Signification, Representation, Ideology:
Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates

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☐ —*This essay attempts to assess Althusser's contribution to the reconceptualization of ideology. Rather than offering a detailed exegesis, the essay provides some general reflections on the theoretical gains flowing from Althusser's break* with classical Marxist formulations of ideology. It argues that these gains opened up a new perspective within Marxism, enabling a rethinking of ideology in a significantly different way.*

ALTHUSSER persuaded me, and I remain persuaded, that Marx conceptualizes the ensemble of relations which make up a whole society—Marx's "totality"—as essentially a complex structure, not a simple one. Hence, the relationship within that totality between its different levels—say, the economic, the political, and the ideological (as Althusser would have it)—cannot be a simple or immediate one. Thus, the notion of simply reading off the different kinds of social contradiction at different levels of social practice in terms of one governing principle of social and economic organization (in classical Marxist terms, the "mode of production"), or of reading the different levels of a social formation in terms of a one-to-one corre-

spondence between practices, are neither useful nor are they the ways in which Marx, in the end, conceptualized the social totality. Of course a social formation is not complexly structured simply because everything interacts with everything else—that is the traditional, sociological, multifactoral approach which has no determining priorities in it. A social formation is a "structure in dominance." It has certain distinct tendencies; it has a certain configuration; it has a definite structuration. This is why the term "structure" remains important. But, nevertheless, it is a complex structure in which it is impossible to reduce one level of practice to another in some easy way. The reaction against both these tendencies to reductionism in the classical versions of the marxist theory of ideology has been in progress for a very long time—in fact, it was Marx and

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Engels themselves who set this work of revisionism in motion. But Althusser was the key figure in modern theorizing on this question who clearly broke with some of the old protocols and provided a persuasive alternative which remains broadly within the terms of the marxist problematic. This was a major theoretical achievement, however much we may now, in turn, wish to criticize and modify the terms of Althusser's break-through. I think Althusser is also correct to argue that this is the way the social formation is in fact theorized in Marx's "1857 Introduction" to the *Grundrisse* (1953/1973), his most elaborated methodological text.

Another general advance which Althusser offers is that he enabled me to live in and with *difference*. Althusser's break with a monistic conception of marxism demanded the theorization of difference—the recognition that there are different social contradictions with different origins; that the contradictions which drive the historical process forward do not always appear in the same place, and will not always have the same historical effects. We have to think about the articulation between different contradictions; about the different specificities and temporal durations through which they operate, about the different modalities through which they function. I think Althusser is right to point to a stubbornly monistic habit in the practice of many very distinguished marxists who are willing, for the sake of complexity, to play with difference so long as there is the guarantee of unity further on up the road. But the significant advances over this delayed teleology are already to be found in the "1857 Introduction" to the *Grundrisse*. There, Marx says, for example, of course all languages have some elements in common. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to identify them as belonging to the same social phenome-

non. But when we have said that we have only said something about language at a *very* general level of abstraction: the level of "language-in-general." We have only begun our investigation. The more important theoretical problem is to think the specificity and difference of different languages, to examine the many determinations, in concrete analysis, of particular linguistic or cultural formations and the particular aspects which differentiate them from one another. Marx's insight that critical thought moves away from abstraction to the concrete-in-thought which is the result of many determinations, is one of his most profound, most neglected epistemological propositions, which even Althusser himself somewhat misinterprets (cf. "Notes on the '1857 Introduction' ", Hall, 1974).

I have to add right away, however, that Althusser allows me to think "difference" in a particular way, which is rather different from the subsequent traditions which sometimes acknowledge him as their originator. If you look at discourse theory,[1] for example—at post-structuralism or at Foucault—you will see there, not only the shift from practice to discourse, but also how the emphasis on difference—on the plurality of discourses, on the perpetual slippage of meaning, on the endless sliding of the signifier—is now pushed *beyond* the point where it is capable of theorizing the necessary unevenness of a complex unity, or even the "unity in difference" of a complex structure. I think that is why, whenever Foucault seems to be in danger of bringing things together, (such as the many epistemic shifts he charts, which all fortuitously coincide with the shift from *ancien régime* to modern in France), he has to hasten to assure us that nothing ever fits with anything else. The emphasis always falls on the continuous slippage away from any conceiva-

ble conjuncture. I think there is no other way to understand Foucault's eloquent silence on the subject of the State. Of course, he will say, he knows that the State exists; what French intellectual does not? Yet, he can only posit it as an abstract, empty space—the State as Gulag—the absent/present other of an equally abstract notion of Resistance. His protocol says: "not only the State but also the dispersed microphysics of power," his practice consistently privileges the latter and ignores the existence of state power.

Foucault (1972/1980) is quite correct, of course, to say that there are many marxists who conceive the State as a kind of single object; that is, as simply the unified will of the committee of the Ruling Class, wherever it is currently meeting today. From this conception flows the necessary "yoking together" of everything. I agree that one can no longer think of the State in that way. The State is a contradictory formation which means that it has different modes of action, is active in many different sites: it is pluricentered and multi-dimensional. It has very distinct and dominant tendencies but it does not have a singly inscribed class character. On the other hand, the State remains one of the crucial sites in a modern capitalist social formation where political practices of different kinds are *condensed*. The function of the State is, in part, precisely to bring together or articulate into a complexly structured instance, a range of political discourses and social practices which are concerned at different sites with the transmission and transformation of power—some of those practices having little to do with the political domain as such, being concerned with other domains which are nevertheless articulated to the State, for example, familial life, civil society, gender and economic relations.

The State is the instance of the performance of a condensation which allows that site of intersection between different practices to be transformed into a systematic practice of regulation, of rule and norm, of normalization, within society. The State condenses very different social practices and transforms them into the operation of rule and domination over particular classes and other social groups. The way to reach such a conceptualization is not to substitute difference for its mirror opposite, unity, but to rethink both in terms of a new concept—articulation.[2] This is exactly the step Foucault refuses.

Hence we have to characterize Althusser's advance, not in terms of his insistence on "difference" alone—the rallying cry of Derridean deconstruction—but instead in terms of the necessity of thinking unity *and* difference; difference *in* complex unity, without this becoming a hostage to the privileging of difference as such. If Derrida (1977) is correct in arguing that there is always a perpetual slippage of the signifier, a continuous "deference," it is also correct to argue that without some arbitrary "fixing" or what I am calling "articulation," there would be no signification or meaning at all. What is ideology but, precisely, this work of fixing meaning through establishing, by selection and combination, a chain of equivalences? That is why, despite all of its fault, I want to bring forward to you, not the proto-Lacanian, neo-Foucauldian, pre-Derridean, Althusserean text—"Ideological State Apparatuses" (Althusser, 1970/1971), but rather, the less theoretically elaborated but in my view more generative, more original, perhaps because more tentative text, *For Marx* (Althusser, 1965/1969): and especially the essay "On Contradiction and Overdetermination" (pp. 87–128), which

begins precisely to think about complex kinds of determinacy without reductionism to a simple unity. (I have consistently preferred *For Marx* to the more finished, more structuralist *Reading Capital* [Althusser & Balibar, 1968/ 1970]: a preference founded not only on my suspicion of the whole Spinozean, structuralist-causality machinery which grinds through the latter text but also on my prejudice against the modish intellectual assumption that the "latest" is necessarily "the best.") I am not concerned here with the absolute theoretical rigor of *For Marx:* at the risk of theoretical eclecticism, I am inclined to prefer being "right but not rigorous" to being "rigorous but wrong." By enabling us to think about different levels and different kinds of determination, *For Marx* gave us what *Reading Capital* did not: the ability to theorize about real historical events, or particular texts (*The German Ideology,* Marx & Engels, 1970), or particular ideological formations (humanism) as determined by more than one structure (i.e., to think the process of overdetermination). I think "contradiction" and "overdetermination" are very *rich* theoretical concepts—one of Althusser's happier "loans" from Freud and Marx; it is not the case, in my view, that their richness has been exhausted by the ways in which they were applied by Althusser himself.

The articulation of difference and unity involves a different way of trying to conceptualize the key marxist concept of determination. Some of the classical formulations of base/superstructure which have dominated marxist theories of ideology, represent ways of thinking about determination which are essentially based on the idea of a necessary correspondence between one level of a social formation and another. With or without immediate identity, sooner or later, polit-

ical, legal, and ideological practices— they suppose—*will* conform to and therefore be brought into a necessary correspondence with what is—mistakenly—called "the economic." Now, as is by now *de rigueur* in advanced post-structuralist theorizing, in the retreat from "necessary correspondence" there has been the usual unstoppable philosophical slide all the way over to the opposite side; that is to say, the elision into what sounds almost the same but is in substance radically different—the declaration that there is "necessarily no correspondence." Paul Hirst, one of the most sophisticated of the post-marxist theorists, lent his considerable weight and authority to that damaging slippage. "Necessarily no correspondence" expresses exactly the notion essential to discourse theory—that nothing really connects with anything else. Even when the analysis of particular discursive formations constantly reveals the overlay or the sliding of one set of discourses over another, everything seems to hang on the polemical reiteration of the principle that there is, of necessity, no correspondence.

I do not accept that simple inversion. I think what we have discovered is that there is *no necessary correspondence,* which is different; and this formulation represents a third position. This means that there is no law which guarantees that the ideology of a class is already and unequivocally given in or corresponds to the position which that class holds in the economic relations of capitalist production. The claim of "no guarantee"— which breaks with teleology—also implies that there is no necessary *non-*correspondence. That is, there is no guarantee that, under all circumstances, ideology and class can never be articulated together in any way or produce a social force capable for a time of self-

conscious "unity in action," in a class struggle. A theoretical position founded on the open endedness of practice and struggle must have as one of its possible results, an articulation in terms of *effects* which does not necessarily correspond to its origins. To put that more concretely: an effective intervention by particular social forces in, say, events in Russia in 1917, does not require us to say either that the Russian revolution was the product of the whole Russian proletariat, united behind a single revolutionary ideology (it clearly was not); nor that the decisive character of the alliance (articulation together) of workers, peasants, soldiers and intellectuals who did constitute the social basis of that intervention was guaranteed by their ascribed place and position in the Russian social structure and the necessary forms of revolutionary consciousness attached to them. Nevertheless 1917 did happen—and, as Lenin surprisingly observed, when "as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, *absolutely dissimilar* currents, *absolutely heterogeneous* class interests, *absolutely contrary* political and social strivings . . . merged . . . in a strikingly 'harmonious' manner." This points, as Althusser's comment on this passage in *For Marx* reminds us, to the fact that, if a contradiction is to become "active in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of circumstances and currents so that whatever their origin and sense . . they 'fuse' into a ruptural unity" (Althusser, 1965/1969, p. 99). The aim of a theoretically-informed political practice must surely be to bring about or construct the articulation between social or economic forces and those forms of politics and ideology which might lead them in practice to intervene in history in a progressive way—an articulation which has to be *constructed* through practice pre-

cisely because it is not guaranteed by how those forces are constituted in the first place.

That leaves the model much more indeterminate, open-ended and contingent than the classical position. It suggests that you cannot "read off" the ideology of a class (or even sectors of a class) from its original position in the structure of socio-economic relations. But it refuses to say that it is impossible to bring classes or fractions of classes, or indeed other kinds of social movements, through a developing practice of struggle, into articulation with those forms of politics and ideology which allow them to become historically effective as collective social agents. The principal theoretical reversal accomplished by "no necessary correspondence" is that determinacy is transferred from the genetic origins of class or other social forces in a structure to the effects or results of a practice. So I would want to stand with those parts of Althusser that I read as retaining the double articulation between "structure" and "practice," rather than the full structuralist causality of *Reading Capital* or of the opening sections of Poulantzas' *Political Power and Social Classes* (1968/1975). By "double articulation" I mean that the structure— the given conditions of existence, the structure of determinations in any situation—can also be understood, from another point of view, as simply the result of previous practices. We may say that a structure is what previously structured practices have produced as a result. These then constitute the "given conditions," the necessary starting point, for new generations of practice. In neither case should "practice" be treated as transparently intentional: we make history, but on the basis of anterior conditions which are not of our making. Practice is how a structure is actively

reproduced. Nevertheless, we need both terms if we are to avoid the trap of treating history as nothing but the outcome of an internally self-propelling structuralist machine. The structuralist dichotomy between "structure" and "practice"—like the related one between "synchrony" and "diachrony"—serves a useful analytic purpose but should not be fetishized into a rigid, mutually exclusive distinction.

Let us try to think a little further the question, not of the necessity, but of the possibility of the articulations between social groups, political practices and ideological formations which *could* create, as a result, those historical breaks or shifts which we no longer find already inscribed and guaranteed in the very structures and laws of the capitalist mode of production. This must not be read as arguing that there are no tendencies which arise from our positioning within the structures of social relations. We must not allow ourselves to slip from an acknowledgment of the relative autonomy of practice (in terms of its effects), to fetishizing Practice—the slip which made many post-structuralists Maoists for a brief moment before they became subscribers to the "New Philosophy" of the fashionable French Right. Structures exhibit tendencies—lines of force, openings and closures which constrain, shape, channel and in that sense, "determine." But they cannot determine in the harder sense of fix absolutely, guarantee. People are not irrevocably and indelibly inscribed with the ideas that they *ought* to think; the politics that they *ought* to have are not, as it were, already imprinted in their sociological genes. The question is not the unfolding of some inevitable law but rather the *linkages* which, although they can be made, need not necessarily be. There is no guarantee that classes will appear in

their appointed political places, as Poulantzas so vividly described it, with their number plates on their backs. By developing practices which articulate differences into a collective will, or by generating discourses which condense a range of different connotations, the dispersed conditions of practice of different social groups *can* be effectively drawn together in ways which make those social forces not simply a class "in itself," positioned by some other relations over which it has no control, *but also* capable of intervening as a historical force, a class "for itself," capable of establishing new collective projects.

These now appear to me to be the generative advances which Althusser's work set in motion. I regard this reversal of basic concepts as of much greater value than many of the other features of his work which, at the time of their appearance, so riveted Althusserian discipleship: for example, the question of whether the implicit traces of structuralist thought in Marx could be systematically transformed into a full blown structuralism by means of the skillful application to it of a structuralist combinatory of the Levi-Straussean[3] variety—the problematic of *Reading Capital;* or the clearly idealist attempt to isolate a so-called autonomous "theoretical practice;" or the disastrous conflation of historicism with "the historical" which licensed a deluge of anti-historical theoreticist speculation by his *epigoni;* or even the ill-fated enterprise of substituting Spinoza for the ghost of Hegel in the Marxist machine. The principal flaw in E. P. Thompson's (1978) anti-Althusserean diatribe, *The Poverty of Theory,* is not the cataloging of these and other fundamental errors of direction in Althusser's project—which Thompson was by no means the first to do—but rather the inability to recognize, *at the*

same time, what real advances were, nevertheless, being generated by Althusser's work. This yielded an undialectical assessment of Althusser, and incidentally, of theoretical work in general. Hence the necessity, here, of stating simply again what, despite his many weaknesses, Althusser accomplished which establishes a threshold behind which we cannot allow ourselves to fall. After "Contradiction and Overdetermination," the debate about the social formation and determinacy in marxism will never again be the same. That in itself constitutes "an immense theoretical revolution."

IDEOLOGY

Let me turn now to the specific question of ideology. Althusser's critique of ideology follows many of the lines of his critique of general positions in the classical marxist problematic sketched above. That is to say, he is opposed to class reductionism in ideology—the notion that there is some guarantee that the ideological position of a social class will always correspond to its position in the social relations of production. Althusser here is criticizing a very important insight which people have taken from *The German Ideology* (Marx & Engels, 1970)—the founding text of the classical marxist theory of ideology: namely, that ruling ideas always correspond to ruling class positions; that the ruling class as a whole has a mind of its own which is located in a particular ideology. The difficulty is that this does not enable us to understand why all the ruling classes we actually know have actually advanced in real historical situations by a variety of different ideologies or by now playing one ideology and then another. Nor why there are internal struggles, within *all* the major political formations, over the

appropriate "ideas" through which the interests of the dominant class are to be secured. Nor why, to a significant degree in many different historical social formations, the dominated classes have used "ruling ideas" to interpret and define their interests. To simply describe all of that as *the* dominant ideology, which unproblematically reproduces itself and which has gone on marching ahead ever since the free market first appeared, is an unwarrantable forcing of the notion of an empirical identity between class and ideology which concrete historical analysis denies.

The second target of Althusser's criticism is the notion of "false consciousness" which, he argues, assumes that there is one true ascribed ideology per class, and then explains its failure to manifest itself in terms of a screen which falls between subjects and the real relations in which subjects are placed, preventing them from recognizing the ideas which they ought to have. That notion of "false consciousness," Althusser says quite rightly, is founded on an empiricist relationship to knowledge. It assumes that social relations give their own, unambiguous knowledge to perceiving, thinking subjects; that there is a transparent relationship between the situations in which subjects are placed and how subjects come to recognize and know about them. Consequently, true knowledge must be subject to a sort of masking, the source of which is very difficult to identify, but which prevents people from "recognizing the real." In this conception, it is always other people, never ourselves, who are in false consciousness, who are bewitched by the dominant ideology, who are the dupes of history.

Althusser's third critique develops out of his notions about theory. He insists that knowledge has to be produced as the consequence of a particular practice.

Knowledge, whether ideological or scientific, is the production of a practice. It is not the reflection of the real in discourse, in language. Social relations have to be "represented in speech and language" to acquire meaning. Meaning is produced as a result of ideological or theoretical work. It is not simply a result of an empiricist epistemology.

As a result, Althusser wants to think the specificity of ideological practices, to think their difference from other social practices. He also wants to think "the complex unity" which articulates the level of ideological practice to other instances of a social formation. And so, using the critique of the traditional conceptions of ideology which he found in front of him, he set to work to offer some alternatives. Let me look briefly at what these alternatives are, for Althusser.

"IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES"

The one with which everybody is familiar is presented in the "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay. Some of his propositions in that essay have had a very strong influence or resonance in the subsequent debate. First of all Althusser tries to think the relationship between ideology and other social practices in terms of the concept of reproduction. What is the function of ideology? It is to reproduce the social relations of production. The social relations of production are necessary to the material existence of any social formation or any mode of production. But the elements or the agents of a mode of production, especially with respect to the critical factor of their labor, has itself to be continually produced and reproduced. Althusser argues that, increasingly in capitalist social formations, labor is not reproduced inside the social relations of pro-

duction themselves but outside of them. Of course, he does not mean biologically or technically reproduced only, he means socially and culturally as well. It is produced in the domain of the superstructures: in institutions like the family and church. It requires cultural institutions such as the media, trade unions, political parties, etc., which are not directly linked with production as such but which have the crucial function of "cultivating" labor of a certain moral and cultural kind—that which the modern capitalist mode of production requires. Schools, universities, training boards and research centers reproduce the technical competence of the labor required by advanced systems of capitalist production. But Althusser reminds us that a technically competent but politically insubordinate labor force is no labor force at all for capital. Therefore, the more important task is cultivating that kind of labor which is able and willing, morally and politically, to be subordinated to the discipline, the logic, the culture and compulsions of the economic mode of production of capitalist development, at whatever stage it has arrived; that is, labor which can be subjected to the dominant system ad infinitum. Consequently, what ideology does, through the various ideological apparatuses, is to reproduce the social relations of production in this larger sense. That is Althusser's first formulation.

Reproduction in that sense is, of course, a classic term to be found in Marx. Althusser doesn't have to go any further than *Capital* (Marx, 1970) to discover it; although it should be said that he gives it a very restrictive definition. He refers only to the reproduction of labor power, whereas reproduction in Marx is a much wider concept, including the reproduction of the social relations of possession and of exploitation, and

indeed of the mode of production itself. This is quite typical of Althusser—when he dives into the marxist bag and comes out with a term or concept which has wide marxist resonances, he quite often gives it a particular limiting twist which is specifically his own. In this way, he continually "firms up" Marx's structuralist cast of thought.

There is a problem with this position. Ideology in this essay seems to be, substantially, that of the dominant class. If there is an ideology of the dominated classes, it seems to be one which is perfectly adapted to the functions and interests of the dominant class within the capitalist mode of production. At this point, Althusserean structuralism is open to the charge, which has been made against it, of a creeping marxist functionalism. Ideology seems to perform the function required of it (i.e., to reproduce the dominance of the dominant ideology), to perform it effectively, and to go on performing it, without encountering any counter-tendencies (a second concept always to be found in Marx wherever he discusses reproduction and precisely the concept which distinguishes the analysis in *Capital* from functionalism). When you ask about the contradictory field of ideology, about how the ideology of the dominated classes gets produced and reproduced, about the ideologies of resistance, of exclusion, of deviation, etc., there are no answers in this essay. Nor is there an account of why it is that ideology, which is so effectively stitched into the social formation in Althusser's account, would ever produce its opposite or its contradiction. But a notion of reproduction which is only functionally adjusted to capital and which has no countervailing tendencies, encounters no contradictions, is not the site of class struggle, and is utterly foreign to Marx's conception of reproduction.

The second influential proposition in the "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay is the insistence that ideology is a practice. That is, it appears in practices located within the rituals of specific apparatuses or social institutions and organizations. Althusser makes the distinction here between repressive state apparatuses, like the police and the army, and ideological state apparatuses, like churches, trade unions, and media which are not directly organized by the State. The emphasis on "practices and rituals" is wholly welcome, especially if not interpreted too narrowly or polemically. Ideologies are the frameworks of thinking and calculation about the world—the "ideas" which people use to figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it and what they *ought* to do. But the problem for a materialist or nonidealist theory is how to deal with ideas, which are mental events, and therefore, as Marx says, can only occur "in thought, in the head" (where else?), in a nonidealist, nonvulgar materialist manner. Althusser's emphasis is helpful, here—helping us out of the philosophical dilemma, as well as having the additional virtue, in my view, of being right. He places the emphasis on where ideas appear, where mental events register or are realized, as social phenomena. That is principally, of course, in language (understood in the sense of signifying practices involving the use of signs; in the semiotic domain, the domain of meaning and representation). Equally important, in the rituals and practices of social action or behavior, in which ideologies imprint or inscribe themselves. Language and behavior are the media, so to speak, of the material registration of ideology, the modality of its functioning. These rituals and practices always occur in social sites, linked with social apparatuses. That is why we have to analyze or

deconstruct language and behavior in order to decipher the patterns of ideological thinking which are inscribed in them.

This important advance in our thinking about ideology has sometimes been obscured by theorists who claim that ideologies are not "ideas" at all but practices, and it is this which guarantees that the theory of ideology is materialist. I do not agree with this emphasis. I think it suffers from a "misplaced concreteness." The materialism of marxism cannot rest on the claim that it abolishes the mental character—let alone the real effects—of mental events (i.e., thought), for that is, precisely, the error of what Marx called a one-sided or mechanical materialism (in the *Theses on Feuerbach,* Marx, 1963). It must rest on the material forms in which thought appears and on the fact that it has real, material effects. That is, at any rate, the manner in which I have learned from Althusser's much-quoted assertion that the existence of ideology is material "because it is inscribed in practices." Some damage has been done by Althusser's overdramatic and too-condensed formulation, at the close of this part of his argument, that—as he quaintly puts its: "Disappear: the term ideas." Althusser has accomplished much but he has not to my way of thinking actually abolished the existence of ideas and thought, however convenient and reassuring that would be. What he has shown is that ideas have a material existence. As he says himself, "the 'ideas' of a human subject exists in his [or her] actions" and actions are "inserted into practices governed by the rituals in which those practices are inscribed within the material existence of an ideological apparatus," which is different (Althusser, 1970/1971, p. 158).

Nevertheless, serious problems remain with Althusser's nomenclature. The "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay, again, unproblematically assumes an identity between the many "autonomous" parts of civil society and the State. In contrast, this articulation is at the center of Gramsci's (1971) problem of hegemony. Gramsci has difficulties in formulating the state/civil society boundary precisely because where it falls is neither a simple nor uncontradictory matter. A critical question in developed liberal democracies is precisely how ideology is reproduced in the so-called *private* institutions of civil society—the theatre of consent—apparently outside of the direct sphere of play of the State itself. If everything is, more or less, under the supervision of the State, it is quite easy to see why the only ideology that gets reproduced is the dominant one. But the far more pertinent, but difficult, question is how a society *allows* the relative freedom of civil institutions to operate in the ideological field, day after day, without direction or compulsion by the State; and why the consequence of that "free play" of civil society, through a very complex reproductive process, nevertheless consistently reconstitutes ideology as a "structure in dominance." That is a much tougher problem to explain, and the notion of "ideological state apparatuses" precisely forecloses the issue. Again, it is a closure of a broadly "functionalist" type which presupposes a necessary functional correspondence between the requirements of the mode of production and the functions of ideology.

After all, in democratic societies, it is not an illusion of freedom to say that we cannot adequately explain the structured biases of the media in terms of their being instructed by the State precisely what to print or allow on television. But precisely how is it that such large num-

bers of journalists, consulting only their "freedom" to publish and be damned, do tend to reproduce, quite spontaneously, without compulsion, again and again, accounts of the world constructed within fundamentally the same ideological categories? How is it that they are driven, again and again, to such a limited repertoire within the ideological field? Even journalists who write within the muckraking tradition often seem to be inscribed by an ideology to which they do not consciously commit themselves, and which, instead, "writes them."

This is the aspect of ideology under liberal capitalism which most needs explaining. And that is why, when people say "Of course this is a free society; the media operate freely," there is no point in responding "No, they operate only through compulsion by the State." Would that they did! Then all that would be required would be to pull out the four or five of their key controllers and put in a few controllers of our own. In fact ideological reproduction can no more be explained by the inclinations of individuals or by overt coercion (social control) than economic reproduction can be explained by direct force. Both explanations—and they are analogous—have to begin where *Capital* begins: with analyzing how the "spontaneous freedom" of the circuits actually work. This is a problem which the "ideological state apparatus" nomenclature simply forecloses. Althusser refuses to distinguish between state and civil society (on the same grounds which Poulantzas (1968/1975) also later spuriously supported—i.e., that the distinction belonged only within "bourgeois ideology"). His nomenclature does not give sufficient weight to what Gramsci would call the immense complexities of society in modern social formations—"the trenches and fortifications of civil society." It does not

begin to make sense of how complex are the processes by which capitalism must work to order and organize a civil society which is not, technically, under its immediate control. These are important problems in the field of ideology and culture which the formulation, "ideological state apparatuses," encourages us to evade.

The third of Althusser's propositions is his affirmation that ideology only exists by virtue of the constituting category of the "subject." There is a long and complicated story here, only part of which I have time to rehearse. I have said elsewhere[4] that *Reading Capital* is very similar in its mode of argumentation to Levi-Strauss and other non-marxist structuralists. Like Levi-Strauss (1958/ 1972), Althusser also talks about social relations as processes without a subject. Similarly, when Althusser insists that classes are simply "bearers and supports" of economic social relations, he, like Levi-Strauss, is using a Saussurean conception of language, applied to the domain of practice in general, to displace the traditional agent/subject of classical western epistemology. Althusser's position here is very much in line with the notion that language speaks us, as the myth "speaks" the myth-maker. This abolishes the problem of subjective identification and of how individuals or groups become the enunciators of ideology. But, as Althusser develops his theory of ideology, he moves away from the notion that ideology is simply a process without a subject. He seems to take on board the critique that this domain of the subject and subjectivity cannot be simply left as an empty space. The "decentering of the subject," which is one of structuralism's main projects, still leaves unsettled the problem of the subjectification and subjectivizing of ideology. There are still processes of subjective effect to be

accounted for. How do concrete individuals fall into place within particular ideologies if we have no notion of the subject or of subjectivity? On the other hand, we have to rethink this question in a way different from the tradition of empiricist philosophy. This is the beginning of a very long development, which begins in the "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay, with Althusser's insistence that all ideology functions through the category of the subject, and it is only in and for ideology that subjects exist.

This "subject" is not to be confused with lived historical individuals. It is the category, the position where the subject—the I of ideological statements—is constituted. Ideological discourses themselves constitute us as subjects for discourse. Althusser explains how this works through the concept, borrowed from Lacan (1966/1977), of "interpellation." This suggests that we are hailed or summoned by the ideologies which recruit us as their "authors," their essential subject. We are constituted by the unconscious processes of ideology, in that position of recognition or fixture between ourselves and the signifying chain without which no signification of ideological meaning would be possible. It is precisely from this turn in the argument that the long trail into psychoanalysis and post-structuralism (and finally out of the marxist problematic) unwinds.

There is something both profoundly important and seriously regretable about the shape of this "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay. It has to do exactly with its two part structure: Part I is about ideology and the reproduction of the social relations of production. Part II is about the constitution of subjects and how ideologies interpellate us in the realm of the Imaginary. As a result of treating those two aspects in two separate compartments, a fatal dislocation occurred. What was originally conceived as one critical element in the general theory of ideology—the theory of the subject—came to be substituted, metonymically, for the whole of the theory itself. The enormously sophisticated theories which have subsequently developed have therefore all been theories about the second question: How are subjects constituted in relation to different discourses? What is the role of unconscious processes in creating these positionalities? That is the object of discourse theory and linguistically-influenced psychoanalysis. Or one can inquire into the conditions of enunciation in a particular discursive formation. That is the problematic of Foucault. Or one can inquire into the unconscious processes by which subjects and subjectivity as such are constituted. That is the problematic of Lacan. There has thus been considerable theorizing on the site of the second part of the "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay. But on the site of the first part—nothing. Finito! The inquiry simply halted with Althusser's inadequate formulations about the reproduction of the social relations of production. The two sides of the difficult problem of ideology were fractured in that essay and, ever since, have been assigned to different poles. The question of reproduction has been assigned to the marxist, (male) pole, and the question of subjectivity has been assigned to the psychoanalytic, (feminist) pole. Since then, never have the twain met. The latter is constituted as a question about the "insides" of people, about psychoanalysis, subjectivity and sexuality, and is understood to be "about" that. It is in this way and on this site that the link to feminism has been increasingly theorized. The former is "about" social relations, production and the "hard edge" of productive systems,

and that is what marxism and the reductive discourses of class are "about." This bifurcation of the theoretical project has had the most disastrous consequences for the unevenness of the subsequent development of the problematic of ideology, not to speak of its damaging political effects.

IDEOLOGY IN *FOR MARX*

Instead of following either of these paths, I want to break from that impasse for a moment and look at some alternative starting points in Althusser, from which I think, useful advances can still be made. Long before he had arrived at the "advanced" position of the "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay, Althusser said, in a short section in *For Marx* (1965/1969, pp. 231–236), some simple things about ideology which bear repeating and thinking about. This is where he defined ideologies as, to paraphrase, systems of representation—composed of concepts, ideas, myths, or images—in which men and women (my addition) live their imaginary relations to the real conditions of existence. That statement is worth examining bit by bit.

The designation of ideologies as "systems of representation" acknowledges their essentially discursive and semiotic character. Systems of representation are the systems of meaning through which we represent the world to ourselves and one another. It acknowledges that ideological knowledge is the result of specific practices—the practices involved in the production of meaning. But since there are no social practices which take place outside the domain of meaning (semiotic), are *all* practices simply discourses?

Here we have to tread very carefully. We are in the presence of yet another suppressed term or excluded middle. Althusser reminds us that ideas don't just float around in empty space. We know they are there because they are materialized in, they inform, social practices. In that sense, the social is never outside of the semiotic. Every social practice is constituted within the interplay of meaning and representation and can itself be represented. In other words, there is no social practice outside of ideology. However, this does not mean that, because all social practices are within the discursive, there is nothing to social practice *but* discourse. I know what is vested in describing processes that we usually talk about in terms of ideas as practices; "practices" feel concrete. They occur in particular sites and apparatuses—like classrooms, churches, lecture theatres, factories, schools and families. And that concreteness allows us to claim that they are "material." Yet differences must be remarked between different kinds of practice. Let me suggest one. If you are engaged in a part of the modern capitalist labor process, you are using, in combination with certain means of production, labor power—purchased at a certain price—to transform raw materials into a product, a commodity. That is the definition of a practice—the practice of labor. Is it *outside* of meaning and discourse? Certainly not. How could large numbers of people either learn that practice or combine their labor power in the division of labor with others, day after day, unless labor was within the domain of representation and meaning? Is this practice of transformation, then, nothing but a discourse? Of course not. It does not follow that because all practices are *in* ideology, or inscribed by ideology, all practices are *nothing but* ideology. There is a specificity to those practices whose principal object is to produce ideological representations. They are different from those practices which—meaningfully, intelligibly—produce

other commodities. Those people who work in the media are producing, reproducing and transforming the field of ideological representation itself. They stand in a different relationship to ideology in general from others who are producing and reproducing the world of material commodities—which are, nevertheless, also inscribed by ideology. Barthes observed long ago that all things are also significations. The latter forms of practice operate in ideology but they are not ideological in terms of the specificity of their object.

I want to retain the notion that ideologies are systems of representation materialized in practices, but I don't want to fetishize "practice." Too often, at this level of theorizing, the argument has tended to identify social practice with social discourse. While the emphasis on discourse is correct in pointing to the importance of meaning and representation, it has been taken right through to its absolute opposite and this allows us to talk about all practice as if there were nothing but ideology. This is simply an inversion.

Note that Althusser says "systems," not "system." The important thing about systems of representation is that they are not singular. There are numbers of them in any social formation. They are plural. Ideologies do not operate through single ideas; they operate, in discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields, in discursive formations. As you enter an ideological field and pick out any one nodal representation or idea, you immediately trigger off a whole chain of connotative associations. Ideological representations connote—summon—one another. So a variety of different ideological systems or logics are available in any social formation. The notion of *the* dominant ideology and *the* subordinated ideology is an inadequate way of representing the com-

plex interplay of different ideological discourses and formations in any modern developed society. Nor is the terrain of ideology constituted as a field of mutually exclusive and internally self-sustaining discursive chains. They contest one another, often drawing on a common, shared repertoire of concepts, rearticulating and disarticulating them within different systems of difference or equivalence.

Let me turn to the next part of Althusser's definition of ideology—the systems of representation in which men and women *live*. Althusser puts inverted commas around "live," because he means not blind biological or genetic life, but the life of experiencing, within culture, meaning and representation. It is not possible to bring ideology to an end and simply live the real. We always need systems through which we represent what the real is to ourselves and to others. The second important point about "live" is that we ought to understand it broadly. By "live" he means that men and women use a variety of systems of representation to experience, interpret and "make sense of" the conditions of their existence. It follows that ideology can always define the same so-called object or objective condition in the real world differently. There is "no necessary correspondence" between the conditions of a social relation or practice and the number of different ways in which it can be represented. It does not follow that, as some neo-Kantians in discourse theory have assumed, because we cannot know or experience a social relation except "within ideology," therefore it has no existence independent of the machinery of representation: a point already well clarified by Marx in the "1857 Introduction" but woefully misinterpreted by Althusser himself.

Perhaps the most subversive implica-

tion of the term "live" is that it connotes the domain of experience. It is in and through the systems of representation of culture that we "experience" the world: experience is the product of our codes of intelligibility, our schemas of interpretation. Consequently, there is no experiencing *outside* of the categories of representation or ideology. The notion that our heads are full of false ideas which can, however, be totally dispersed when we throw ourselves open to "the real" as a moment of absolute authentication, is probably the most ideological conception of all. This is exactly that moment of "recognition" when the fact that meaning depends on the intervention of systems of representation disappears and we seem secure within the naturalistic attitude. It is a moment of extreme ideological closure. Here we are most under the sway of the highly ideological structures of all—common sense, the regime of the "taken for granted." The point at which we lose sight of the fact that sense is a production of our systems of representation is the point at which we fall, not into Nature but into the naturalistic illusion: the height (or depth) of ideology. Consequently, when we contrast ideology to experience, or illusion to authentic truth, we are failing to recognize that there is no way of experiencing the "real relations" of a particular society outside of its cultural and ideological categories. That is not to say that all knowledge is simply the product of our will-to-power; there may be some ideological categories which give us a more adequate or more profound knowledge of particular relations than others.

Because there is no one to one relationship between the conditions of social existence we are living and how we experience them, it is necessary for Althusser to call these relationships "imaginary." That is, they must on no

account be confused with the real. It is only later in his work that this domain becomes the "Imaginary" in a proper Lacanian[5] sense. It may be that he already had Lacan in mind in this earlier essay, but he is not yet concerned to affirm that knowing and experiencing are only possible through the particular psychoanalytic process which Lacan has posited. Ideology is described as imaginary simply to distinguish it from the notion that "real relations" declare their own meanings unambiguously.

Finally, let us consider Althusser's use of this phrase, "the real conditions of existence"—scandalous (within contemporary cultural theory) because here Althusser commits himself to the notion that social relations actually exist apart from their ideological representations or experiences. Social relations do exist. We are born into them. They exist independent of our will. They are real in their structure and tendency. We cannot develop a social practice without representing those conditions to ourselves in one way or another; but the representations do not exhaust their effect. Social relations exist, independent of mind, independent of thought. And yet they can only be conceptualized in thought, in the head. That is how Marx (1953/1973) put it in the "1857 Introduction" to the *Grundrisse*. It is important that Althusser affirms the objective character of the real relations that constitute modes of production in social formations, though his later work provided the warrant for a quite different theorization. Althusser here is closer to a "realist" philosophical position than his later Kantian or Spinozean manifestations.

Now I want to go beyond the particular phrase I have been explicating to expand on two or three more general things associated with this formulation. Althusser says these systems of represen-

tation are essentially founded on unconscious structures. Again, in the earlier essay, he seems to be thinking the unconscious nature of ideology in ways similar to those in which Levi-Strauss used when he defined the codes of a myth as unconscious—in terms of its rules and categories. We are not ourselves aware of the rules and systems of classification of an ideology when we enunciate any ideological statement. Nevertheless, like the rules of language, they are open to rational inspection and analysis by modes of interruption and deconstruction, which can open up a discourse to its foundations and allow us to inspect the categories which generate it. We know the words to the song, "Rule Brittania" but we are "unconscious" of the deep structure—the notions of nation, the great slabs and slices of imperialist history, the assumptions about global domination and supremacy, the necessary Other of other peoples' subordination—which are richly impacted in its simple celebratory resonances. These connotational chains are not open nor easily amenable to change and reformulation at the conscious level. Does it therefore follow that they are the product of specific unconscious processes and mechanisms in the psychoanalytic sense?

This returns us to the question of how it is that subjects recognize themselves in ideology: How is the relationship between individual subjects and the positionalities of a particular ideological discourse constructed? It seems possible that some of the basic positionings of individuals in language, as well as certain primary positions in the ideological field, are constituted through unconscious processes in the psychoanalytic sense, at the early stages of formation. Those processes could then have a profound, orienting impact on the ways in which we situate ourselves in later life in

subsequent ideological discourses. It is quite clear that such processes *do* operate in early infancy, making possible the formation of relations with others and the outside world. They are inextricably bound up—for one thing—with the nature and development of, above all, sexual identities. On the other hand, it is by no means adequately proven that these positionings *alone* constitute the mechanisms whereby all individuals locate themselves in ideology. We are not entirely stitched into place in our relation to the complex field of historically-situated ideological discourses exclusively at that moment alone, when we enter the "transition from biological existence to human existence" (Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," 1970/1971, p. 93). We remain open to be positioned and situated in different ways, at different moments throughout our existence.

Some argue that those later positionings simply recapitulate the primary positions which are established in the resolution of the Oedipus complex. It seems more accurate to say that subjects are not positioned in relation to the field of ideologies exclusively by the resolution of unconscious processes in infancy. They are also positioned by the discursive formations of specific social formations. They are situated differently in relation to a different range of social sites. It seems to me wrong to assume that the process which allows the individual to speak or enunciate *at all*—language as such—is the same as that which allows the individual to enunciate him- or herself as a particular gendered, raced, socially sexed, etc., individual in a variety of specific representational systems in definite societies. The universal mechanisms of interpellation may provide the necessary general conditions for language but it is mere speculation and

assertion which so far suggests that they provide the sufficient concrete conditions for the enunciation of historically specific and differentiated ideologies. Discourse theory one-sidedly insists that an account of subjectivity in terms of Lacan's unconscious processes is itself *the* whole theory of ideology. Certainly, a theory of ideology has to develop, as earlier marxist theories did not, a theory of subjects and subjectivity. It must account for the recognition of the self within ideological discourse, what it is that allows subjects to recognize themselves in the discourse and to speak it spontaneously as its author. But that is not the same as taking the Freudian schema, reread in a linguistic way by Lacan, as an adequate theory of ideology in social formations.

Althusser himself appeared, earlier (in his "Freud And Lacan" essay, first written in 1964 and published in Althusser, 1970/1971), to recognize the necessarily provisional and speculative nature of Lacan's propositions. He repeated the succession of "identities" through which Lacan's argument is sustained—the transition from biological to human existence paralleling the Law of Order, which is the same as the Law of Culture, which "is confounded in its formal essence with the order of language" (p. 193). But he does then pick up the purely *formal* nature of these homologies in a footnote: "Formally: for the Law of Culture which is first introduced as language . . . is not exhausted by language; its content is the real kinship structures and the determinate ideological formations in which the persons inscribed in these structures live their function. It is not enough to know that the Western family is patriarchal and exogamic . . . we must also work out the ideological formations that govern paternity, maternity, conjugality and child-

hood. . . . A mass of research remains to be done on these ideological formations. This is a task for historical materialism" (p. 211). But in the later formulations, (and even more so in the Lacanian deluge which has subsequently followed) this kind of caution has been thrown to the wind in a veritable riot of affirmation. In the familiar slippage, "the unconscious is structured like a language" has become "the unconscious *is* the same as the entry into language, culture, sexual identity, ideology, and so on."

What I have tried to do is to go back to a much simpler and more productive way of beginning to think about ideology, which I also find in Althusser's work though not at the fashionable end of it. Recognizing that, in these matters— though our conceptual apparatus is extremely sophisticated and "advanced," in terms of real understanding, substantive research, and progress to knowledge in a genuinely "open" (i.e., scientific) way—we are very much at the beginning of a long and difficult road. In terms of this "long march," *For Marx* is earlier than the flights of fancy, and occasionally of fantasy, which overtake the "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay. It ought not, however, be left behind for that reason alone. "Contradiction and Overdetermination" contains a richer notion of determination than *Reading Capital,* though not so rigorously theorized. *For Marx* has a fuller notion of ideology than does "Ideological State Apparatuses," though it is not as comprehensive.

READING AN IDEOLOGICAL FIELD

Let me take a brief, personal example as an indication of how some of the things I have said about Althusser's general concept of ideology allow us to think

about particular ideological formations. I want to think about that particular complex of discourses that implicates the ideologies of identity, place, ethnicity and social formation generated around the term "black." Such a term "functions like a language," indeed it does. Languages, in fact, since the formations in which I place it, based on my own experience, both in the Carribean and in Britain, do not correspond exactly to the American situation. It is only at the "chaotic" level of language in general that they are the same. In fact what we find are differences, specificities, within different, even if related, histories.

At different times in my thirty years in England, I have been "hailed" or interpellated as "coloured," "West-Indian," "Negro," "black," "immigrant." Sometimes in the street; sometimes at street corners; sometimes abusively; sometimes in a friendly manner; sometimes ambiguously. (A black friend of mine was disciplined by his political organization for "racism" because, in order to scandalize the white neighborhood in which we both lived as students, he would ride up to my window late at night and, from the middle of the street, shout "Negro!" very loudly to attract my attention!) All of them inscribe me "in place" in a signifying chain which constructs identity through the categories of color, ethnicity, race.

In Jamaica, where I spent my youth and adolescence, I was constantly hailed as "coloured." The way that term was articulated with other terms in the syntaxes of race and ethnicity was such as to produce the meaning, in effect: "not black." The "blacks" were the rest—the vast majority of the people, the ordinary folk. To be "coloured" was to belong to the "mixed" ranks of the brown middle class, a cut above the rest—in aspiration if not in reality. My family attached

great weight to these finely-graded classificatory distinctions and, because of what it signified in terms of distinctions of class, status, race, color, insisted on the inscription. Indeed, they clung to it through thick and thin, like the ultimate ideological lifeline it was. You can imagine how mortified they were to discover that, when I came to England, I was hailed as "coloured" by the natives there precisely because, as far as they could see, I *was* "black," for all practical purposes! The same term, in short, carried quite different connotations because it operated within different "systems of differences and equivalences." It is the position within the different signifying chains which "means," not the literal, fixed correspondence between an isolated term and some denoted position in the color spectrum.

The Caribbean system was organized through the finely graded classification systems of the colonial discourses of race, arranged on an ascending scale up to the ultimate "white" term—the latter always out of reach, the impossible, "absent" term, whose absent-presence structured the whole chain. In the bitter struggle for place and position which characterizes dependent societies, every notch on the scale mattered profoundly. The English system, by contrast, was organized around a simpler binary dichotomy, more appropriate to the colonizing order: "white/not-white." Meaning is not a transparent reflection of the world in language but arises through the differences between the terms and categories, the systems of reference, which classify out the world and allow it to be in this way appropriated into social thought, common sense.

As a concrete lived individual, am I indeed any one of these interpellations? Does any one of them exhaust me? In fact, I "am" not one or another of these

ways of representing me, though I have been all of them at different times and still am some of them to some degree. But, there is no essential, unitary "I"— only the fragmentary, contradictory subject I become. Long after, I encountered "coloured" again, now as it were from the other side, beyond it. I tried to teach my son he was "black" at the same time as he was learning the colors of the spectrum and he kept saying to me that he was "brown." Of course, he was *both.*

Certainly I am from the West Indies—though I've lived my adult life in England. Actually, the relationship between "West-Indian" and "immigrant" is very complex for me. In the 1950s, the two terms were equivalents. Now, the term "West Indian" is very romantic. It connotes reggae, rum-and-coke, shades, mangoes, and all that canned tropical fruit-salad falling out of the coconut trees. This is an idealized "I." (I wish I felt more like that more of the time.) "Immigrant" I also know well. There is nothing remotely romantic about that. It places one so equivocally as *really* belonging *somewhere else.* "And when are you going back home?" Part of Mrs. Thatcher's "alien wedge." Actually I only understood the way this term positioned me relatively late in life—and the "hailing" on that occasion came from an unexpected direction. It was when my mother said to me, on a brief visit home: "I hope they don't mistake you over there for one of those immigrants!" The shock of recognition. I was also on many occasions "spoken" by that other, absent, unspoken term, the one that is never there, the "American" one, undignified even by a capital "N." The "silence" around this term was probably the most eloquent of them all. Positively marked terms "signify" because of their position in relation to what is absent, unmarked,

the unspoken, the unsayable. Meaning is relational within an ideological system of presences and absences. "Fort, da."

Althusser, in a controversial passage in the "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay says that we are "always-already" subjects. Actually Hirst and others contest this. If we are "always-already" subjects, we would have to be born with the structure of recognitions and the means to positioning ourselves with language already formed. Whereas Lacan, from whom Althusser and others draw, uses Freud and Saussure to provide an account of how that structure of recognitions is formed (through the mirror phase and the resolutions of the Oedipus complex, etc.). However, let us leave that objection aside for a moment, since a larger truth about ideology is implied in what Althusser says. We experience ideology as if it emanates freely and spontaneously from within us, as if we were its free subjects, "working by ourselves." Actually, we are spoken by and spoken for, in the ideological discourses which await us even at our birth, into which we are born and find our place. The new born child who still, according to Althusser's reading of Lacan, has to acquire the means of being placed within the law of Culture, is already expected, named, positioned in advance "by the forms of ideology (paternal/maternal/conjugal/fraternal)."

The observation puts me in mind of a related early experience. It is a story frequently retold in my family—with great humor all round, though I never saw the joke; part of our family lore— that when my mother first brought me home from the hospital at my birth, my sister looked into my crib and said, "Where did you get this Coolie baby from?" "Coolies" in Jamaica are East Indians, deriving from the indentured laborers brought into the country after

Abolition to replace the slaves in plantation labor. "Coolie" is, if possible, one rung lower in the discourse of race than "black." This was my sister's way of remarking that, as often happens in the best of mixed families, I had come out a good deal darker-skinned than was average in my family. I hardly know any more whether this really happened or was a manufactured story by my family or even perhaps whether I made it up and have now forgotten when and why. But I felt, then and now, summoned to my "place" by it. From that moment onwards, my place within this system of reference has been problematic. It may help to explain why and how I eventually become what I was first nominated: the "Coolie" of my family, the one who did not fit, the outsider, the one who hung around the street with all the wrong people, and grew up with all those funny ideas. The Other one.

What is *the contradiction* that generates an ideological field of this kind? Is it "the principal contradiction between capital and labor?" This signifying chain was clearly inaugurated at a specific historical moment—the moment of slavery. It is not eternal, or universal. It was the way in which sense was made of the insertion of the enslaved peoples of the coastal kingdoms of West Africa into the social relations of forced labor production in the New World. Leave aside for a moment the vexed question of whether the mode of production in slave societies was "capitalist" or "pre-capitalist" or an articulation of both within the global market. In the early stages of development, for all practical purposes, the racial and the class systems overlapped. They were "systems of equivalence." Racial and ethnic categories continue today to be the forms in which the structures of domination and exploitation are "lived." In that sense, these

discourses do have the function of "reproducing the social relations of production." And yet, in contemporary Caribbean societies, the two systems do *not* perfectly correspond. There are "blacks" at the top of the ladder too, some of them exploiters of other black labor, and some firm friends of Washington's. The world neither divides neatly into its social/natural categories, nor do ideological categories necessarily produce their own "appropriate" modes of consciousness. We are therefore obliged to say that there is a complicated set of articulations between the two systems of discourse. The relationship of equivalences between them is not fixed but has changed historically. Nor is it "determined" by a single cause but rather the result of an "over-determination."

These discourses therefore clearly construct Jamaican society as a field of social difference organized around the categories of race, color and ethnicity. Ideology here has the function of assigning a population into particular classifications organized around these categories. In the articulation between the discourses of class and race-color-ethnicity, (and the displacement effected between them which this makes possible), the latter is constituted as the "dominant" discourse, the categories through which the prevailing forms of consciousness are generated, the terrain within which men and women "move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (Gramsci, 1971, p. 377), the systems of representation through which the people "live the imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 1965/1969, p. 233). This analysis is not an academic one, valuable only for its theoretical and analytic distinctions. The overdetermination of class and race has the most profound consequences—some of them highly contra-

dictory—for the *politics* of Jamaica, and of Jamaican blacks everywhere.

It is possible, then, to examine the field of social relations, in Jamaica and in Britain, in terms of an interdiscursive field generated by at least three different contradictions (class, race, gender), each of which has a different history, a different mode of operation; each divides and classifies the world in different ways. Then it would be necessary, in any specific social formation, to analyze the way in which class, race and gender are articulated with one another to establish particular condensed social positions. Social positions, we may say, are here subject to a "double articulation." They are by definition over-determined. To look at the overlap or "unity" (fusion) between them, that is to say, the ways in which they connote or summon up one another in articulating differences in the ideological field, does not obviate *the particular effects* which each structure has. We can think of political situations in which alliances could be drawn in very different ways, depending on which of the different articulations in play became at that time dominant ones.

Now let us think about this term, "black" within a particular semantic field or ideological formation rather than as a single term: within its chain of connotations. I give just two examples. The first is the chain—black-lazy, spiteful, artful, etc., which flows from the identification of /black/ at a very specific historical moment: the era of slavery. This reminds us that, though the distinction "black/white" that is articulated by this particular chain, is not given simply by the capital-labor contradiction, the social relations characteristic of that specific historical moment are its referent in this particular discursive formation. In the West Indian case, "black," with this connotative resonance,

is a way of representing how the peoples of a distinctive ethnic character were first inserted into the social relations of production. But of course, that chain of connotations is not the only one. An entirely different one is generated within the powerful religious discourses which have so raked the Caribbean: the association of Light with God and the spirit, and of Dark or "blackness" with Hell, the Devil, sin and damnation. When I was a child and I was taken to church by one of my grandmothers, I thought the black minister's appeal to the Almighty, "Lord, lighten our darkness," was a quite specific request for a bit of personal divine assistance.

IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE

It is important to look at the semantic field within which any particular ideological chain signifies. Marx reminds us that the ideas of the past weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living. The moment of historical formation is critical for any semantic field. These semantic zones take shape at particular historical periods: for example, the formation of bourgeois individualism in the 17th and 18th centuries in England. They leave the traces of their connections, long after the social relations to which they referred have disappeared. These traces can be re-activated at a later stage, even when the discourses have fragmented as coherent or organic ideologies. Common sense thinking contains what Gramsci called the traces of ideology "without an inventory." Consider, for example, the trace of religious thinking in a world which believes itself to be secular and which, therefore, invests "the sacred" in secular ideas. Although the logic of the religious interpretation of terms has been broken, the religious repertoire continues to trail through his-

tory, usable in a variety of new historical contexts, reinforcing and underpinning more apparently "modern" ideas.

In this context, we can locate the possibility for ideological struggle. A particular ideological chain becomes a site of struggle, not only when people try to displace, rupture or contest it by supplanting it with some wholly new alternative set of terms, but also when they interrupt the ideological field and try to transform its meaning by changing or re-articulating its associations, for example, from the negative to the positive. Often, ideological struggle actually consists of attempting to win some new set of meanings for an existing term or category, of dis-articulating it from its place in a signifying structure. For example, it is precisely because "black" is the term which connotes the most despised, the dispossessed, the unenlightened, the uncivilized, the uncultivated, the scheming, the incompetent, that it can be contested, transformed and invested with a positive ideological value. The concept "black" is not the exclusive property of any particular social group or any single discourse. To use the terminology of Laclau (1977) and Laclau and Mouffe (1984), the term, despite its powerful resonances, has no necessary "class belongingness." It has been deeply inserted in the past into the discourses of racial distinction and abuse. It was, for long, apparently chained into place in the discourses and practices of social and economic exploitation. In the period of Jamaican history when the national bourgeoisie wished to make common cause with the masses in the fight for formal political independence from the colonizing power—a fight in which the local bourgeoisie, not the masses, emerged as the leading social force— "black" was a sort of disguise. In the cultural revolution which swept Jamaica

in the later 1960s and 1970s, when for the first time the people acknowledged and accepted their African-slave-black heritage, and the fulcrum or center of gravity of the society shifted to "the roots," to the life and common experience of the black urban and rural underclasses as representing the cultural essence of "Jamaican-ness" (this is the moment of political radicalization, of mass mobilization, of solidarity with black struggles for liberation elsewhere, of "soul brothers" and "Soul," as well as of reggae, Bob Marley and Rastafarianism), "black" became reconstituted as its opposite. It became the site for the construction of "unity," of the positive recognition of "the black experience": the moment of the constitution of a *new* collective subject—the "struggling black masses." This transformation in the meaning, position and reference of "black" did not follow and reflect the black cultural revolution in Jamaica in that period. It was one of the ways in which those new subjects were *constituted.* The people—the concrete individuals—had always been there. But as subjects-in-struggle for a new epoch in history, they appeared for the first time. Ideology, through an ancient category, was constitutive of their oppositional formation.

So the word itself has no specific class connotation, though it does have a long and not easily dismantled history. As social movements develop a struggle around a particular program, meanings which appear to have been fixed in place forever begin to loose their moorings. In short, the meaning of the concept has shifted as a result of the *struggle* around the chains of connotations and the social practices which made racism possible through the negative construction of "blacks." By invading the heartland of the negative definition, the black move-

ment has attempted to snatch the fire of the term itself. Because "black" once signified everything that was least to be respected, it can now be affirmed as "beautiful," the basis of our positive social identity, which requires and engenders respect amongst us. "Black," then, exists ideologically only in relation to the contestation around those chains of meaning, and the social forces involved in that contestation.

I could have taken any key concept, category or image around which groups have organized and mobilized, around which emergent social practices have developed. But I wanted to take a term which has a profound resonance for a whole society, one around which the whole direction of social struggle and political movement has changed in the history of our own life times. I wanted thereby to suggest that thinking that term in a nonreductionist way within the theory of ideology opens the field to more than an idealistic exchange of "good" or "bad" meanings; or a struggle which takes place only in discourse; and one which is fixed permanently and forever by the way in which particular unconscious processes are resolved in infancy. The field of the ideological has its own mechanisms; it is a "relatively autonomous" field of constitution, regulation

and social struggle. It is not free or independent of determinations. But it is not *reducible* to the simple determinacy of any of the other levels of the social formations in which the distinction between black and white has become politically pertinent and through which that whole "unconsciousness" of race has been articulated. This process has real consequences and effects on how the whole social formation reproduces itself, ideologically. The effect of the struggle over "black," if it becomes strong enough, is that it stops the society reproducing itself functionally, in *that* old way. Social reproduction itself becomes a contested process.

Contrary to the emphasis of Althusser's argument, ideology does not therefore only have the function of "reproducing the social relations of production." Ideology also *sets limits* to the degree to which a society-in-dominance can easily, smoothly and functionally reproduce itself. The notion that the ideologies are always-already inscribed does not allow us to think adequately about the shifts of accentuation in language and ideology, which is a constant, unending process—what Volosinov (1930/1973) called the "multiaccentuality of the ideological sign" or the "class struggle in language."   □

NOTES

[1]The general term, "discourse theory," refers to a number of related, recent, theoretical developments in linguistics and semiotics, and psychoanalytic theory, which followed the "break" made by structuralist theory in the 1970s, with the work of Barthes and Althusser. Some examples in Britain would be recent work on film and discourse in *Screen,* critical and theoretical writing influenced by Lacan and Foucault, and post-Derrida deconstructionism. In the U.S., many of these trends would now be referred to under the title of "post-modernism."

[2]By the term, "articulation," I mean a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not "eternal" but has constantly to be renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections—re-articulations—being forged. It is also important that an articulation between different practices does not mean that they become identical or that the one is dissolved into the

other. Each retains its distinct determinations and conditions of existence. However, once an articulation is made, the two practices can function together, not as an "immediate identity" (in the language of Marx's "1857 Introduction") but as "distinctions within a unity."

[3]This idea is explicated in chapter 3 of *Cultural Studies* (Hall, forthcoming).

[4]This is the subject of chapter 5 of *Cultural Studies* (Hall, forthcoming).

[5]In Lacan (1966/1977), the "Imaginary" signals a relationship of plenitude to the image. It is opposed to the "Real" and the "Symbolic."

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