

6-1-2015

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### Recommended Citation

Pêcheux, Michel (2014) "Dare to Think and Dare to Rebel! Ideology, Marxism, Resistance, Class Struggle," *Décalages*: Vol. 1: Iss. 4. Available at: <http://scholar.oxy.edu/decalages/vol1/iss4/12>

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# Dare to Think and Dare to Rebel! Ideology, Marxism, Resistance, Class Struggle

Michel Pêcheux

Translated by Ted Stolze

These reflections have their origin in Louis Althusser's text, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," written in 1969, and published in German in the collection *Positionen*,<sup>1</sup> and which will be presumed to be known by readers.

In 1975 I took the opportunity to develop, on the basis of Althusser's study, certain theoretical perspectives to which I would like explicitly to refer here,<sup>2</sup> both to explain to German readers the positions which I continue to hold, and to formulate some critical rectifications directed at certain "theoreticist" effects: we shall see that this work leads to a reevaluation of the relations between Marxist theory and what has been called proletarian ideology inside the revolutionary process as a whole, in which the ideological class struggle is one element.

Further, we should emphasize straightaway that the two theoretical references of the present study, namely, historical materialism and the Freudian theory of the unconscious, must be conceived neither as elements that are strictly external to one another, nor as aspects that are purely and simply combined into an impossible theoretical "synthesis" that would contain them: we seek instead to take advantage of the reciprocal allusions circulating between these two fundamental references and combining their effects in relation to problem of ideology, especially by means of "solutions" that are immediately found to be invalid.

In effect:

- To take seriously the reference to historical materialism means to recognize the primacy of class struggle in relation to the existence of classes themselves, and that

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<sup>1</sup>Althusser (1977); available in English translation as Althusser (2014).

<sup>2</sup>Pêcheux (1975); available in English translation as Pêcheux (1982).

entails, with respect to the problem of ideology, the impossibility of any differential analysis (of a sociological or psych-sociological nature) that attributes *its own* ideology to each “social group” before the ideologies enter into conflict, as each seeks to ensure its domination the others.. This also leads us to interrogate the notion of *dominated ideology* (often identified with a subterranean second world, a blurred, imperfect, and caricatured reflection of the first) in order to determine its characteristics given the primacy of class struggle.

- To take the reference to the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious seriously means to recognize the primacy of the unconscious over consciousness; and that entails, speaking still of ideology, the impossibility of any psychologistic conception that produces a consciousness (even the “class consciousness” proper to a given “social group”) which, from an initial state of “alienation” would either move from itself through self-clarification to its own transparency; or would receive the conditions of its “liberation” from the outside. To conceive ideological processes according to the form of such a pedagogical trajectory—auto- or hetero-determined—is quite simply to reject in practice the consequences of Freudian materialism.

It is no exaggeration to say that all the political-ideological stakes implied by the question of ideology and of the ideological class struggle are suspended in the position we have adopted adopted regarding this double primacy: we shall have other occasions to make this observation.

### **I. On the Double Character of Ideological Processes**

We know that the point of departure for Althusser’s reflection in the work cited earlier is an interrogation of the spatial metaphor of base/superstructure by means of which the classics of Marxism have grasped the nature of the State + Ideology combination through such famous formulas as

- The (economic) base determines the superstructure “in the last instance”;
- The superstructure enjoys a “relative autonomy” in relation to the base;
- There is a “reciprocal action” of the superstructure on the base.

We shall assume here that the reader is familiar with the notions of State Apparatus and State Power, as well as with the distinction introduced by Althusser between the Repressive State Apparatus (in the singular) and Ideological State Apparatuses or ISAs (in the plural). We shall immediately proceed, then, to what is essential, by recalling that in order to deepen the metaphorical description of ideological processes, and begin to formulate their *concept*, Althusser sought to “begin with reproduction,” to place himself at the standpoint of the superstructural conditions of the reproduction of the economic base.

Yet to place oneself “at the standpoint of reproduction” under the primacy of class struggle is necessarily to place oneself *at the same time* at the standpoint of what is opposed to this reproduction, at the standpoint of resistance to this reproduction, and of the revolutionary tendency leading to the transformation of the relations of production. Althusser has often been reproached for having underestimated this second aspect; and some have not hesitated to accuse him of having thus “forgotten the class struggle,” given the fact that the analysis of the process of ideological subjection implied in reproduction occupies such an important place in his study. We shall soon see why this reproach is totally unjustified, and what necessary philosophical detour Althusser’s enterprise took here, precisely in accounting for the primacy of the class struggle.

For the moment, however, we are content to use the term “reproduction/transformation” to indicate the nodally contradictory character of *every mode of production based on a division into classes, i.e., whose “principle” is class struggle*. This means that class struggle traverses the mode of production in its entirety and that, in the sphere of ideology, class struggle *occurs through* the ISAs without its being possible to localize *a priori* either what contributes to

the reproduction of the relations of production or what plays a role in their transformation.

We are thus led to specify the following points:<sup>3</sup>

1. Ideology is not reproduced in the general form of a *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the age, “mentality” of an epoch, “habits of thought,” etc.) which would be imposed in an even and homogeneous way on society understood as a space prior to class struggle: “The ISAs are not the realization of Ideology in general....”

2. “. . . nor even the conflict-free realization of the ideology of the dominant class,” which means that it is impossible to attribute *to each class its own ideology*, as if each existed “before the class struggle” in its own camp, with its own conditions of existence, its institutions, its specific “habits” and “mentalities,” which amounts to conceiving of ideological class struggle as the encounter of two distinct pre-existing worlds—an encounter followed by the victory of “the stronger” class, which would then impose its ideology on the other. In the end, this would be to multiply the conception of ideology as *Zeitgeist* by two.

3. “The ideology of the dominant class does not become dominant by the grace of God . . . ,” which means that the ISAs are not the *expression* of the domination of the dominant ideology, i.e., the ideology of the dominant class (God knows how the dominant ideology would achieve its supremacy if that were so!), but the site and the *means* of the realization of that domination: “. . . it is by the establishment of the ISAs in which this ideology (the ideology of the dominant class) is realized and realizes itself, that it becomes dominant . . .”

4. But the ISAs are not simply pure instruments of the dominant class, ideological machines purely and simply reproducing the existing relations of production: “. . . this establishment of the ISAs is not achieved all by itself; on the contrary, it is the stake in a very bitter and uninterrupted class struggle . . . ,” which means that the ISAs constitute simultaneously and contradictorily the site and the ideological conditions of the transformation of the relations of

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<sup>3</sup>This passage summarizes what is essential to the analyses presented in Pêcheux (1975), pp. 126-31; Pêcheux 1982, pp. 97-100.

production (i.e., of revolution, in the Marxist-Leninist sense). *From this arises the expression “reproduction/transformation” that we have used.*

We may now take one more step in the study of the ideological conditions of the reproduction/transformation of the relations of production by saying that these contradictory conditions are constituted, at a given historical moment and for a given social formation, *by the complex set of ISAs* that this social formation includes. We say *complex*, i.e., a set with relations of contradiction-unevenness-subordination among its “elements,” and not a mere list of elements: indeed, it would be absurd to think that in a given conjuncture *all the ISAs contribute equally* to the reproduction of the relations of production *and* to their transformation. In fact, their “regional” properties—their “unquestioned” specialization into religion, knowledge, politics, etc.—condition their relative importance (the unevenness of their relations) inside the set of ISAs, and this in turn as a function of the state of the class struggle in the given social formation.

This explains why the ideological instance in its concrete materiality exists in the form of “*ideological formations*” (referring to the ISAs), which have both a “regional” character *and* involve class positions: ideological “objects” are always simultaneously furnished with “the way to use them”—their “meaning,” i.e., their orientation or the class interests they serve—on which one might comment by saying that practical ideologies are class practices (of class struggle) in Ideology. Which is to say that, in the ideological struggle (no less than in the other forms of class struggle) there are no “class positions” that *exist abstractly* and *are then applied* to the different regional ideological “objects” of concrete situations in the School, the Family, etc. In fact, this is where the contradictory connection between the reproduction and transformation of the relations of production is joined at the ideological level, insofar as it is not the regional ideological “objects” taken one by one but the very division into regions (God, Morality, Law, Justice, Family, Knowledge, etc.), together with the relationships of *unevenness-subordination* between those regions, that constitute what is at stake in the *ideological class struggle*.

*The domination of the dominant (class) ideology*, which is characterized, at the ideological level, by the fact that the reproduction of the relations of production “wins out” over their transformation (obstructs it, slows it down or suppresses it in different cases), thus corresponds less to keeping each ideological “region” considered by itself *the same* than to the reproduction of the relationships of unevenness-subordination between those regions (with their “objects” and the practices in which they are inscribed):<sup>4</sup> this is what entitled Althusser to propose the apparently scandalous thesis that the set of the ISAs in a capitalist social formation also includes *unions* and *political parties* (without further specification; in fact, all he meant to designate was the function *assigned* to political parties and unions within the complex of ISAs *under the domination of the dominant (class) ideology*, i.e., the subordinate but unavoidable and so quite “necessary” function whereby the dominant class is assured of “contact” and “dialogue” with its class adversary, i.e., the proletariat and its allies, a function with which a proletarian organization as such obviously cannot *coincide*.

This example helps us better understand how the relations of unevenness-subordination between different ISAs (and the regions, objects, and practices that correspond to them) constitute, as we have said, the stake in the ideological class struggle. The ideological aspect of the struggle for the transformation of the relations of production lies therefore, above all, in the struggle to impose *new relations of unevenness-subordination*<sup>5</sup> inside the complex of ISAs (this is what is expressed, for example, in the slogan “Put politics in command!”), resulting in a transformation of the *set* of the “complex of ISAs” in its relationship with the state apparatus, as well as a transformation of the state apparatus itself.

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<sup>4</sup>“The unity of the different Ideological State Apparatuses is secured, usually in contradictory forms, by the ruling ideology, the ideology of the ruling class” (Althusser 2014, p. 247).

<sup>5</sup>By a transformation of these subordinations into class struggle: for example, by a transformation of the relationship between *schools* and *politics*, which in the capitalist mode of production is a *relationship of disjunction* (denegation or simulation), based on the “natural” place of the school between the family and economic production.

As Etienne Balibar has very clearly stated,<sup>6</sup> this transformation not only consists, in the revolutionary process that leads from capitalism to communism, in substituting a new (proletarian) State Apparatus for the State Apparatus of the capitalist bourgeoisie, but also and above all in substituting for it “something other than a State Apparatus,” something on the order of a “non-State.” We will return later to the consequences of this crucial point regarding the question of proletarian ideology.

We can sum up the preceding discussion in the divided unity of the following two theses:

- a. In every mode of production governed by class struggle, the dominant (class) ideology dominates the two antagonistic classes.
- b. Class struggle is the motor of history, including the history of the ideological class struggle.

These two theses might at first seem to contradict each other, in the same way that the existing state of affairs is in contradiction with revolution; yet between these two theses there exists only a “false contradiction” produced by an erroneous conception of the *dominant ideology*: in fact, the proletariat does not belong to another world, external to the capitalist bourgeoisie, and which would contain its own ideology in an independent, embryonic form, and therefore, an ideological essence that is certainly impeded, repressed, dominated, but nonetheless ready to emerge fully armed like Athena and to dominate in its turn when the day comes: this is a false conception of the dominated ideology. In reality, it is not simply a matter of a constitutive external domination, like, as one might say, a bourgeois lid on the boiling pot of revolutionary tendencies, but also and especially of an internal domination, i.e., of a domination proper to capitalist relations of production that is manifested in the very internal organization of the dominated ideology: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are formed and organized *together* in the capitalist mode of production under the domination of the bourgeoisie, and in particular of bourgeois ideology.

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<sup>6</sup>Balibar (1974), p. 97.



This means simultaneously that the historical process by which the dominated ideology tends to be organized “on its own basis” as proletarian ideology remains paradoxically in contact with bourgeois ideology, precisely to the extent that it attempts to realize the latter’s destruction.

It is a question, then, regarding ideology, of thinking about *the contradiction of two worlds in one*, since, according to Marx’s phrase “the new is born from the old,” which Lenin reformulated by saying that “One divides into two.”

This amounts to conceiving every contradiction as necessarily uneven,<sup>7</sup> which, as concerns ideology, is expressed by the fact that the ISAs are *naturally plural*: they do not form, we have just said, a homogeneous bloc or a list but combine their *regional character* and their *class character* in such a way that their regional characteristics (their “specialization”) contribute unevenly to the development of the ideological struggle between the two antagonistic classes and intervene unevenly in the reproduction/transformation of the relations of production. The double character of ideological processes (regional character and class character) allows us to understand how ideological formations refer to *both identical and different* “objects” (like Freedom, God, Justice, etc.), i.e., whose unity is submitted to a division: the characteristic of the ideological class struggle is to take place in *one* world that never quite *divides into two*.

## II. Ideological Interpellation and Class Struggle

Certain illusions have a long life: for example, the illusion according to which the reproduction of capitalist relations of production would be a pure and simple effect of inertia not requiring in itself any explanation . . .

Althusser’s entire article seeks to combat this illusion by explaining the process of ideological subjection indispensable to this reproduction: this point is condensed in the thesis according to which “ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.”

Without retracing here the different moments of this analysis, to which the reader can easily refer, we shall emphasize that the

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<sup>7</sup>This point was developed in Althusser (2011), especially pp. 221-22.

expression “ideology” in the singular designates here, in contrast to the plural of the ISAs and ideological formations, the omni-historical nature of the effect of interpellation, which Althusser allusively connects to the eternal nature of the Freudian unconscious.

It is interesting to attempt to deepen this connection by explaining the constitutive subject/Subject relation of ideological interpellation: the ideological subject splits into a *singular subject*, grasped in the empirical obviousness of its identity (“It’s really me!”) and its place (“It is indeed true, here I am—a worker, a boss, a soldier!”) and a *universal Subject*, a Great Subject who, in the form of God, Justice, Morality, or Knowledge, etc. conveys the evidence that “That’s how it is,” always and everywhere, and so it is.

In the 1975 text already mentioned, I tried to characterize the different modalities of this splitting by distinguishing the effects of identification, counter-identification, and dis-identification within ideological interpellation.

*Identification* characterizes the modality within which the subject/Subject split is realized in a coincidence: the subject coincides with the Subject, the individual interpellated as a subject is freely subjected to the Subject and “works all by itself,” according to Althusser’s expression, by recognizing the existing state of things (*das Bestshende*) with the conviction that “it is indeed true that it is this way and no other”; at the moment of the outbreak of WWI, for example, the great majority of French subjects “worked all by themselves”: *France was threatened/we are all French/this is war!*—a chain of obviousnesses (*évidences*) on the order of a *fait accompli*, minted and articulated in diverse assessments and orders that are laden with pre-constructed, inculcated forms of obviousness (*évidence*) (“A French soldier does not retreat,” “Dead men, get up!” etc.)

Thus is accomplished the identification of each French subject with the Subject-France: “France enters the war,” as the newspapers of the time announced, and as History textbooks today continue to repeat; and *in the same way* “Germany,” “Russia,” etc. “entered the war” . . . So be it!

But—to restrict ourselves to the example of WWI—history also teaches us that, under certain circumstances, “it does not work all by

itself” because in certain places, under the effect of the class struggle, the coincidence of subject/Subject comes to be broken in such a way that certain “bad subjects” will carry out a series of refusals, reversals, and revolts that may on occasion necessitate the intervention of a given specialized detachment of the Repressive State Apparatus (the military police, for example).

I have therefore introduced the term *counter-identification* in order to characterize this ideological process of non-coincidence in which singular empirical forms of obviousness (*évidence*) are distinct from universal obviousnesses, for example, the Republican-Bourgeois obviousness according to which “the French are equal before the war” is taken literally and reversed within the spontaneous functioning of the dominated ideology of the working-class and peasant proletariat, by means of this other obviousness, cruelly absurd but meaningful, that “it is always the same ones who get killed,” and which, by taking the ideology of Equality literally and reversing it, formed the basis of *pacifism* in France, as well as in Germany, Russia, etc.

But the paradox of the pacifistic ideological process (“Down with war! Long live peace!”) that characterized the action of the German, French, and Russian socialist parties *against the war*, as we know, led each of these parties initially to participate in the Sacred Union and vote for war credits in the name of defending peace and opposing the politics of annexation, so that the spontaneous ideology of pacifism immediately found itself subordinated to the dominant bourgeois ideology (the fatal obviousness [*évidence*] of the war). As if this reversal of counter-identification remained caught up in that to which it was opposed and finally reproduced the same subjection . . .

What was the specificity of Leninist practice which led to October 1917 in the face of such a situation? Lenin dedicated himself to the enormous task of explaining and organizing the proletarian struggle in the framework of a “political practice of a new type,” aiming ideologically and politically to *work (visant à travailler)* the masses influenced by the “social chauvinism” of the Second

International.<sup>8</sup> However, in the ideological process it implements, this practice carries out a *break* that tends to escape both the effects of ideological identification *and* the reverse effects of counter-identification: Lenin does not cease to repeat that the knot of the problem resides in the connection between social chauvinism and opportunism—a connection that relies on the ideological obviousness (*évidence*) of the opposition-disjunction between *war* and *peace*, entailing in its turn the opposition between *the struggle for socialism within the national framework* (during peacetime) and *the struggle between nations* (which during wartime necessitated “setting aside” the struggle for socialism, temporarily.)

The knot of the problem is, therefore, the very conception of class struggle and its relation to the “framework” of the State and the Nation; thus, Leninist practice is not content to *reverse* the forms of obviousness imposed by the Ideological State Apparatuses: taking up and developing certain intuitions of Marx and Engels, Leninism seeks to shatter notions like “equal right,” “free state,” “equitable distribution,” etc. by showing that these notions presuppose their solution at the very moment that the questions they evoke are posed, while obscuring the fact that the true basis of the solution is in reality incompatible with that of the question: “equal right,” “free state,” “equitable distribution” . . . are as inconceivable as the famous *knife without a blade whose handle is missing* (the example could be Marx’s or Lenin’s, but it is Freud’s).

In order to specify this effect of ideological rupture (distinct from the taking it at its word and reversing it characteristic of counter-identification) integrating the effect of proletarian revolutionary practice and Marxist theory, I have proposed the term *dis-identification* as a third ideological modality affecting the subject/Subject relation. It is in no way a question of a “synthesis” of the

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<sup>8</sup>The expression “work” is the place of a crucial difficulty for the workers’ movement. By allowing oneself to be carried away by this expression, one can, in fact, wind up with a manipulative conception of political work, conceived as pure and simple *agitation* destined to *push through*, by every means of propaganda, “correct ideas” that already in the heads of the leadership, in their “chief.” Lenin had a completely different conception of the origin of correct ideas: to work the masses is first of all to let work, to render the contradictions that traverse them active.

Hegelian type that aims to reconcile two prior moments conceived as affirmation (identification) and negation (counter-identification); nor is it a question of an impossible desubjectification of the subject, but rather of a transformation of the *subject-form* under the effect of this unprecedented historical event that constitutes the tendential fusion of the revolutionary *practices* of the workers' movement with the scientific *theory* of class struggle.

But a serious difficulty appears here, implicit in what Althusser has characterized by the term "theoreticism": how can we conceive of the transformative rupture that thus affects the subject-form in proletarian practice, caught up in History as a "process without a subject or end," without definitively *founding* this rupture in the *theoretical fact* that the subject as such is found to be absent from every scientific discourse? How then can we avoid a subordination of political practice to theory, in which the theoretical exteriority of the concepts of the science of history would appear finally as the *cause* of the proletarian ideological rupture?<sup>9</sup>

The practical primacy of class struggle therefore requires us to reject at all costs any conception of the ideological process of dis-identification that would turn it into a kind of trajectory of the Platonic type, a theoretical journey taking place according to the image of the Myth of the Cave by means of

- 1) the ideological mechanism of interpellation-subjection;
- 2) the erasure ("forgetting") of every identifiable trace of this mechanism in the subject full-of-meaning that finds itself produced as self-caused;

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<sup>9</sup>The positions developed on this point in Pêcheux (1975) are marked by this difficulty: faced with the full subject, identified in the interpellation of the dominant bourgeois ideology, bearer of the obviousness that makes say to each "That's me!" and provides it with the obvious meaning of its actions, words, and thoughts. Pêcheux (1975) essentially rested on a radical exteriority of Marxist-Leninist theory (presumed to be "outside of ideology") determining the possibility of a sort of pedagogy of rupture with the imaginary identifications in which the subject is caught up. Thus emerged, despite my theoretical precautions, a strange materialist subject affecting "the subjective appropriation of proletarian politics," a paradoxical subject of proletarian political practice whose tendential symmetry with the subject of bourgeois political practice was not questioned. Theoreticist exteriority was thus coupled with a reversed pedagogy.

- 3) the theoretical mastery of the aforementioned mechanism which would be , conquered by recollection through a sort of anamnesis having the appearance (but only the appearance . . .) of Marxist-Leninist practice.

This means that it is not so simple to do away with the pedagogical conception of ideological struggle, for this conception profoundly marks the forms in which the workers' movement, as long as it has existed, has grasped its own history: it constitutes a retroactive effect of bourgeois ideology at the very interior of the ideologies of the workers' movement, so that proletarian politics is perpetually on the verge of retreating into the dilemma of quietism (the mute idea at the very interior of the workers' movement that time and experience automatically work for the revolution) and a voluntarist leap (the idea that it is necessary to import revolutionary theory from the outside into the workers' movement, in order to "put it on the right path"): under this auto- or hetero-pedagogical double figure the history of the workers' movement and of proletarian practice thus take on the form of a *trajectory* reconnecting a point of departure (the dominated ideologies of the capitalist mode of production) with a point of arrival or a strategic goal (the "scientific" ideology characteristic of the classless society of the communist mode of production: "We have arrived, everyone get off!," as Lenin said ironically; the attempt to think resistance to capitalism, revolt against it, and the revolutionary organization aiming to overthrow it has taken place primarily on this basis. The proletariat in struggle aims "in its turn" to seize state power by developing all the necessary ideological and political alliances, but without establishing a new domination over any class since it is the last exploited class in human history, and all domination rests on exploitation and perpetuates it: a strange proletarian state, which will disappear if it ever manages to do what it says . . . Things seem simple on paper, but this transformation of the proletarian state (which, like a large Brechtian character, smugly shouts today "I am in the process of disappearing!") represents in reality a strange trajectory . . .

How can we not see today that, under the figure of this trajectory, reasonable, clear, and obvious explanations ("developing consciousness," the "lessons of experience," "penetration of ideas,"

“progress of mentalities,” indeed, “the test of practice”) have wound up marking the place of a theoretical and practical running in place, caught up in an immense counter-identification? The more one is in the ideology of the trajectory, the more one is stuck! And here too, “it works all by itself” . . . in a circle!

We propose to show, on the basis of the “philosophical detour” effected by Althusser, under what conditions the dis-identifying ideological process of proletarian revolution nonetheless *works on* this pedagogical ideology of the trajectory by calling it into question.

### III. Resistance, Revolt, and the Revolutionary Tendency in Ideology

The ideological repetition of the trajectory-in-place marks, as we just noted, the point at which the dominant bourgeois ideology (based in that respect on something much older than the bourgeoisie, which was formed in the European thirteenth century with the Rule of Law)<sup>10</sup> insures from inside its hold over the struggles of the workers’ movement, across the different forms in which it generously proposes that the dominated ideologies recognize themselves. There are essentially two:

- *the emptiness (le vide) of every dominated ideology*, on the pretext that there would be “in reality” nothing outside the Master’s power, his Law and his Order, so that the perverse Great Subject of capitalism would manipulate precisely those who have the illusion that they are in revolt (revolt is then marginal and reinforces Order)

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<sup>10</sup>Toward the middle of the thirteenth century, during the reign of Louis IX (called Saint Louis), the royal government and the monarchical administration began to assert and strengthen their apparatus. One of the decisive elements of this strengthening lay in a new usage of Law: it was during this epoch that there appeared those that history knows by the name of the *Legists* who, before the people and in the face of other powers (the Empire outside the kingdom, and feudalism inside), began to justify *the centralized monarchical state*, to establish its legitimacy by law. At the same time, theologians, jurists and propagandists, and the Legists were already in the Rule of Law.

- or else *the repetition of the Master's*<sup>11</sup> *world in a second world*, subordinated, devalued, and folkloric; bourgeois ideology easily tolerates the existence of dominated ideologies like relics in a museum representing practices and worldviews, their degrees, variants, and differences displayed haphazardly in the Social and Democratic Conservatory of popular life: unionism and strikes next to card games and drinking, politics and betting on horse races . . . This is inexhaustible material for the zoologists of the working class and the popular masses!

All this bric-a-brac of the bourgeois representation of dominated ideologies aims at upholding the single question that bourgeois ideology addresses to this second world, insofar as it is a parodic and derisory metaphor for the first: “You’re not proposing to govern with *that*? Aren’t you, despite everything, happier in your own world?”

All the rest derives from this: if the working class and popular masses come to pose the question of state power politically, bourgeois ideology will do everything it can to lead them back to the quietism of the museum/conservatory: “You are only children! You’ll break everything! Each in his place, in his world, capitalism for all, and all will be well (*et les vaches seront bien gardée*)!”

And if in spite of everything the exploited persist in their political aim of *changing* the world by changing *the* world, the response is, once again, ready made: this necessarily comes from what outside agitators have “put into the heads” of the exploited in order to manipulate their revolt against the Master’s existing order, in the

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<sup>11</sup>This position is developed in particular by the adherents of the “New Philosophy,” who have put back into fashion the theme of the Master, through a political exploitation of the theses of Jacques Lacan on the “discourse of the master,” the discourse of the consciousness that masters, confronted with the discourse of the Academic, of the Hysteric . . . and of the Analyst, who in principle rejects all lawmaking. A certain conception of the Hegelian dialectic also comes to be grafted onto this theme, and winds up with the “discovery” that revolution is impossible; gender, labor, the sciences, language, the life of human beings . . . everything is always “under the boot” of the Master, the omnipresent and omnipotent calculator. Jacques Lacan developed his thesis of “four discourses” in “L’envers de la psychanalyse” (a 1970 unpublished seminar [now available in English as Lacan 2007—trans.]). An illuminating discussion may be found in Roudinesco (1977), pp. 46ff.



hopes of taking his place. For the Master “obviously” can only be dislodged by a symmetrical adversary who repeats his inverted image: “Anyway, that won't change anything for you.” The circle is thus closed in the bourgeois conception of the dominated ideology, and we see how the series of relations between interior/exterior, practice/theory, quietism/voluntarism, and war of position/war of movement constitute a dilemma-fuelled machinery destined to fend off by every means the possibility of proletarian revolution. In the face of the dominated ideologies, the bourgeoisie has responses that, as we observe every day, are adapted to the balance of forces. . . .

At the same time, we understand a bit better *in what way* resistance, revolt, and the revolutionary tendency of the dominated ideologies are at an impasse, and how the pedagogical illusion of a trajectory destined to escape this condition (by “becoming conscious,” or through the “lessons of experience,” etc.) only duplicates this impasse insofar as the very question of *ideological domination* remains intact: far from possessing its own response, the proletariat cannot move beyond the “responses” of the bourgeois dominant ideology.

I maintain that it is at this precise point, in many respects intolerable, that Althusser's theses on the ISAs sought to affect Marxism-Leninism by taking the risk of going to extremes in order to try to free it from this impasse, from this interrupted trajectory through which “one advances” indefinitely without ever moving: the article on the ISAs aims, in a philosophical detour imposed by the class struggle, to *dispossess Marxism-Leninism of its operating assumptions*, to deprive it of them in the most radical way, and it is precisely this that is unpardonable in the eyes of some.

However, by saying that subjects “work all by themselves,” Althusser gave to this singular phenomenon of walking in place the chance to work in Marxism-Leninism, he gave to Marxism-Leninism the chance to escape from its somnambulism on this point . . . In reality, through a series of theses concerning the dominant ideology in its relationship with State Power and the State Apparatus, Althusser engaged those who recognize themselves in Marxism and Leninism to “take up things again but in a new way” concerning the question of dominated ideologies and proletarian ideology: by

showing that the dominant ideology formed an integral part of the State Apparatus of domination by the class in power. Althusser removed any possibility of avoiding or of escaping into some outside (*hors-lieu*) (outside of class or outside of ideology): there is no other way out than the struggle of the dominated classes against this domination; and this struggle has no assignable beginning, because it is nothing but *the very history of these classes*, caught up in their antagonism from the time of their formation until the time of their disappearance.

Thus, the dominated ideology cannot be purely and simply “the ideology of the dominated class,” in symmetry to the dominant ideology: we must speak of *dominated ideologies in the plural*, and thus of the fact that there cannot be *a single dominant ideology* in a given historical moment; it is precisely for this reason that the question of ideology comes to be placed under that of the state: the existence of dominated ideologies is indissociable from the contradictions inscribed in the ideological domination of the class in power, which we will mark here in the following thesis: *the dominant ideology never dominates without contradictions*.

It is therefore at the precise moment that the dominant ideology appears under the aspect of the irrefutably full eternity of an enchanted circle within which subjects “work all by themselves” outside of the class struggle, that the dominant class wages its own ideological class struggle to the maximum degree and touches on the impossibility of an end to class struggle from which ideological domination would have evacuated every contradiction: Althusser’s article on the ISAs very precisely takes this *impossible point of realization* as its object, not in order to make it understood by “exaggerating” this domination, but in order to try to lead Marxist reflection back to the primacy of class struggle, by ridding Marxism of another, second world where it would be, *a priori and invincibly*, at home.

At the same time, Althusser’s allusions to the eternal character of the unconscious (repetition), as well as the care he takes to emphasize that it is impossible for a Marxist to maintain pre-Freudian conceptions of the dream (as pure nothingness or a bric-a-brac resulting from “day residues”), both *aim*, from this other perspective in

which the dream, the lapsus, and the parapraxis constitute a series, *at the same point of impossibility*: fully to grasp ideological interpellation as a ritual presupposes recognizing that there is no ritual without break, failure, and cracking: “One word for another” is the definition of metaphor, but it is also the point at which an ideological ritual comes to be broken in the lapsus (examples abound in religious ceremonies, judicial procedures, pedagogical lessons, or political discourses).

In other words, ideology touches on the unconscious from the perspective of the impossible: lapsus and parapraxis mark the impossibility of an ideological domination beyond any contradiction. The series of effects summarized here by the figures of lapsus and parapraxis thus never cease to contaminate every dominant ideology from the very interior of the practices in which they tend to be realized; the profanities and blasphemies that come out of the mouths of believers of every kind without their perceiving it and against their will, the violations of ritual that take place when least expected, the ambiguities that suddenly burst out from the most sacred sentence or gesture: all of this has something very precisely to do with the point always-ready there, the imaginary origin of resistance and revolt, without the need to search for it in another world or a hidden world: dominated ideologies are formed nowhere else than in the very location of domination, in it and against it, through the flaws and stumbling blocks that unavoidably affect it, even when domination extends to the point that “one cannot help *it*” because “*that’s* how it

is”: the *it* and the *that* remain and will return in an unpredictable form in the failures of interpellation.<sup>12</sup>

To retrace the fugitive forms of the appearance of something “of another order,” of tiny victories that, in an instant, disrupt the dominant ideology by taking advantage of its stumbling; to retrace, therefore, the success of the lapsus, the parapraxis, the equivocation and ambivalence in the cracks of interpellation, of ritual, of the ideological order—all this does not suppose that one henceforth makes the unconscious the *source* of dominated ideologies, after having given up trying to make it the superegoistic springboard of the dominant ideology. The order of the unconscious does not coincide with that of ideology, repression is identified neither with subjection nor suppression, but ideology cannot be thought without reference to the unconscious register; lapsus, parapraxis, etc. constitute as breakage and scraps of rituals the primary materials of the ideological struggle of the dominated classes to the precise extent that the circle-ritual of ideological interpellation is the primary material of ideological domination. And the order of the theoretical in no way escapes this rule: the embryonic forms of a new problematic often reside in the

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<sup>12</sup>This *impossible point of realization* of a “perfect” subjection inside of the *labor process* imposed by the capitalist mode of production, emerges in the following lines drawn from an autobiographical narrative of an intellectual militant hired for one year as OS2 [his classification as a semiskilled worker—trans.] in a Citroën factory in the Paris region; he speaks of working on an assembly line: “And suppose you said to yourself that nothing matters, that you need only get used to making the same movements in the same way in the same period of time, aspiring to no more than the placid perfection of a machine? A temptation to death. But life kicks against it and resists. The organism resists. The muscles resist. The nerves resist. Something, in the body and the head, braces itself against repetition and nothingness. Life shows itself in more rapid movement, an arm lowered at the wrong time, a slower step, a second’s irregularity, an awkward gesture, getting ahead, slipping back, tactics at the station; everything, in the wretched square of resistance against the empty eternity that is the work station, indicates that there are still human incidents, even if they’re minute; there’s still time, even if it’s dragged out to abnormal lengths. This clumsiness, this unnecessary movement away from routine, this sudden acceleration, this soldering that’s gone wrong, this hand that has to do it all over again, the man who makes a face, the man who’s out of step, this shows that life is hanging on. It is seen in everything that yells silently within every man on the line: “I’m not a machine!” (Linhart 1981, p. 17).

emergence of an incongruity of thought (arising from a lapsus or a joke) that creates an enigma, and thus begins to overturn the existing order of knowledge at a determinate point: sort of a theoretical revolt in a nascent state.

To conceive a science (for example, historical materialism) in this way as the extension of a theoretical revolt caught up in the history of dominated ideologies is authorized by the analytic practice of the unconscious whereby *theoretical thought is also fundamentally unconscious*. It is also to recognize, under the primacy of class struggle, how the status of Marxist theory is determined by the ideological and political struggle of the proletariat. What we mean when we speak of the “scientific nature” of proletarian ideology is an effect and not a cause of its singularity, which is itself revolutionary, fragile, incomplete, and constantly called into question in the course of the revolution itself.

We shall conclude this point by emphasizing that there is neither *one* world of the dominant ideology, unified in the form of an “accomplished fact,” nor *two* ideological universes opposed like the plus sign and the minus sign, but only a single world that never ceases dividing into two. Every dominant ideology, irremediably infected, thus works constantly to reinforce its defenses at their points of fragility, failure and fracture which are so many formation points of dominated ideologies; it is the place of an incessant reorganization in order to occupy these points preventively or to re-appropriate them by necessary concessions, by recognizing in dominated ideologies a space ruled by limits, such that dominated ideologies experience domination above all inside themselves and not as a purely external obstacle. In the transition to capitalism, this process of unification/division takes on new forms, combining ideological interpellation with repressive violence according to the modalities of subjection, individualization, and normalization that Michel Foucault has magisterially undertaken to elucidate and describe. Foucault provides an important contribution to the revolutionary struggles of our time by patiently demonstrating the multiple mechanisms whereby over centuries the training and regimentation of individuals have been perfected, the material *dispositifs* that insure their functioning and the disciplines that codify their exercise. But at the

same time he covers up what he discovers by rendering the points of resistance and the bases of revolt by the dominated classes essentially ungraspable. We might formulate the hypothesis that this covering up has to do with the combined foreclosure of Marxism and perhaps even more of psychoanalysis in Foucault's thought, with the result that it becomes impossible to establish a coherent and consistent distinction between the material process of the subjection of human individuals and the procedures of animal domestication. There is in Foucault a larval biologism, of Bakunian inspiration, which he unknowingly shares with various currents of functionalism, and which in fact make revolt strictly unthinkable, since, contrary to the title of George Orwell's novel, there cannot be a "revolt of the beasts" any more than there can be extraction of surplus labor or language in what one has agreed to call the animal kingdom.

If, in the history of humanity, revolt is contemporaneous with the extraction of surplus labor, it is because class struggle is the motor of this history.

And if, on a completely different level, revolt is contemporaneous with language, it is because its very possibility is sustained by a division of the subject, inscribed within the symbolic.

The specificity of these two discoveries prevents us from fusing them by means of any theory, even a theory of revolt. But it is necessary to admit that politically they have something to do with each other, and to note the price that is paid, and not only in Foucault, for their common foreclosure: the price is the inability to think resistance and ideological revolt other than in the form of marginal wanderings—except to posit, which is even worse, an impossible subject-full-of-revolt, a symmetrical figure negatively reproducing the good subject that "works all by itself."

#### **IV. Some Remarks on Proletarian Ideology**

Regarding the transformation-destruction of the bourgeois State Apparatus, we mentioned Balibar's study "La rectification du *Manifeste Communiste*" [The Rectification of the *Communist*

*Manifesto*],<sup>13</sup> indicating that we would return to it after the detour on points II and III; in fact, Balibar takes up the question of the *analogy*, the *parallelism* between bourgeois and proletarian revolution and quotes the *Manifesto* on this question: “The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself,”<sup>14</sup> and notes that

*this analogy is completely formal*; it only has a transitory and pedagogical function; and even, like every pedagogical artifice, it carries its own risk of introducing an error. In fact, under this analogy, there is no parallelism or symmetry but a complete *opposition* and a *dissymmetry*. In particular, whereas the bourgeoisie historically conquers political power by first forcing feudalism to make a place for it in the feudal state apparatus, at its side (this is the interpretation that in the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels already gave of absolutist monarchy), the proletariat can never control the existing state apparatus any more than it can, under the domination of the bourgeoisie, progressively make a place for itself.

Paradoxically, the *Manifesto*, without its correction, could lead to the idea of a *bourgeois state* (“the bourgeoisie organized as the dominant class”) and of a *proletarian state* (“the proletariat organized as the dominant class”), distinct of course, opposed in their social bases and in the politics they pursue, but having a *common principle* (a general definition, an essence): the *simple* “organization of the dominant class.”

Yet we see, on the contrary, that the bourgeoisie “is organized as the dominant class” *only* by developing the state apparatus. And that the proletariat “is organized as a dominant class” *only* by causing to arise alongside the state apparatus and against it political forms of practice and organization that are completely different: therefore, in fact, by destroying the existing state apparatus and by replacing it not simply by

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<sup>13</sup>In this study Balibar tries to interrogate the modalities under which the revolutionary experience of the Paris Commune echoed certain theses of the *Manifesto*, leading Marx to begin their “rectification” in the direction that Lenin took up.

<sup>14</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2012), p. 79.

another apparatus but by *the totality of another state apparatus completely different from a state apparatus.*

The singularity of the proletarian revolution (its “completely different,” foreign character, unrelated to the existing state of affairs) is based on an impossible exteriority of the theoretical, but above all by a practical singularity inscribed in the very interior of the revolutionary tendency to communism in relation to the state; the “strategic notions” of *taking literally* and *reversal* contained in analogy, parallelism, and symmetry reveal their limits here: proletarian politics cannot be enclosed in counter-identification without the risk of purely and simply disappearing as such, by becoming what Balibar calls a “pedagogical artifice”: the characteristic of proletarian revolution is precisely to take on what has been bypassed, turned back, reversed, appropriated, and preserved by other revolutions, especially by the bourgeois revolution; i.e., to attack the state-form and the ideological processes of interpellation-identification-subjection that are constitutively inscribed in it.

If it is acceptable to designate by the term “dis-identification” that which, in the process of the proletarian revolution, constitutes the *ideological form of the tendency of the non-state*, we can say that the proletarian state apparatus, insofar as it is indeed this contradictory reality tending “not to perpetuate and reinforce itself but progressively to disappear by the very reason of its form” (Balibar), functions ideologically by dis-identification, and thereby attacks even the processes of division-representation-delegation that found the rule of law. This point is determinant in the proletarian revolution, insofar as it is mass revolutionary democracy, for the masses are precisely *unrepresentable*:<sup>15</sup> contrary to the mystical body of Christ, contrary to the body of the King, contrary to the body of the popular bourgeois state, the masses escape the order of representation, because they do not constitute *one* body. Thereby, the proletarian revolution necessarily disrupts the representation of society as a *social body*,

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<sup>15</sup>This is what Bertolt Brecht aimed at in his intervention at the moment when, in response to the 1953 uprising in East Berlin, the Soviet command imposed a state of siege: Brecht remarked ironically that if the government encountered difficulties with the people, a “new people” would have to be elected.



and simultaneously affects the ISAs in their very functioning, i.e., in the realization of the contradictory combination of their regional character and their class character. What is characteristic of the dominant feudal *and* bourgeois ideology is that class interests (feudal-monarchical, then capitalist) are realized and unified through the organized regional disjunction of the ISAs: class character is thus masked behind the regional character and realized in this very masking under the form of the organic interests of the *body of society*.

The singularity of proletarian ideology lies in its tendency to establish the political primacy of class struggle over the regional characteristics inscribed in the functionality of the ISAs: this implies that proletarian ideological practice as such is *de-regionalizing*. In particular, it de-regionalizes politics by drawing it out of Parliament, also affecting in this way the Family, School, Religion, etc.

If, therefore, in the phase of class struggle that constitutes the proletarian revolution, the communist transformation of the capitalist relations of production overrides their reproduction, it is inevitable that the “social body” finds itself ideologically affected in other ways than by substitutions and reversals establishing a new School, a new Family, a new Church, a new Court, etc. . . . in place of the former institutions.

The notion of dis-identification corresponds to the practical effects of the process of ideological de-regionalization: the mark of proletarian politics, to the extent that it *is realized*, is that as soon as it is a question of the Family, School, Justice, etc., it is immediately also a question of something completely different, which inevitably appears by a detour or a reconciliation that is often incongruous in appearance; in other words, the location of the questions is never *fixed* in proletarian politics, it is ceaselessly displaced by the detours of unrepresentable laws according to the cartography of the social body. It is even entirely necessary to dismiss this biological metaphor in order to understand something of its displacements, the result of unexpected short circuits or shocking mergers; and it is in this sense that one might say: “Freud is to the government of the unconscious what Lenin is to the government of the masses, the instigator of a politics lacking the Master’s certitudes and pedagogues’

knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> For the Master and the pedagogue, even under the “proletarian label,” are caught up in the trajectories governed by the biological metaphor of the social body, and, at the same time, in the network of ideological identifications and counter-identifications.

The precarious singularity of proletarian politics has a very precise connection with an extended rupture with this metaphor: what thereby opens up is quite the contrary of a straight-line trajectory; it is the process of a “politics in a broken line” which allows the terrain of questions ceaselessly to be displaced, which therefore tolerates slipping into the excentricity of a political lapsus or into the detour of an ideological pun in order precisely to *have a chance to get it right (avoir une chance de tomber juste)*. Certain aspects of Lenin’s practice, and also of the Chinese cultural revolution, seem to have directly and explicitly touched this point at which, through the dis-identification of the juridical ego-subject and the de-regionalization of ideological functionality, the plural tissue of ideologies that are dominated, passed down and or forgotten in the history of the state suddenly begins to work in the direction of the non-state, with all the affects that are indiscernibly implicated in the political struggle of the masses, and in the singularity of individual destinies.

This vacillating figure that arises from time to time in the process of socialist revolutions while incessantly covered up by them could well be what gives proletarian ideological interpellation its specificity, the contradictory way in which it seals the fate of individuals in the class struggle.

To say that proletarian interpellation functions in contradiction is to say that individuals are seized by it precisely from within the very contradiction that passes through them, outside of any identification with an impossible proletarian ego-subject; but this is to say also that this process, strictly speaking, has no end, since it is constrained to begin again indefinitely at the exact point where it appears to be finished; there does not and cannot exist a “pure” proletarian interpellation, because contradiction does not cease to be reproduced in the attempt precisely to realize this impossibility: at the precise moment that it is going to be realized as “master of itself and the

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<sup>16</sup>Roudinesco (1977), p. 63.

universe,” the proletarian ego-subject re-identifies itself in an immobile self-pedagogical trajectory within the space of a kind of somnambulistic non-thought, the reflex of practical powerlessness, which softly mumbles or loudly proclaims the eternal leitmotif of idealism: “what does not worry me, I don’t talk about, and what I don’t think about, does not exist!”

In the face of this reproduction that never ceases to affect the revolutionary movement in a thousand ways, the dis-identifying tendency of proletarian ideology does not fail to interpellate individuals as subjects in one and the same material process a process characterized by the double fact that “there is revolt” and “it thinks (*ça pense*),” which reverberates in the double slogan of communist practice: “dare to revolt” and “dare to think for yourself.”

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