Lacan's work is that the process required for this outcome - i.e. the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex - is not and cannot be in place in liberal capitalist cultures. Therefore sublimation becomes unavailable as a vicissitude of the instincts.¹⁶⁷ This is a subject who has been formed by the abstract institutions constituted by

164 In fact, Borch-Jacobsen (1991), p. 129, suggests that Lacan is attempting to rescue sociality by means of a 'therapy of the socius'.

165 See Hamilton (1993) for an argument about the continuity rather than discontinuity between the human infant and its socio-cultural environment.

166 Freud (1985ii), p. 172.

167 Lacan has little to say about this matter. See Lacan (1980v), pp 165 - 6.

capitalism - i.e Althusser's specialized legal, political and ideological relations - which 'brand men in their flesh and blood, just as the production relation does.'¹⁶⁸ Insofar as pure capitalism has been instituted, then secondary process thinking will be expressed in rationalization i.e. in a world of fetishized social relations oriented to the production of surplus value. In such a world, the strong social sense needed to effect sublimation will not be present. The subject will be the monadic atomistic subject. As was argued in section three of this chapter, secondary process functioning and sublimation express the combined characteristics of sociality, creativity and the specific kind of cognitive theoretical abilities required to carry out effective transformative action on capitalist cultures. The psychoanalytical categories therefore complete the theoretical framework needed to explain the erosion of political commitment in liberal capitalist cultures.

In the final chapter, I recapitulate the argument while at the same time grounding it more precisely in the stages of capitalism which were first discussed briefly in chapter two.

168 Althusser (1990v), p. 238.

Chapter nine

The argument concluded

In this final chapter, I complete the argument by showing the institutional basis of the decentred subjectivity whose character and political consequences were first explored in chapter three. This discussion will be prefaced by a brief examination of organized capitalism which will help to clarify claims about the significance of the displacement/condensation contrast and bring out the distinctiveness of disorganized institutions. The account will be informed by the dichotomous categories which I am using to capture the debilitating character of capitalist forms of subjectivity.

I

Organized capitalism and the proletarian subject

The individual/society dichotomy

The characteristics of organized capitalism were indicated in chapter two and the exploration of its subject effects was begun in chapter four by means of Althusser's work on the ISAs. As we noted there, this work is seriously underdeveloped but nevertheless highly suggestive and useful in terms of the argument of this thesis. In addition to pointing the way towards a more rigorous and systematic articulation of psychoanalysis to Marxism than was achieved by members of the Frankfurt School, Althusser hints at the source of the a-sociality which he appears to take as innate to the to-be-humanized organism. This hint points us towards the 'violence of abstraction' inflicted on these organisms by capitalist cultures and returns us to Marx for an explanation of this abstraction. I suggest that it is this violence rather than any innate human characteristic which produces the sense of *lack* experienced by these subjects.¹ In view of this *lack* and the claims made by post-Marxism about its political effects, we need to explore further the (apparent) docility implied by Althusser in his portrayal of capitalist subject-constitution: 'kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe'. This suggests an internalization of cultural values for which Althusser's discussion had not prepared us, as noted in chapter four. The

¹ I am not arguing, however, against the possibility of the existence of an intra-psychic contradiction, as posited by Freud (1985iv). See also Deleuze and Guattari (1983). This contradiction, though, is not necessarily (although it may be) experienced as the acute sense of lack with which we are concerned here.

suggestion that habituation results in internalization is at odds with Althusser's own account of subjectivity but points us in the direction of more fruitful explorations. If docility does in fact exist during the organized stage of capitalism, it may be due either to the total malleability of humanity - a position in accord with Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism but not with his portrayal of resistance to humanization in FL - or to the relative benignancy of organized capitalism. The latter possibility is derived from Freud's belief that 'an internalization' of 'cultural prohibitions' by 'suppressed people is not to be expected.'² I shall now discuss the likelihood that the characteristics of organized capitalism are such as to invoke internalization. If this is the case, then political commitment to the attainment of collective goals remains a possibility during this stage of capitalism.

To begin with, we need to note that the requirements of organized capitalism serve to mitigate the alienation³ instituted by pure capitalism. This mitigation comes about in two related (although also contradictory) ways. First, the socialization of labour through mass production produces some of the effects of association expected by Marx (discussed in chapter six); it reinstates sociality of a kind, albeit unwittingly. Second, the decommodification put in train through state-directed activity renders the social bond visible. The characteristic use-value production of this stage of capitalism - i.e. iron and steel, as noted in chapter two - requires mass production, efficient coordination, standardization and bureaucratization.⁴ These requirements produce an overt and explicit partnership between state and market - a partnership which receives its theoretical apotheosis in the work of Keynes.⁵

Keynesianism is not just a set of economic prescriptions for reinstating capital accumulation and economic growth, but a metanarrative which links the fates of different classes and strata within the state which can thereby be experienced by a particular population as a nation-state.⁶ This, though, is a metanarrative which is translated into functionally-related practices kept in place by political power in the shape of the state. The result is that the contradictory character of capitalism is experientially insignificant during this period, as is also displacement (i.e. metonymic causality). Put another way, subject-positions are relatively coherent and also relatively fixed. Moreover, because the state is visibly involved in benign activities on behalf of the population at large, the social bond is visibly expressed through a

2 Freud (1985iii), p. 191.

3 I am using the concept of alienation to refer to the social debility instituted by capitalism. The concept of fetishism refers to cognitive debility. While these two forms of debility are related, they can also be differentially instituted in different stages of capitalism, as will be seen.

4 Aglietta (1979); Reich (1991).

5 Middlemass (1979).

6 See Poulantzas (1978a, 1978b).

range of bureaucratic measures (i.e. welfare provision).⁷ The welfare state institutes respect for workers through the partial decommodification of labour. So some of the most dehumanizing aspects of industrial capitalism (as described by Marx) are marginalized through combined changes in the labour process and through Keynesianism. At the same time (and relatedly), these workers are beginning to experience a relatively new kind of enjoyment, namely the consumption of commodities (satisfaction of artificial needs, in Marxian terms).⁸ Workers who are becoming affluent are workers who are turning to the joys of consumption and to the 'private' intimate familial sphere.⁹ In terms of the social relations which it institutes, the dynamic of organized capitalism is a contradictory dynamic of socialization/atomization. Socialization by means of association in the factory faces a two-fold threat: first, the bureaucratization of trades unions; second, the atomization (privatization) of increasingly affluent workers. This two-fold threat involves the displacement of individual attention from the public to the private sphere. Put another way, insofar as it is realized, it produces political passivity, or at most a limited kind of interest group politics (Gramsci's 'economic-corporative' politics) which largely takes the form of corporatism.¹⁰

As noted above, organized capitalism institutes a relatively fixed form of 'lived experience' for the subjects it constitutes. The proletarian subject is interpellated in a relatively fixed mode through career structures for professional strata, jobs for life for manual workers and 'cradle to grave' provision of welfare services for all.¹¹ Furthermore, the individual subject experiences relatively stable and embodied social relations in the different spheres making up the totality. Therefore the capacity for sociality does not atrophy. What this means is that the individual as functionary is subordinated to cultural imperatives which are (or can be) experienced as relatively benign.¹² This can help us to understand the docility of the proletarian subject as the docility induced by the 'one-dimensional' or 'totally administered' society.¹³

For these reasons a minimal sense of the social bond remains at the experiential level under organized (welfare state) capitalism, although always rendered vulnerable to the individual/society dichotomy. Expressed in psychoanalytic terms, the nexus of institutions produced by this stage of capitalism represents the Lacanian Law of the Father (the symbolic)¹⁴ whose interpellations can be experienced as authoritative

7 Baldwin (1990) refers to this in terms of the 'politics of social solidarity'.

8 Falk (1994); Haug (1987); Honneth (1995); Marcuse (1986). Plant (1992) provides an account of the significant body of French post-1945 theory concerned with these questions.

9 Goldthorpe et al (1968).

10 See Goldthorpe (1984); Lash & Urry (1987), ch. 8; Maier (1984); Schmitter (1974).

11 See Baldwin (1990) on welfare provision; Sampson (1995) on the occupational structure.

12 Thomas (1984) offers a Marxist argument to this effect.

13 Keane (1984); Marcuse (1986).

14 See Donzelot (1980) on the 'patriarchal state'. See also Barrett & McIntosh (1982).

(and therefore be internalized) because, although systemically engendered, they remain to a significant degree instituted by means of personal rather than impersonal relations and are furthermore not wholly indifferent to the needs of individual subjects. So long as the welfare state is in operation and reliable and relatively well-paid work is available, the environment is not experienced as wholly unresponsive by proletarian subjects. The result is that popular energies can be mobilized to some degree for collective purposes. In effect, the individual/society dichotomy is *not* fully instituted during the organized stage of capitalism which combines socializing and atomizing practices. This is not to say, though, that the 'work of culture' is achieved by means of sublimation. It is through repression rather than sublimation that the requirements of organized capitalism are secured. Collective purposes are fulfilled up to a point by such subjects, but not in the active, knowledgeable and participatory way which is required for sublimation, as discussed in chapter eight. I now turn to the second dichotomy.

The subjective/objective dichotomy

Unlike the individual/society dichotomy, the subjective/objective dichotomy is fully instituted during this stage of capitalism, in both economic and political spheres. In the former, abstract labour is instituted; in the latter bureaucratic collective action (albeit supported by a kind of passive communal impulse, as just noted). Expressed in psychoanalytic terms, the organized stage of capitalism institutes the secondary process at the systemic rather than subjective level. It is in this way that the cognitive debility to which Marx alerts us can be psychically expressed. A brief recapitulation of Marx's account will be helpful at this point.

The institution of abstract labour requires the division between mental and manual labour and the reduction of individual labourers to appendages of machines. As the individuality of workers is effaced under the real subsumption of labour by capital, so also the consciousness of individual workers ceases to be a constitutive element of the production process. Continuity between subjective and objective - as experienced by the bourgeois subject - becomes unnecessary and even impossible as individual workers are reduced to minute - and interchangeable - elements in myriad different production processes whose overall character they are not required to comprehend. Workers are placed in the service of machines which are in turn minute elements in one particular part of one production process; they are at the service of a *functional* type of rationality - identity-assemblist logic, in Castoriadis's terms.¹⁵ This is a type of rationality which inheres in the *system* rather than the *individual*; a

¹⁵ See also Castoriadis (1987); Habermas (1987b), esp. Appendix.

type of rationality whose operation would be impeded rather than aided by the active involvement of individual workers. The latter are required to carry out, without question, and as efficiently and as speedily as possible, sets of instructions of which they need have little or no understanding.¹⁶ Furthermore, these machines are seen by workers as the property and power of *capital*, as *objective*, impersonal power, rather than as the outcome of the *social* power of past labour. That is to say, organized capitalism institutes fetishism in the economic sphere. It involves the real subsumption of labour under capital. Otherwise expressed, it involves the constitution of the proletarian subject rendered passive in the face of the opacity of the vast impersonal system of which the subject is the support (although this hollowing out is mitigated by other developments discussed above).

This passivity is enhanced through the bureaucratization of collective action in the public sphere. As mentioned before, the kind of collective action which is characteristic of organized capitalism is bureaucratic action.¹⁷ Bureaucratic action is action carried out by elites as experts on behalf of or upon the population at large or targeted strata of the population. What it requires from a population is compliance rather than active involvement. In fact, such action can be carried on without any conscious engagement on the part of the population involved. Bureaucratic action intensifies the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity. It constitutes a population as passive recipients of (and passive contributors to) public welfare. Under organized capitalism, the reality principle becomes increasingly elusive, as the complexities of the economic and political spheres and the increasing intrusion of expert knowledge into the intimate familial sphere undermine the possibility of an interactive process of development between individual and environment to which that principle refers.¹⁸ Reality testing takes place at the systemic, rather than individual level. This is what is meant by the claim that the secondary process is instituted at the collective rather than individual level and it is this state of affairs (one in which systematicity - i.e. functionality between the different spheres and practices - is institutionally sustained by means of state action) that Althusser's account of the ISAs expresses.

I now turn to discuss the disorganized stage of capitalism. In this section, the task is to render an institutional account of the 'dislocation' and 'surplus of meaning' whose subject effects have been intimated by post-Marxism, as discussed in chapter three.

¹⁶ Hence Taylorism's preference for unintelligent workers capable of performing as 'trained monkeys'. See Gorz (1989), ch. 3, also Kosik (1976), ch. II.

¹⁷ See Lash & Urry (1987); Offe (1984).

¹⁸ Barrett & McIntosh (1982); Donzelot (1980); Lasch (1977, 1985); Poster (1978).

II

Disorganized capitalism and the decentred subject

In this section, I complete the argument that disorganized capitalism in its pure form is productive of neither the cognitive nor affective capacities needed for sustained political commitment. This is because the dual dichotomies discussed in chapter five come close to full instantiation only during this period. As we have seen, these dichotomies produce novel kinds of cognitive and affective debilities which fragment and disable individual subjects in a culturally unprecedented manner. Expressed in terms of our psychoanalytic concerns, pure capitalism is a culture which is neither loveable nor knowable at the level of commonsense knowledge. In fact, the cognitive opacity of this culture is intensified during the disorganized stage due to the effects of microchip technology. At the same time, disorganized capitalism - unlike the organized stage just discussed - requires a new kind of active, knowledgeable subject and therefore apparently institutionalizes the knowledge requirements for confident, competent and effective action on the world. We will need to consider whether this development heralds the end of that 'paltriness' of labour which the law of value has required during the organized stage of capitalism and whether this is likely to have the political effects looked for by Marx and discussed in chapter six. These effects include the emergence (at the level of the individual subject) of action-facilitating knowledge of the world (which in reference to capitalist cultures is necessarily theoretical in the sense discussed in chapters two and six above) and the recovery of a directly experienced sense of social connectedness and interdependence. I have examined these requirements from a psychic point of view in chapter eight with the help of the psychoanalytic concepts of secondary process functioning and sublimation. To begin with, a brief recapitulation of the arguments made there will be useful.

Recall that the development of the cognitive and affective capacities needed for active social subjectivity requires a process of continuous, active engagement between individual infant and its environment. The latter must be experienced as fairly, but not wholly, responsive to the infant's needs. This enables the infant to experience a balance between total satisfaction and total frustration. It induces a toleration of temporary frustration which ensues in the willingness to tolerate delay; to effect a break between the wish (for gratification) and the realization of that gratification. What this tolerance of delay signifies is the initiation of a process of cognitive development whereby the infant begins to realize his potential for thought. Intra-individual motivations for developing this potential emerge and are sustained as the

small child comes to know that delay affords the possibility of experiencing less immediate but ultimately more satisfying forms of gratification. This is the transition from primary to secondary process thinking and (possibly) from repression to sublimation.¹⁹ Cognitive development is also simultaneously affective development since satisfaction is obtained through the ministrations of human 'objects' or, in Marxian terms, through social relations of a specific kind.

Lacan's work has been read as an analysis of the capitalist subject and therefore of the impossibility of making the transition from repression to sublimation. It is because Lacan's work (due to its hyperbolic character) best expresses the reality of this form of subjectivity (in the same way that Marx's thought experiment in *Capital* expresses the reality of pure capitalism) that he is so useful to us here. The linguistic turn as manifested in Lacan's privileging of the symbolic is an expression of fetishized social relations i.e. of impersonal social relations which produce atomistic subjects possessing a strong sense of impersonal dependence and personal independence. These are subjects who have lost their sense of necessary, human social connectedness and interdependence. At the same time, these are subjects without substance, that is to say, subjects without a strong sense of a self with enduring and stable contents. Hence the preoccupation in Lacanian theory with the split subject, the insatiable subject in the grip of substitutability.²⁰ We have found that these subjects are governed to a significant degree by the primary process and are, in addition, incapable of the inhibition of libidinal aims required for sublimation, therefore for durable social ties. Lacan's interpretation of both the imaginary and symbolic as first, narcissistic, and second, impersonal in their functioning can enable us to understand why this is the case. Indeed the contrast between the hubris of the imaginary moment and the tyranny of the symbolic moment expresses quite neatly this state of affairs. Both 'moments' are expressive of a capitalist culture which promises individual autonomy while in fact constituting individuals as 'bearers of structures'. Such subjects are necessarily incapable of fulfilling the requirements for transformative communal action which have been discussed in chapters six, seven and eight. Moreover, they are not to be expected to commit themselves to more modest intra-cultural collective obligations. I shall now conclude my argument by going on to specify further the institutional nexus which produces this state of affairs.

Disorganized capitalism: an institutional analysis

¹⁹ In this work I can merely indicate the requirements for the instantiation of sublimation. Further work in this area requires the development of feminist arguments such as those of e.g. Benjamin (1990) and Brennan (1992).

²⁰ Lacan (1979), ch. 16.

Whereas organized capitalism mitigates the fetishizing and alienating effects of pure capitalism, disorganized capitalism intensifies these in ways which were first discussed in chapter three. During this stage of capitalism decommodification is reversed as the state advances the institutionalization of the law of value in spheres of activity hitherto protected from its effects. Moreover, the fragmentation and volatility produced by this change is intensified through the use of new kinds of technology. The result is the decentred subject. I shall now discuss these developments under the headings of *dislocation* and *surplus of meaning*.

Dislocation As was seen in chapter three, post-Marxism uses the concept of dislocation to explain the volatility and fluidity of social relations experienced by decentred subjects. These are subjected to myriad interpellations which fix and unfix them in myriad subject positions which may or may not be congruent with one another. What dislocation refers to is the end of that post-1945 period of relative stability when, as noted above, the contradictoriness and displacements (metonymic causality) produced by free market capitalism were mitigated by welfare state capitalism.

Disorganized capitalism introduces volatility and the marked dilution of the social bond in several related ways. First, it reinstates the market as prime expression of that bond, with all the effects analyzed by Marx in *Capital 1*.²¹ Now the state is required to oversee the reinstatement of the law of value or even its introduction into spheres hitherto protected from it. Keynesianism is replaced by neo-liberalism so that individuals are now reinterpellated as self-interested, self-reliant, active, knowledgeable and flexible subjects capable of taking charge of those matters hitherto under the direction of the state and of responding speedily and effectively to the requirements of the market. In effect, individuals are given new responsibilities for self-maintenance; they are interpellated as possessive subjects in MacPherson's sense, who owe nothing to and who should expect nothing from their culture, although they can make demands on others with whom they have contractual relationships. This contractualism becomes a feature of trade union membership, in that trades unions are transformed from collective to individualized organizations by means of legislation.²² Put another way, with the institutionalization of the 'free' market, any form of

21 For a psychoanalytic analysis of the subject effects of the 'free market', see Richards (1984, 1989a, 1989b esp. ch. 7).

22 See Strinati (1990).

authority is dissolved, since authority requires a sense within the individual of some transindividual entity worthy of respect.²³

At the same time, the basis for self-reliance becomes shredded as the permanently revolutionary character of capitalism is intensified through the use of electronics.²⁴ The new technologies allow of more flexible working arrangements and social relationships. They also require fewer workers so that unemployment becomes institutionalized.²⁵ In addition, self-employment, part-time work, short-term contracts, begin to take the place of life-time employment, of predictable and graduated career structures.²⁶ There is a new temporariness in the structures of both public and private practices which means that both public and private relationships are marked by transitoriness. Short-termism and adaptability, pluralism, fragmentation and change are upheld as new values. In fact, these are the values whose implementation Marx expected and described in the *CM*, where, as we have seen in chapter six, he described a wholly commodified culture.

Third, disorganized capitalism institutes a new global division of labour which marginalizes the experience and significance of industrial production for populations in liberal capitalist cultures. Disorganized capitalism is a stage of capitalism whereby changes in the global division of labour result in the significant deindustrialization of the advanced industrial cultures of the West and the speedy industrialization of the formerly 'peripheral' countries, those of East and South East Asia in particular. Populations in liberal capitalist cultures now become predominantly producers of services, messages and meanings rather than of things.²⁷ (I shall return to this matter below.) All boundaries are experienced as porous, all allegiances as temporary, all contracts as short-term. There emerges a new preoccupation with flexibility deriving from the conviction that a capitalism freed from the need for earlier overt and explicit forms of political regulation and armed with the technological means of moving resources around the globe apparently at will, requires populations to be permanently

23 Richards (1984, 1989a, 1989b). Giddens's work expresses this state of affairs (which he views as progressive) quite well up to a point. See Giddens (1990, 1991). See also Rustin (1995). Note 34 below also refers.

24 Piore & Sabel (1984); Reich (1991); Rifkin (1995); Sherman & Judkins (1995).

25 Head (1996); Lash & Urry (1987); Reich (1991); Rifkin (1995); Sherman & Judkins (1995); Western (1995).

26 Reich (1991); Sampson (1995); Sherman & Judkins (1995).

27 Hence Baudrillard's hyperbolic and misleading pronouncement on the 'end of production'. See Baudrillard (1993), ch. 1. See Callinicos (1989) for an argument against this interpretation. Both are wrong in the sense that, while consumption is internally related to production (so one cannot take place without the other, as Callinicos argues) it is nevertheless the case that the 'end of production' in liberal capitalist cultures has subjective and therefore political effects which Callinicos appears unable to understand.

mobilized to respond to its demands.²⁸ It becomes imperative for populations to be mobilized to produce the kinds of subjects (highly skilled in the new technologies, highly mobile and flexible and therefore radically disembedded) required to attract capital.²⁹ For employed as well as the growing pool of the long-term unemployed, these changing conditions are experienced as insecurity and as the loss of a strong sense of place in the world.³⁰ In effect, individuals are being interpellated as possessive, self-reliant, independent subjects at a time when the 'objective' basis for the emergence of such self-reliance just does not exist. These are subjects on whom culture places heavy demands without troubling itself as to how these demands are to be fulfilled, to paraphrase Freud.³¹

The culture of disorganized capitalism has neither the stability nor responsiveness needed to constitute active social subjects. Indeed, it is governed by the principle of the 'obsolescence of replaceable experience' which, as Lichtman puts it, 'threatens to dissolve the self.'³² The nature of this threat should be clear from the discussion in chapter eight, as to speak of the 'obsolescence of replaceable experience' is to speak of the obsolescence of the reality principle. It is in this way that we can understand the psychic (and therefore political) consequences of the 'ontology of flux'. The latter phrase expresses the lived experience of subjects who are subjected to (indeed must expect nothing but) rapid, unceasing and unpredictable displacements. It is in this way that we can interpret the language used by post-Marxism to describe social relations and subjectivity.³³

Recall that this language includes the concepts of the signifying chain and metonymy to refer to the constant movement of signifiers and, therefore, to the constant changes in subjects' positionalities ('obsolescence of replaceable experience').³⁴ It includes the concept of lack to refer to the subject's alleged

28 Reich (1991); Hirst & Thompson (1996); Miyoshi (1993). There also emerges a new preoccupation with 'risk'. See Beck (1992); Beck et al (1994). See also Hoggett (1989) on the 'crisis of all certainty' in these cultures.

29 Piore & Sabel (1984); Reich (1991). See also Elger & Smith (1994). Reich also stresses the related need for low-paid, low-skilled occupations, as does Wright (1997). The latter also notes the proletarianization of new areas.

30 Sherman & Judkins (1995), ch. 11, discuss the wider social and personal effects of unemployment.

31 Freud (1985iv), ch. VIII, esp. p. 377.

32 Lichtman (1982), p. 279.

33 As Jameson (1983a), pp. 124 - 125, points out, poststructuralist critiques of the humanist subject have a high descriptive value. Their explanatory value is negligible, though.

34 They also imply that such subjects are not merely at the mercy of the myriad interpellations of which they are the focus but can choose to accept or reject such interpellations. From this point of view, the decentred subject is the active reflexive subject who evaluates, accepts or rejects identifications available from the external world. This is the subject, then, who has, apparently, developed the cognitive capacities discussed in chapter eight under the rubric of the secondary process; a subject who is capable of resisting both coercion and manipulation and of pursuing a self-determined course of self-development through the use of his reflexive capacities. See Laclau & Mouffe (1985); Giddens (1991); Lash & Urry (1994).

receptivity to such changes i.e. a receptivity posited on the hope of experiencing a 'fullness of being' which is so elusive (indeed impossible) in capitalist cultures. So a strong sense of self becomes unavailable in a situation in which selves are expected to be self-activating and responsible. In effect, what post-Marxism is describing is the narcissistic subject, as discussed in chapter eight, but this is the narcissistic subject who is expected to adopt an active, outward orientation towards the world. The narcissistic subject is the overdetermined result of a nexus of institutions all of which are governed by the logic of volatility, of speediness, of change as permanent revolution. The logic of volatility is the logic of the primary process. It is a logic which renders reality-testing in the Freudian sense extremely difficult and which therefore inhibits the emergence of the secondary process at the level of the individual organism. It also and relatedly inhibits the development of sociality. In effect, for the individual subject, reality-testing becomes impossible at a time when reality testing becomes imperative. I now need to discuss a hitherto unexplored dimension of this volatility by a further consideration of the 'surplus of meaning' adumbrated by post-Marxism.

The 'surplus of meaning'

The culture of contemporary liberal capitalist cultures

As noted above, changes in the global division of labour result in the migration of industrial production from the 'advanced' capitalist countries to those of the hitherto unindustrialized. The former now become producers of services, of meanings and messages. The preoccupation with discourse expresses this change (as the preoccupation with 'production' expressed the changes put in place by the first capitalist industrialization in nineteenth century England) whereby practices become not only less immediately and solidly material but also, as we have noted, increasingly volatile and evanescent. The effect is that words, meanings and things are less reliably related. However, there is another aspect to this change which I shall now discuss.

Post-Marxism's preoccupation with the surplus of meanings which constitutes and reconstitutes the decentred subject offers a useful clue to the distinctiveness of liberal capitalist cultures. This distinctiveness resides in first, the ever-increasing significance of the cultural sphere i.e. of the specialized production of meanings and second, the intensification and transformation of consumption as a practice

increasingly necessary to confer a sense of self on decentred subjects.³⁵ Volatility in the private and economic spheres is supported and intensified by volatility in the cultural sphere. What the individual subject takes in from external reality is - in every sphere of activity - volatility.³⁶ The response to this volatility is a withdrawal from external reality to an internal world of one's 'private theatre'. The decentred subject is the narcissistic subject who withdraws libido from real persons and things (found to be unsatisfactory) and redirects it to phantasy objects. Put another way, what is cathected is the internal reality of the subject, for whom the external world becomes the raw material for an ongoing process of self-making and remaking.³⁷ This is the response of a subject in jeopardy whose inward turn is an attempt to sustain a sense of self.³⁸ It is in such a world that culture in the narrow sense, (in the sense, that is, of a body of 'meanings', representations, etc., produced by specialists in a dedicated sphere) assumes a new kind of institutional significance. Now we witness the intensification of that process of commodification of culture which Habermas noted in relation to the early twentieth century period.³⁹ Such a process - one which results in the '*fictionalization of reality*'⁴⁰ - constitutes individuals as passive consumers of images rather than active participants in a living popular culture, or in Appadurai's striking phrase, phantasy becomes 'a social practice' in the sense that 'ordinary lives today are increasingly powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities that the media (either directly or indirectly) suggest are available.'⁴¹ Honneth, who takes the view that culture is 'both the bearer and the ideology of capitalist growth processes' will see no contrast here between phantasy and the given, since phantasy now becomes the capitalist product par excellence.⁴² From this point of view the electronic media and the phantasies which they disseminate are, along with the speeded-up consumerism characteristic of the contemporary world, manifestations of systemic imperatives and therefore an intrinsic part of the 'givenness of things'. Phantasies take the place of earlier identities grounded in a sense of place and of function derived from location within the family and the occupational structure.⁴³

35 Baudrillard (1983) esp. chs. 3 & 4; Bowlby (1993); Haug (1987). Here the equation of having and being goes beyond Marx's analysis discussed in chapter five above. See also Brennan (1992, 1993).

36 See Richards (1989b), ch. 2.

37 This becomes expressed in the preoccupation with 'difference' and the celebration of inessentialism as the necessary precondition for emancipation. See Butler & Scott (1992) on the politics of difference. See Fuss (1989) on essentialism and its critics.

38 Brennan (1992), ch. 3.

39 Habermas (1989); Honneth (1995).

40 Honneth (1995), p. 223 (*italics in original*).

41 Appadurai (1991), pp. 198, 200. This is one of several claims about the social significance of phantasy in the contemporary world. See also Baudrillard (1994); Fuss (1989) ch. 6; Honneth (1995), ch. 13.

42 Pecora notes capitalism's tendency 'to make fleeting pleasure a use-value and thereby recreate it as pure exchange-value'. See Pecora (1988), pp. 138 - 9.

43 See Sennett (1977) on the debilitating political effects of phantasy.

The cultural sphere replaces the familial and economic spheres as shaper of subjectivities and as the output of the 'culture industry' increases through the remarkable proliferation of technologies described above. It is these technologies which produce the 'surplus of meaning' whose subject effects post-Marxism describes.⁴⁴ As noted before, these subject effects are describable under the rubric of primary process functioning i.e. a way of functioning involving the indiscriminate and instantaneous (therefore necessarily temporary) cathexis of objects which, in the case of the infant are hallucinogenic but in the case of adults engaging in daydreaming are phantastic.⁴⁵ The cognitive-affective effects of daydreaming have been described in chapter eight. These effects are now constituted as everyday experience in that disorganized capitalism has commodified phantasy so that reality becomes phantasy and phantasy becomes reality. This is the thrust of the analyses of Appadurai and of Honneth mentioned above and this is the novel twist that electronic technology adds to the depiction of pure capitalism offered by Marx. It is this development which intensifies the related cognitive and affective debilities first identified by Marx and explained from a psychic point of view by psychoanalysis. In view of this intensification, the new preoccupation with producing knowledgeable workers cannot be expected to have the emancipatory significance expected by Marx and examined briefly in chapter six. However, before concluding, it will be useful to explore this question briefly.

Disorganized capitalism as the end of abstract labour?

The idea that the mental/manual split as institutionalized in mass industrial production is no longer functional for capitalism (or indeed for the cultures which require its flourishing) has become widely disseminated in recent years.⁴⁶ What is happening, apparently, is that the needs of capitalism dictate the end of that 'paltriness of labour' noted by Marx and discussed in chapter six. They also dictate that social mobility that Marx considered to be a prerequisite for the attainment of the systemic knowledge (i.e. knowledge of the totality as a totality of many determinations) needed to implement effective radically democratic transformative action. Indeed, Reich's 'symbolic analysts' appear to exemplify the required kind of worker, whose task-specific knowledgeability should be enhanced by the kind of

44 Poster (1984, 1990, 1995); Thompson (1995).

45 Brennan (1992).

46 According to Konosuke Matsushita (a Japanese electronics magnate): '[B]usiness has become so complex, the survival of firms so precarious, and our environment increasingly unpredictable, competitive and dangerous, that firms' continuing existence depends on their day-to-day mobilisation of every ounce of intelligence'. Quoted by Wheeler & Sillanpaa (1997). For an academic examination of this kind of claim, see Elger & Smith (1994).

knowledge of capitalism's real nature (derived from its high mobility requirements) which we have discussed in chapter six. However, as is clear from Reich's own analysis, these symbolic analysts lead lives which become increasingly privatized and deterritorialized. They are possessive subjects in the strong sense that their needs are supplied largely through 'market forces' and so, apparently, by means of their own autonomous efforts. Therefore they cannot be expected to feel a sense of obligation to the wider group.⁴⁷ The possibility remains that the growth of unemployment among this stratum might have the kinds of effects looked for by Marx,⁴⁸ but in the absence of association (rather than atomized trades unions) the institutional means for such emergence appears to be lacking.⁴⁹ In any case, it is evident that the speediness of change and the increased complexity and fragmentation accompanying that speediness results in an opacity beyond the cognitive grasp of the most highly educated.⁵⁰ So, Reich's symbolic analysts should be expected to exemplify in the strongest possible form the characteristics of the decentred subjectivity with which I am here concerned. That is to say, they should exemplify the a-social characteristics of the narcissistic subject whose activity is necessarily directed towards self rather than group maintenance or repair.⁵¹

For this reason, the kind of pluralist democracy discussed by post-Marxism is bound to be a narcissistic (atomistic, individualistic) form of democracy centring on self-development and self-expression of a kind not compatible with the transcendence of 'self-interested' motivations for political action, although these motivations may be expressed in terms of the politics of 'difference' rather than of distribution.⁵² This is clearly quite different from the kind of radical democracy looked for by Marx and Gramsci, as discussed in chapters six and seven. The latter, as has been noted in chapter eight, requires the active social subject. However, this is precisely what the culture of disorganized capitalism is incapable of instituting.

It should be clear from what has been said that disorganized capitalism institutes social relations which are not only instrumental (because governed by market

47 Indeed, Reich himself is quite gloomy about the prospects for the nation state. See Hirst & Thompson (1996) for a different view.

48 Sherman & Judkins (1995, p. 88) point to the significance of a growing 'overclass' of educated unemployed whose numbers rose by 267% from 1990 to 1994.

49 Lichterman (1996) sees a basis for the emergence of commitment in local voluntary groups in the United States. However, he sees this threatened by an 'individualized morality' preoccupied by 'personal empowerment' (ch. 7, p. 229). Mouffe (1992) also discusses this question. Rifkin looks for the reinstatement of the social bond by means of an emergent 'third sector' i.e. of a new sphere of voluntary activity between state and market. See Rifkin (1996), chs. 16 & 17. Leadbeater (1997) looks to 'social entrepreneurs' for a solution to the problem.

50 Carchedi (1983); Jameson (1991). Baudrillard's work exemplifies the most powerful expression of this fact of contemporary liberal capitalist cultures.

51 Brennan (1992) offers an excellent account of why this has to be the case.

52 See MacCannell (1991); Sennett (1977). See Fraser (1995) on 'distribution' versus 'difference' motivations for political action.

principles) but also fleeting, so the possibility of sociality engendered by organized capitalism disappears. In being forced into culture, the decentred subject of disorganized capitalism is not at the same time forced into sociality. This is the strikingly novel characteristic of pure capitalism which we have noted in Marx's account. It is because liberal capitalist culture in its disorganized form approximates so closely to this state of affairs that the problem of political commitment has become so urgent. It is in these cultures that the dual subjective debility expected by Marx in the mid-nineteenth century begins to become most clearly visible. However, as has been noted, developments in the late twentieth century intensify this debility in ways unimaginable by Marx.⁵³

Conclusion

Disorganized capitalism (as instituted in liberal capitalist cultures) constitutes subjects without the cognitive or affective attributes needed for political commitment. The subjects of disorganized capitalism are narcissistic subjects whose lack of a stable sense of inner and outer worlds results in a preoccupation with self rather than group maintenance. These are therefore by definition incapable of the kind of sublimation - i.e. the libidinal bonding with human 'objects' in external reality - required for political commitment.⁵⁴ This is the state of affairs which is expressed by post-Marxism. In fact, the 'post' problematic of which post-Marxism is a recognizable element expresses quite forcefully the 'superstructural' accompaniment of pure capitalism as analyzed by Marx.⁵⁵ However, as we have seen, the explanation offered by post-Marxism for the state of affairs which it correctly describes, is inadequate. A return to Marx, guided in part by the preoccupations and insights of post-Marxism itself, and enhanced by a more systematic use of psychoanalysis, has afforded the means of developing a fuller and more historically-informed analysis of the problem.

Political commitment requires the reinstitution of sociality through practices which render visible the necessary connectedness of human beings. Pure capitalism renders invisible this necessary connectedness through the instantiation of impersonal

53 Jameson has discussed this in terms of the 'waning of affect' and the difficulty of 'cognitive mapping' which is experienced by subjects in these cultures. These express quite elegantly the individual/society and subjective/objective dichotomies which have organized the arguments in this thesis. Jameson (1992), esp. pp. 6, 25. Baudrillard's (1996) less measured account refers to hyperreality and the murder of reality 'the perfect crime'.

54 It is striking that most of the new kinds of direct collective action which have emerged in recent years are concerned with the suffering of non-human nature.

55 See Jameson (1992) for one version of this claim.

forms of mediation, as first noted by Marx. While the recovery of a sense of necessary connectedness must emerge out of changes in directly-experienced processes, it requires the aid of theoretical knowledge if contradictoriness is to become the basis of an effective humanizing politics. It is because of the extreme cognitive elusiveness of these cultures that theoretical knowledge is necessary. Here knowledge will help to counteract the fetishizing and alienating effects of fragmented capitalist cultures while at the same time indicating where and how political action can be most efficient and effective. Theoretical knowledge has the related functions of first, bringing to the attention of hitherto atomized subjects the fact of necessary human social connectedness and second, enhancing the emergent sense of competence and confidence required to act effectively on fragmented capitalist cultures.⁵⁶ At the same time, as has been seen in chapters six and seven, such knowledge must be an emergent property of directly experienced social relations if a radical democratic politics is to be possible.

In relation to questions of collective commitment and action, Gramsci's analysis draws our attention most fruitfully to the importance of non-reifying non-scientistic knowledge. He stresses the importance of knowledge which incorporates concrete rather than abstract rationality; which incorporates 'feeling' as well as 'knowing'. He thereby offers us the means of transcending the rational/irrational dichotomy. Psychoanalysis has afforded the means of understanding more systematically the importance of this claim of Gramsci's by showing the necessary internal relationship between feeling and knowing. Moreover, it alerts us to the conditions needed to convert feeling into sociality (sublimation), thereby ensuring that knowing (secondary process functioning) will not be expressed in scientistic, fetishizing knowledge. This psychoanalytic point of view affords the possibility of a fruitful reassessment of Marx's emphasis on association and theory and Gramsci's emphasis on the concrete phantasy. However, in its stress on intra-psychic contradiction it also alerts us to the dangers of political hubris as manifested in earlier forms of Marxist politics.⁵⁷

Finally, it is worth repeating Marx's insistence upon the openness and historicity of human life and therefore the necessary transitoriness of any state of affairs. Transitoriness is the effect, not only of contradictoriness, but of the innate human capacity for praxis. For these reasons, the colonizing or totalizing propensity of

⁵⁶ Peasants engaged in subsistence agriculture do not require theoretical knowledge because they can act with confidence and effectiveness on the basis of commonsense knowledge. In this sense, they are more autonomous than capitalist subjects. This difference in the character and possibilities of everyday life is ignored by theorists such as de Certeau (1988) who seek to romanticize the 'ordinary' which in liberal capitalist cultures is saturated with expert knowledge and therefore not open to the kinds of refusal and subversion still possible in 'underdeveloped' cultures. For an example of the latter, see Ayoade (1988).

⁵⁷ Freud's (1985iv) comments on the necessary shortcomings of the Soviet experiment remain relevant here.

capitalism is constantly open to the possibility of disintegration and/or subversion. The instantiation of pure capitalism would exemplify a pure structural determinism such as is suggested by the base-superstructure metaphor. As we have seen, Marx himself assumes the instantiation of pure capitalism for two reasons: first, as a thought experiment oriented to scientific understanding; second, as a polemic oriented to facilitating revolutionary proletarian action. In the concrete world, though, what we find are greater or lesser approximations to pure capitalism and therefore greater or lesser degrees of the social and cognitive debility which has been described in this thesis.

In contemporary liberal capitalist cultures there is a high degree of such debility but also manifestations of 'outraged humanity', as noted in the introduction. A renovated and more modest Marxism can help to clarify the sources and connectedness of different experiences of outrage and thereby contribute to the emergence of an effective radical politics without courting the dangers of hubris.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See Geras (1994).

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