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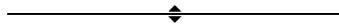
THE RE
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LOUIS
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On the Reproduction of Capitalism

Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses



LOUIS ALTHUSSER

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What Is a Mode of Production?

With his discovery, Marx opened up the ‘continent of history’ to scientific knowledge. He laid the groundwork for a theory constituting the foundation of all the sciences that bear on objects belonging to the ‘continent of history’: not just what is known as ‘history’, sociology, human geography, economics and demographics, but also psychology, ‘social psychology’ [*psychosociologie*] and, generally, the disciplines known as ‘social sciences’ and, still more generally, all the ‘human sciences’. The fact that these social and human sciences do not acknowledge that Marx’s theory is the foundation for their true existence as sciences, the fact that they persist in upholding ideological notions which make them semi-sciences, pseudo-sciences or mere techniques of social adaptation is due to the dominant influence of bourgeois ideology, which prevents them from recognizing Marx as the founder of their true theory. But let us say no more about that.

What matters for present purposes is the fact that Marx, with his discovery, provided us with scientific concepts capable, for the first time, of making intelligible what ‘human societies’ and their histories are – that is, of making the structure, persistence, development, stagnation and decline of societies intelligible, along with the transformations whose sites they are. This does not mean that nothing important was ever said about the nature of ‘human societies’ before Marx – by, for example, ‘philosophers’ (Spinoza, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau and others); *historians (feudal or bourgeois) who discovered the reality of the class struggle*; or economists such as Smith and Ricardo. All the efforts of Marx’s predecessors, however, their most positive aspects included, were dominated by ideological notions and depended in every instance on an (explicit or implicit) idealist ‘philosophy of history’, not on a true scientific theory of history.

Human ‘societies’: let us note straight away that Marx very early (beginning in 1847 with his polemic against Proudhon, *The Poverty of*

Philosophy) rejected the notion of 'society' as non-scientific. This term is in fact fraught with moral, religious and legal overtones; in short, it is an ideological notion that must be replaced by a scientific concept: the concept of 'social formation' (Marx, Lenin). It is not simply a matter of substituting one word for another. The concept of social formation is scientific insofar as it belongs to a *theoretical system* of concepts that has nothing whatsoever to do with the system of ideological notions to which the idealist notion of 'society' must be referred. We cannot now elaborate on this system of concepts, in which the concept of mode of production plays the central role.

Let us simply say, so as to be understood by one and all, that 'social formation' designates every 'concrete society' that has historical existence and is *individualized*, so that it is distinct from other societies contemporaneous with it, and is also distinct from its own past, by virtue of the mode of production dominant in it. Thus we can speak of so-called 'primitive' social formations,¹ the Roman slave-holding social formation, the French social formation based on serfdom (known as 'feudal'), the French capitalist social formation, such-and-such a 'socialist' social formation (in transition towards socialism), and so on.

Marx showed, precisely, that in order to understand how a given social formation functions and what occurs in it (including the revolutionary transformations that shift it from one mode of production to another), we have to bring the central concept of *mode of production* into play.

I FOUR CLASSICAL THESES

I here recall four classical theses in order to show how the central concept of mode of production 'comes into play' in Marxist theory.

1) Every concrete social formation is based on a *dominant* mode of production. The immediate implication is that, in every social formation, there exists more than one mode of production: at least two and often many more.² One of the modes of production in this set is described as *dominant*, the others as dominated. The dominated modes are those surviving from the old social formation's past or the one that may be emerging in its present. The plurality of modes of production in every social formation and the current dominance of one mode of production

See Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and 'Primitive' Societies: Two Studies*, trans. Mary Klopfer, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972.

² Analyzing the late nineteenth-century Russian social formation, Lenin distinguished four modes of production!

over those that are disappearing or coming into being make it possible to account for the contradictory complexity of the empirical facts observable in every concrete social formation, but also for the contradictory tendencies that clash within it and find expression as its history (the observable real transformations in the economy, politics and ideology).

2) What constitutes a mode of production? It is *the unity* between what Marx calls the productive forces and the relations of production. Thus every mode of production, dominant or dominated, has, in its unity, its productive forces and relations of production.

How should we conceive of this unity? Marx speaks of the ‘correspondence’ between the productive forces and relations of production. ‘Correspondence’, however, is just a descriptive term. The theory of the very special ‘nature’ of the *unity* between the productive forces and the relations of production of a determinate mode of production has yet to be constructed.

This first theory commands the theory of an altogether different problem, too often confused with the first: the theory of another ‘unity’ – quite different, because necessarily ‘contradictory’ – between the dominant and dominated mode or modes of production in a given social formation. For example, when we say that the relations of production no longer ‘correspond’ to the productive forces and that this contradiction is the driving force behind every social revolution,³ it is no longer a question or no longer just a question of non-correspondence between the productive forces and relations of production of *one* given mode of production. In the great majority of cases, doubtless, it is also a question of the contradiction, in the social formation under consideration, between the productive forces *of the whole set of modes of production* in that social formation, on the one hand, and, on the other, the relations of production *of the mode of production currently dominant*. This distinction is crucial. If we fail to make it, we will talk wildly and inaccurately about ‘correspondence’ and ‘non-correspondence’, confusing two very different types of unity: first, the unity, internal to a mode of production, between its productive forces and relations of production, and, second, the (always contradictory) ‘unity’ between the dominated modes of production and the dominant mode of production.

3) When we consider a mode of production in the unity productive forces/relations of production that constitutes it, it appears that this

3 See the famous Preface to Karl Marx’s 1859 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, [trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1975–2002, vol. 29, pp. 261–5].

unity has a material basis: the productive forces. But these productive forces are nothing at all if they are not rendered operational, and they can only operate *in and under the aegis of* their relations of production. This leads to the conclusion that, on the basis of the existing productive forces and *within the limits they set, the relations of production play the determinant role*. The whole of *Capital* and all of Lenin's and Mao's work comprise a commentary on this thesis; Marxists have not always acknowledged this. On this decisive thesis, the reader may consult Appendix 1.

4) This last thesis, which bears on the determinant element *in* the unity between productive forces/relations of production, and thus in the economic 'base' or 'infrastructure', should not be conflated with another classic thesis, which affirms that in another very complex unity, that which unites the superstructure (law, state, ideologies) with the base (the unity of the productive forces and the relations of production), the economic infrastructure is '*determinant in the last instance*'. The thesis that I just presented, Thesis 3, must therefore itself be placed under the present thesis. Thesis 3 can accordingly be stated as follows: in the base, which, in the last instance, determines everything that happens in the superstructure – in the base, that is, in the unity productive forces/relations of production – the relations of production are determinant, on the basis of the existing productive forces and within the material limits they set.

We have to be very careful here.

We need only compare these four theses with each other to see that we are virtually identifying the mode of production with the unity between productive forces/relations of production, which is to say that we are classing the mode of production with the base. Simply in order to evoke an issue that is the subject of still unsettled theoretical debates,⁴ we shall say that we are provisionally leaving aside the question as to whether we should ultimately define a mode of production 'in the narrow sense' (*as we are doing here*) – namely, by bringing only its productive forces and relations of production into play – or whether we should, rather, affirm that every mode of production necessarily 'induces' or includes its own superstructure.

For some time, we favoured the latter hypothesis. *Provisionally*, we now prefer to maintain the 'narrow' sense of the concept mode of production (unity of the productive forces and the relations of production peculiar to a given mode of production), while affirming, again provisionally, that the question of the superstructure pertains, rather, to

4 An inkling of these debates may be found in Poulantzas and Terray.

the nature of the concrete *social formation*, in which at least two modes of production are combined under the dominance of one of them. In the present state of our knowledge, it seems to us preferable to retain the present hypothesis, while reserving the right to modify it, should that prove necessary.

II THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES

In what follows, we shall consider what happens in a *single* mode of production.

A mode of production is, as its name indicates, a way or manner (a mode) of producing. Of producing what? The material goods indispensable to the material existence of the men, women and children living in a given social formation. A way of 'producing' is a way of 'tackling nature', since it is from nature and nature alone that all social formations, which do not live on thin air or the Word of God, extract the material goods necessary for their subsistence (food, clothing, shelter, and so on), that is, for their stagnation or 'development'.

A way of tackling nature in order to *wrest* from it the goods required for subsistence (hunting, gathering, fishing, extraction of minerals, and so on) or *make it produce* them (agriculture, animal husbandry) is not a state of mind, a behavioural style, or a mood. It is a set of *labour processes* that together form a system constituting the production process of a particular mode of production. A labour process⁵ is a series of systematically regulated operations performed by the *agents* of that labour process, who 'work on' *an object of labour* (raw material, unprocessed material, domesticated animals, land, and so on), using, to that end, *instruments of labour* (more or less sophisticated tools, and then machines, and so on) in such a way as to 'transform' the object of labour into, on the one hand, *products* capable of satisfying immediate human needs (food, clothing, shelter, and so on) and, on the other hand, *instruments of labour* for the purpose of ensuring that this labour process can continue to be carried out in future.

In every labour process, the agents of that process must be 'qualified', that is, capable of properly using the instruments of labour in accordance with specific technical rules. Hence they must have technical experience of a kind that is rigorously *defined by*, because *required by*, the existing instruments of labour; if they did not have such

5 For an analysis of the labour process, see Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35, pp. 187–95.

experience, the instruments of labour would be improperly used or not used at all.

Every generation of individuals always finds the existing instruments of labour to hand; it can improve them or not. In any case, the limits on these improvements (or innovations) depend on the state of existing instruments, those that the generation in question has inherited, not invented itself. The technical level of the agents of a labour process is thus always *determined* by the nature of the instruments of labour and, more generally (see below), by the existing *means of production*. Hence the following important Marxist thesis: in the productive forces, in which people figure as agents of the labour process, it is not these people but, rather, *the means of production which are the determining element*. Marx was always categorical on this point.⁶

Only for the last 200 years has it been possible to observe, as a consequence of the capitalist mode of production, a constant revolution in the means of production, a consequence of the development of technology, linked, in its turn, to the development of the natural sciences. For millennia, however, modifications of the means of production were either virtually non-existent or all but imperceptible. The constant modernization of technology specific to the capitalist mode of production,⁷ including the spectacular developments that we have been witnessing for the past thirty years (above all, atomic energy and electronics), do not alter Marx's thesis by a jot.⁸

Throughout the labour process, its agents either work in a non-cooperative mode (isolated fishermen or hunters, small 'independent' producers) or cooperate. The introduction of cooperation and, above all,

6 In this connection, one is quite simply stupefied to read, in a recent official work by Soviet Marxist theorists, *Fundamental Principles of Historical Materialism*, the following phrase, which *revises* the classical thesis: [TN: The phrase is missing from Althusser's manuscript.]

7 Marx points out time and again that one of the essential characteristics of the capitalist mode of production, one distinguishing it from previous productive modes, is that it *incessantly 'revolutionizes'* the existing means of production. Thus what is occurring today comes under a classical Marxian thesis.

8 I note the incontestable topicality of this thesis of Marx's, at a time when the *conjunction* between the vogue of the Marxist-'humanist' interpretation, on the one hand, and, on the other, the unbridled technocratic lyricism that the 'impetuous development of the sciences and technology' inspires in certain Marxists, leads them to formulate theses tending to affirm 'man's' primacy over the means of production. These theses are converted into hazy formulas about, say, 'the increasingly determinant role, in production, of intellectuals as elements of the collective worker', or the revisionist thesis that '*science has become a direct productive force*'. We shall return at our leisure to these seemingly 'theoretical' questions.

its different forms also depends, in the final analysis, on the state of the existing means of production. People can fish all alone, angling with hook and line or using a small net. When, however, they possess long-range trawlers and huge nets, the kind of fishing they practice mandates a specific form of cooperation.

The existing dominant relations of production and the politics that correspond to them can either impose or allow forms of cooperation which, *with the same productive forces*, make possible results that the previous relations of production and politics ruled out. For instance, cooperation based on colonial ‘forced labour’ (on big plantations owned by whites, or for road-building and other construction projects) made it possible to achieve – using the same instruments of production as in the past, or other, almost equally rudimentary instruments – results that had previously been beyond the reach of the colonized ‘social formations’. For instance, the very large-scale cooperation practised in China after the Revolution in order to build gigantic earthen dams, especially in the People’s Communes (to cite just this one example), made it possible, without in any way altering the existing instruments of production (small baskets carried on shoulder poles, hoes and shovels), to achieve results that were impossible and unimaginable in the older forms of familial cooperation (individual peasants) or cooperation based on a single village.

Let us also simply note the following: every productive process in a mode of production involves *several different* labour processes, which must therefore be carefully combined in such a way that the manpower needed to perform the various tasks (seasonal or not) suffices to accomplish the whole of the labour process called for by that one mode of production. By itself, this requirement necessarily implies a *division of labour*, even if it takes only rudimentary forms.

To take an extremely simple example, we can observe, in the surviving ‘primitive’ African social formations, divisions of labour between different labour processes: the men hunt and build the huts, in regulated forms of cooperation, while the women, for their part, tend the vegetable garden or raise the small barnyard animals, pound the grain, and so on. We can also observe crossover phenomena: the same men switch from one labour process to the other, depending on the season.

This simple example provides some idea of the extreme complexity that reigns even in a ‘primitive’ social formation’s productive process. As one can readily imagine, the process of production becomes infinitely more complex in our highly industrialized ‘modern societies’.

Let us leave it at that and go back to our basic concepts.

Our contention is that the productive forces of a mode of production are constituted by the *unity* of a complex, regulated interplay [*jeu*] of factors that brings on stage:

– the *object of labour*: nature, in various forms (including the ‘natural energy’ that must always, under all circumstances, be either ‘harnessed’, even if what is involved is simply wind or a flowing stream, or exploited (gravity); but, above all, raw material, whether passive (minerals) or active (animals, land);⁹

– the *instruments of production*;

– the *agents of production* (or labour-power).

Marx uses the term *means of production* for the set encompassing the object of labour + instruments of labour (or production). Marx uses the term *labour-power* for the set encompassing the various ways in which activity (either physical or of some other kind) is expended by the set of agents of the labour process, that is, individuals who have the technical skills needed to utilize the existing means of production in the required cooperative or non-cooperative forms.

If we recapitulate these terms, we arrive at the famous equation: *productive forces* = (*unity*) *means of production* + *labour-power*.

All this holds for a *single* mode of production.

This equation has the theoretical advantage of highlighting the set *means of production*; that is, it distinguishes this set from the set ‘labour-power’. This distinction is essential to understanding what happens in every ‘class society’ – for example, in a capitalist social formation, in which the *means of production* are held, not by those who dispose of *labour-power*, but by individuals outside the labour process: capitalist exploiters.

Before going further, let me bring a theoretical problem with far-reaching implications to my readers’ attention, including those of my readers who may have illuminating suggestions as to how to resolve it.

It will have been understood that it is, to begin with, crucial to distinguish the productive forces specific to *one* particular mode of production from the *whole set of productive forces* in a concrete social formation, in which several modes of production ‘coexist’ under the dominance of one

9 Livestock and the land have a double status: they are objects of labour (livestock must be ‘raised’ and land must be ‘cultivated’) but, at the same time, ‘machines’ of a sort, since they themselves work on an ‘object of labour’ with which they are provided: pasturage or animal fodder and, in the case of the land, seed. This twofold character of livestock and land is of decisive importance when it comes to understanding the very special nature of agricultural labour – as well as the role played by the concept of the differential ‘fertility’ of land in the theory of ground rent (see Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, Part 3, trans. David Fernbach, London, Verso, 1981).

of them. The set of the latter forces of production is the set of the productive forces of the different modes of production coexisting in a social formation under the dominance of one of them. In this case, the plural 'productive forces' seems to be justified by the plurality of the modes of production, although the set of these productive forces obviously cannot be a simple aggregate, a simple sum, but has to possess, even in its contradictions, a kind of unity: the unity conferred on it by the dominance of the mode of production that dominates the others. This is in itself a problem for which we do not yet have a real theory.

The principal difficulty, however, has to do with the plural of the 'productive forces' belonging to *one* given mode of production. We have, in a word, described the productive forces and presented their unity in the form of a list and a sum: object of labour + instruments of production + labour-power.¹⁰ Hegel long ago warned us that a sum is just a sum: that is, to be very rigorous, it is the absence of a concept, if not, as Spinoza put it in another context, 'the sanctuary of ignorance'. To be less rigorous, let us say that a sum is the index of a provisional lacuna that clearly has to be filled.

For we clearly 'sense' that the productive forces put into operation in the various labour processes in the productive process of a *single* mode of production are not just *added up* or added up any which way. Addition is the record of an observation that 'counts things up'. We have to set out from it, of course, but we cannot remain at that level. We suspect that what we are describing in the form of a sum is not a random aggregation, but a specific combination that has, for each mode of production, a *specific unity* which, precisely, founds the material possibility of this combination or *conjunction*; we come to terms with it empirically by breaking it down into the form of elements that we then *add up*. Among the important theoretical questions requiring clarification, then, we must include the question of the type of unity which, for each mode of production, organizes its productive forces in specific forms.¹¹

However this last difficulty is resolved, we have, by bringing the concept of productive forces into play, begun to form a clearer picture

10 We find this sum in the form of a list in Joseph V. Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, New York, International Publishers, 1970.

11 In *Reading Capital* [trans. Ben Brewster, London, Verso, 1997], Etienne Balibar has undertaken this investigation for the transition from manufacturing to big industry. I would like to point out to those who have read or will read Balibar's discussion that what he has given us, albeit in keeping with the spirit of *Capital, is not in Capital*; it is an original, fruitful 'contribution'. This is worth noting, in order to distinguish those who make the risky attempt to *discover something* from those who content themselves with *repeating* things they owe to others so as not to have to 'think for themselves'.

of one of the two elements of the mode of production. In question here, after all, are facts that anyone who keeps his eyes open and is reasonably methodical can, if not discover, then at least recognize. It is not on the subject of the forces of production that we can decently pick a quarrel with Marx. The vast majority of 'experts' (the 'economists') will agree, but will further observe that all that goes without saying. They will even add, 'We have understood what a mode of production is: productive forces set in motion in certain labour processes by agents with special skills.'

From the foregoing, a good many 'experts' will conclude: 1) that Marx invented nothing new, since all this is blindingly obvious (without suspecting that it has only been blindingly obvious since Marx); and, above all, 2) that we have to do, in all this, with nothing more than *technology* pure and simple: material technology (tools, machines), technical training of the workforce, and technical organization of the labour process. The experts will feel reassured, and their 'spontaneous' tendency, which is technicist or technocratic, will be reinforced. Since they find themselves, unfortunately, in certain Marxists' company in this matter, everything will, for them, be for the best in the best of all (bourgeois) worlds.

In fact, we must squarely rebut them. The productive forces do not suffice to account for a mode of production, since they are just *one* of its elements. The other is represented by the relations of production.

Marx effectively shows in *Capital* (as does Lenin throughout his work) that the mobilization of the productive forces (means of production + labour-power) is incomprehensible unless we understand that it takes place under the aegis of definite relations of production, which play the determinant role in the unity productive forces/relations of production.

III THE RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

What are the relations of production? They are relations of a very special kind between (in classless societies) the agents of production, when all the members of a social formation are agents of production, or between (in class societies) the agents of production on the one hand and, on the other, personages *who are not agents of production*, although they intervene in production.

These personages hold [*détournement*] the means of production and *appropriate* a share of the products of the labour of the agents of production without providing anything 'in return': they appropriate a share of surplus labour. Thus they may, *so to speak*, be found at both 'ends' of the

productive process, since they own [*détiennent la propriété de*] the means of production *before* the process of production and, after it, *appropriate* its product, conceding only a *share* of it to the agents of production so that the latter may live and reproduce. They keep the remainder (in the capitalist regime, surplus-value) for themselves.

Of course, they do not ‘consume’ the whole of this remainder at celebrations or spend it on other personal whims. They must consecrate a *share* of this remainder (that is, of surplus labour) to renewing the means of production in the requisite proportions, because means of production are gradually depleted (a mine) or wear out (tools, machines).¹² If those who hold the means of production do not take care to renew them, they will end up, one fine day, no longer holding them at all and be unable to avoid falling to the level of individuals of the sort who have nothing to sell but the strength of their two hands, when they do not sell their bodies. (One can find, in Balzac or Zola, stories of rich heirs who ‘fritter away’ the family fortune and end up as wage-workers in what was once their own factory – or in the gutter.)

Thus we can, at the point we have now reached, define the relations of production in class societies as relations of the one-sided *distribution* of the means of production between those holding them and those without them. We can add that this distribution of the means of production determines the distribution of the goods produced.

Here, however, we have to be very careful.

We may be tempted to think: Granted, there are people who hold the means of production and others without them. It is all a question of ‘*property*’. So what? What does that change as far as the labour process, for example steel-making, is concerned and, generally speaking, as far as the mobilization of the productive forces is concerned? We have been told that the personages who hold the means of production and who appropriate surplus labour are, ‘*so to speak*’, *at both ends of the process: before and after*. But then the process of production remains what it is: mobilization of the productive forces, full stop. Our ‘economists’ will once again conclude: ‘process of production’ = ‘the reign of *technology*’, relegating ‘all that business about the ownership’ of this or that to the level of secondary considerations.

Yes, precisely: we said that these individuals are, ‘so to speak’, at both ends of the process of production. If we take things at the level of pure appearances, our ‘economists’ (there are even ‘Marxists’ among them) are

12 Machines wear out not only ‘materially’ but also ‘historically’: they are made obsolete by new, improved machines, the results of technological progress.

right: who holds or does not hold the means of production is simply a matter of *legal* clauses, a question of ‘*property*’. ‘I’m the one’, says the capitalist, ‘who owns the means of production, and the legal consequence (have a look at the Civil Code) is that I also own its products; I’m free to concede a share of them to my workers in the form of wages – something that is, moreover, quite “normal” – in exchange for their “labour”.’

But we said ‘*so to speak*’. That was a way of suggesting that all this is not true. We can now show why.

Capitalist relations of production are relations of capitalist exploitation. To demonstrate this, we shall, from now on, restrict our analysis to what goes on in the capitalist mode of production – to be very precise, in a social formation, such as the contemporary French social formation (I am writing in 1969), dominated by the capitalist mode of production.

The fact that the capitalist mode of production is dominant in this social formation means that there still exist elements of one or more earlier modes of production in France, which is to say, in the case to hand, ‘sectors’ in which decomposition products of the feudal mode of production, the mode of production based on serfdom, still endure – big landed estates,¹³ to begin with (the basis for ground rent), followed by the ‘small independent producers’, urban or rural craftsmen (referred to as ‘small family farmers’), and so on.

However, the capitalist mode of production dominates these archaic forms, not just by virtue of the transformation of ‘natural’ ground rent into capitalist ground rent, but also by virtue of the capitalist market’s nearly total domination of the surviving ‘small independent producers’. As for buyers’, sellers’ or producers’ cooperatives (the last-named are extremely rare), they are incontestably part of the capitalist mode of production, constituting a direct ‘anticipation’ of the socialist mode of production only in the fancy of a handful of opportunists or superannuated utopian thinkers.

The fact that France 1969 is a social formation dominated by the capitalist mode of production means that *production* (of socially useful goods or use-values, marketed in the form of commodities or exchange-values – thus the real, effective production of objects of real social utility) takes place

13 Let us recall one effect of this ‘survival’ (= the ‘class’ of big landowners) that has nothing to do with the capitalist mode of production. It is well known that Lenin defended the thesis (which is ‘imaginary’, but interesting from a theoretical standpoint) that, in a ‘purely capitalist’ social formation (one without residues of the ‘feudal’ mode of production), the land could or even should be . . . ‘nationalized’, that is, the property of the state, which would rent it to capitalist farmer-entrepreneurs (and charge a purely capitalist ‘rent’, that is, a differential rent shorn of absolute rent).

under the aegis of capitalist relations of production. But these capitalist relations of *production* are simultaneously relations of capitalist *exploitation*. And we shall see in a moment that it is necessary to go further still.

Here, we must beware. The point is not to conflate everything and, as soon as it has been understood that capitalist production is simultaneously capitalist exploitation, to whisk production off stage and consider only exploitation. One of the effects of the capitalist mode of production (among others) is effectively to *produce* objects of social utility that are consumed either ‘individually’, ‘collectively’¹⁴ (bread, sugar, apartments, automobiles, radios, airplanes and also . . . weapons) or ‘productively’ (as means of production). Every mode of production in every social formation, whether or not there are social classes in that social formation, has, among other effects, this basic material effect. In this regard, and depending on the existing – today, international – level of technology,¹⁵ ‘Soviet’ or ‘Chinese’ wheat is well and truly *wheat*, identical to ‘capitalist’ wheat, and an automobile, ‘Soviet’ or ‘Chinese’, is well and truly an automobile, identical to a ‘capitalist’ automobile, simply because social and political categories (such as ‘socialist’ or ‘capitalist’) do not apply to objects of social utility or even to means of production. To be sure, those wishing to efface all distinctions between social regimes invoke the international (because physical) nature of products of social utility (of the overwhelming majority of such products) and technology in order to justify their theories of ‘industrial societies’ or other such drivel.

We can even do them the favour of giving them, for free and to all appearances, an additional argument, by saying that all identical labour processes or even all labour processes in general, no matter what the mode of production or ‘regime’ under which they are carried out, mobilize the invariable elements of a labour process: object of labour, instrument of labour, labour-power. Here the imaginations of our utopian thinkers, apologists for neo-capitalism and reformists start churning and promise us the moon (either the disappearance of classes or communism) just as soon as automation becomes universal . . . because automation will put an end, ‘to all intents and purposes’, to nearly every intervention by *labour-power* . . . and, consequently, to the exploitation of labour-power!

Let us be serious. While the capitalist mode of production does indeed

14 Be it recalled that *Capital* contains neither a theory of the basic unit of production nor a theory of the basic unit of consumption. We need to elaborate both theories.

15 Technology has not always been international. It became international with the constitution of the ‘*global market*’ or ‘universal history’, which really only dates from the period in which the capitalist mode of production came into existence.

produce objects of social utility, it produces them only under the aegis of very specific relations of production (we have briefly seen which ones, in a very provisional way) that simultaneously make them relations of *exploitation*. The same thing holds for all class societies, but these relations of exploitation take a specific form in capitalist social formations.

Let us now see in what respect capitalist relations of production are relations of capitalist exploitation. In principle, this finds very concrete expression in the following way.

The *means of production*: the unprocessed material processed in a factory, the factory buildings, the instruments of production (machines) in them, and so on, are the sole property of a capitalist proprietor (or corporation – that makes no difference here). It likewise makes no difference whether the capitalist proprietor directs the process of production himself, as his ‘orchestra’s’ ‘conductor’ (Marx) or delegates this task to a factory director.

In contrast, *labour-power*, in each of its atomistic subdivisions, belongs to a large number of individuals who possess no means of production, but only their personal ‘labour-power’, with different degrees of qualification. These individuals sell the use of their labour-power for a set length of time to the owner of the means of production. In exchange for wages, they are hired by the day, the week or (in certain cases) the month. Wage-workers always *advance* the use of their labour-power, as Marx shows, inasmuch as they are paid *at the end* of the day, week or month. Among these wage-workers, there are different categories of ‘personnel’: common labourers and unskilled workers at the lowest level, then skilled workers, technicians of various levels, supervisors of various kinds, production engineers and various managers. There are also office workers (typists, accountants, and so on).¹⁶

As everyone knows, real ‘production’ cannot take place unless the means of production (which do not ‘work’ all by themselves) are set into relation with – and set to work by – labour-power, that is, *waged* workers. But this act of bringing wage-workers into relation with means of production belonging, not to them, but to the capitalist owner of those means

16 I leave aside two questions that are today ‘on the agenda’, and for good reason: that of the difference between productive and non-productive workers, and that of the ‘collective worker’. Ink is being spilled on the latter concept in the same proportions as it is ‘fuelling hopes’. Let me point out that the concept of the collective worker, if it is to be brought into play from the opposite theoretical standpoint, has to be paired off with an unprecedented concept that I submit to the reflection of ‘collective worker’ fans: the concept of the ‘collective exploiter’. The latter bears a name familiar from Marx himself: *the holders and the agents or auxiliaries, direct or indirect, of capital*.

of production – the act thanks to which material production can proceed – takes place, precisely, in a capitalist regime, and only within relations of control of the means of production in the one case and, in the other, non-control of the same means of production (those who have no means of production at their disposal have nothing but their individual labour-power). These relations *automatically convert capitalist relations of production into relations of exploitation.*

We have already seen where this exploitation resides (this is Marx's great discovery): in the value that the capitalist concedes to the 'free' workers in exchange for the purchase of the use of their labour-power. The capitalist concedes to his wage-workers (contractually) only their wages, that is, only *part* of the value produced by their labour. By law, all the products remain in the capitalist's hands: their value represents: 1) the value of the commodities that are used up in the process of production carried out by the workers, such as raw material, wear and tear on machines, and so on; and 2) a surplus product that is itself divided up (unequally) into two portions: the wage conceded to the workers and the 'surplus-value' extorted from them, which is pocketed by the capitalist without further ado. And 'everyone is happy', says the capitalist, because he has 'risked' his capital, because he surely must pocket a 'profit' that rewards him for . . . the 'risk' he has run, and because the workers' labour has been paid for at 'its value'.

The trouble with this 'line of reasoning', which Marx took to pieces, is that: 1) no category, legal or of any other kind, can register the 'necessity' of giving the person who is lucky enough to hold capital a profit 'in exchange . . . for the risk' he has run, which, moreover, he generally does not run at all; and 2) the value conceded to the individual worker in the form of a wage by no means represents the 'value of his labour', but only the value required to reproduce his individual labour-power, a value that has nothing to do with the 'value of labour', an expression that, properly speaking, is devoid of all theoretical meaning.¹⁷

This is why the capitalist relations of production that ensure the real production of use-values (or products of social utility) simultaneously ensure, inexorably, capital's exploitation of labour-power. That is why capitalist relations of production are simultaneously relations of capitalist exploitation.

To this, we must add a determination specific to the capitalist regime. A number of readers will agree that the foregoing analysis is realistic.

17 Labour, the 'quantity' of which serves to measure/compare the value of products, cannot, by definition, 'have value' (Marx) (yellow logarithm).

They will, however, add: granted, the capitalist mode of production is indeed a mode of production that produces objects of social utility, but the capitalist avails himself of the *opportunity* that this production provides in order to squeeze surplus-value from workers. In sum, the capitalist is a man shrewd enough to ‘cash in’ on the real production of objects of social utility required to meet ‘men’s’ needs.

This is not at all true. Marx shows that, contrary to most earlier modes of production, for which this explanation may perhaps hold, capitalism is a mode of production whose overriding objective is to produce, not objects of social utility, but surplus-value and capital itself. That is what is meant by the common expression which has it that the driving force behind the capitalist regime is the ‘profit motive’. We should say, more rigorously, that the driving force behind capitalism is the production of surplus-value *by means* of the production of objects of social utility; it is the *uninterrupted* growth, and thus the growth *on an extended scale*,¹⁸ of exploitation *by means* of production.

In the capitalist mode of production, the production of objects of social utility is wholly subordinate to the ‘production’ of surplus-value, that is to say, the production of capital on an extended scale, or what Marx calls ‘the valorization of value’. The capitalist mode of production does indeed produce goods of social utility (‘use-values’), but it does not produce them as objects of social utility for the seemingly primordial ‘purpose’ of satisfying social needs. It produces them as commodities that are produced through purchase of the commodity known as labour-power, and it does so for one purpose and one purpose alone: to ‘produce’ surplus-value, that is to say, to extort it from workers thanks to the unequal play between two values: the value of the surplus-product and the value of wages.

In a day and age in which both ideologues of neo-capitalism and neo-anarchists are sweeping exploitation under the carpet, the former by way of a defence of the notion that the capitalist economy no longer exists, that we have a ‘service economy’, the latter by declaring that the essence of exploitation is repression, we need to recall this truth that Marx brought to light. Everything that happens in a capitalist social formation, including the forms of state repression that accompany it (we shall see which forms and why), *is rooted in the material base of capitalist relations of production, which are relations of capitalist exploitation, and in a system of production in which production is itself subordinated to exploitation and thus to the production of capital on an extended scale.*

18 The concept of the ‘extended scale’ plays an altogether crucial role in the theory of the capitalist mode of production, as we shall have occasion to confirm.

Before we come to these notorious forms of state repression, however, we must examine more closely, even if only by adducing a few limited examples, the manner in which this primacy of the relations of capitalist exploitation is expressed and exercised in the forms of capitalist production itself, its technical forms included.

IV THE SOCIAL DIVISION OF LABOUR IS THE REALITY BEHIND
THE 'TECHNICAL' DIVISION OF LABOUR: PRODUCTION,
EXPLOITATION AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN PRODUCTION

The thesis that we shall be defending is a perfectly classical thesis. We find the basis for it everywhere in Marx's *Capital*, Lenin's work, and the work of their intellectual heirs. It runs as follows:

1) The relations of production radically determine *all* the seemingly 'technical' relations of the division and organization of labour.

2) By virtue of what we have said so far, since the relations of production are relations of capitalist exploitation, the relations of capitalist exploitation radically determine, not in general and indistinctly, but *in specific forms*, all the apparently 'technical' relations that come into play in material production itself.

In other words, the relations of exploitation are not just expressed in terms of the extortion of surplus value, which is consecrated by wages and all the effects of the market economy. Exploitation has its primary effect in wages, but it has other specific effects in the practice of production itself, in the guise of the division of labour.

To bring out the existence of some of these effects, we introduced the concept of the *social division* of labour some time ago¹⁹ (in a sense different from the one in which Marx uses the term), opposing the social to the technical division of labour. Marx employs the expression '*social division of labour*' in *Capital* to designate what we propose to call *the division of social labour*, that is, the division of social production into different branches: agriculture and industry, to begin with, but also different branches of industry. Because the term is convenient and seems to us to be very apt, we propose to retain the terminological innovation that we introduced then. Thus we shall use the term *social*

19 In 'Problèmes étudiants', an essay that was published in *La Nouvelle Critique* [no. 152 (January 1964), pp. 80–111; partially translated by Dick Bateman as 'Student Problems', *Sublation* (1967), pp. 14–22, reprinted in *Radical Philosophy*, 170 (November–December 2011), pp. 11–15]. We here rectify the 'technicist' and 'theoreticist' tendency that marked some of the arguments in that essay.

division of labour to designate the effect that the relations of production, *qua* relations of exploitation, have at the heart of the production process itself.

Our ‘adversary’ is, here too, the same as before: namely, the technocratic-technicist ideology that we may describe as ‘*economistic*’.

As we have already seen, every mode of production mobilizes a combination of labour processes which require that certain defined operations be carried out by qualified agents in a strictly defined order and in strictly defined forms. For each labour process, this entails a technical division into defined *posts* of various kinds, as well as organization of the labour process and thus management of the organization resulting from the defined division of labour. This holds for every labour process; it holds *a fortiori* when a process of production subsumes, as it always does, a large number of labour processes.

From all this, our stalwart ‘economists’ promptly draw the very simple conclusion that only *purely technical* phenomena occur in the production process: a purely technical division of labour, a purely technical organization of labour, and a purely technical management of labour. Invoking the requirements of production itself, they will argue that division, organization and management of labour are surely needed to ensure production; that there must therefore be ‘manual workers’ and ‘intellectual workers’, and thus workers and diversely qualified technicians on the one hand and, on the other, the whole hierarchy of managers, administrators, engineers, upper-level technicians, supervisors, and so on. These are all ‘blindingly self-evident truths’. Did Marx himself not acknowledge the fact? There has to be someone to supervise each department on the shop-floor, and the whole ‘orchestra’ needs a ‘conductor’ to organize the division of labour and lead the resulting organization. To which our worthy ‘economists’ add that all one has to do is to ‘humanize’ relations in the enterprise between supervisors, engineers and managers on the one hand and workers on the other. This provides workaday proof of the fact that ‘*economistic*’ ideology and ‘*humanist*’ ideology are two faces of one and the same ideology. We need only read Louis Armand or [François] Bloch-Lainé.

But all Marx’s work is a commentary on the fact, and all the workers’ practical experience – their grinding, pitiless daily experience of the real relations that dominate and regulate the ‘technical’ division and organization of labour – is proof of the fact that these ‘self-evident truths’ about the division, organization and purely technical management of labour are pure and simple illusions or, worse, pure and simple impostures, milked for all they are worth in the capitalist class struggle against the workers’

class struggle for the purpose of maintaining workers in the condition of the exploited.²⁰

It is indeed in production itself that the implacable class struggle between exploiters and exploited is rooted, for it is present there at every moment.

The primary argument of the capitalist class struggle consists, at this level, in the ideological imposture about the 'purely technical' division, organization and management of labour. Squarely taking our stand, with Marx, against this mystification, we affirm that all the *forms* in which the putatively 'technical' functions of the division of labour are carried out are direct or indirect effects of the dominant relations of production (in our country, capitalist relations of production). Consequently, we maintain that every technical division of labour is in fact a *social division of labour*. As Marxists, we must take the view that all arguments to the effect that the currently existing forms of the division of labour are purely technical, and all such presentations of them should be rejected and denounced as pure and simple arguments of the capitalist class struggle. I will restrict myself to developing three points to prove it.

1) Every process of production entails the existence of several labour processes and thus of a set number of *posts* for qualified labour, including the posts required to organize, coordinate and manage that process of production. In the final analysis, the state of development of the means of production, first and foremost the technological unity object of labour/instruments of labour,²¹ commands the way these posts are defined.

In our capitalist class society, these posts are filled on the basis of an implacable, insuperable class division. Posts requiring 'manual labour' of the kind performed by workers as well as certain posts for technicians and low-level supervisors (foremen and, at the limit, the heads of the various departments on the shop-floor) are *held for life* by members of the working class. The other posts, involving somewhat more elevated

20 The fact that engineers, even young engineers, who are stuffed with a heavy dose of 'economistic-humanist' ideology in their school years, really 'experience' (for themselves, and even when they have the 'best of intentions') their status and work as *purely technical* makes no difference here. Given that they are educated in their schools in conformity with an ideology which, by a happy coincidence (such is not always the case: hence the 'friction' that can indeed go quite far when 'circumstances' are favourable, as happened in May, for example), also holds sway in the enterprises in which they are employed, how can anyone expect them not to 'experience' their ideology as if it were the 'nature of things'? It takes no ordinary experiences to disabuse them, assuming that they wish to be disabused when it is not in their interest to be.

21 See Balibar's demonstration in *Reading Capital*.

organizational tasks and, higher up, 'planning' and partial management of the labour process, are monopolized by members of other social strata: engineers and technicians, as well as middle-level and upper-level supervisory personnel. Finally, the most important posts are held by the capitalists themselves or their direct representatives.

The division into social classes is thus present in the division, organization and management of the process of production, *by virtue of the distribution of posts on the basis of the class affiliation* of the individuals who hold them (and, correspondingly, the number of years they have spent in school getting an 'education', whether 'truncated' or complete). The fact that a majority of these individuals – engineers, upper-level supervisory personnel, even directors – are increasingly simple wage-earners²² makes no difference here. *There are class differences among those who work for wages*, for source of revenue does not determine class affiliation.²³ That this division into classes has inexorable effects on the division of labour is strikingly revealed by the circumstance that only a *rare* handful of workers ever succeed in climbing up a few rungs and, thanks to gruelling efforts, acquiring somewhat better qualifications. As for the worker who becomes an engineer or even a manager, he is, in our society, a museum piece exhibited to encourage belief in the 'possibility' of the impossible and the idea that there are no social classes or that someone born a worker can 'rise above his class'. Plain, unvarnished reality cries out against these disgraceful exhibitions.

The immense majority of workers are workers *for life*. The opposite is still more indubitably true: an engineer or upper-level supervisor never 'falls to the level' of a worker, except in the case (an exceedingly rare limit case, and even that is understated) of disastrous economic crises. A pitiless line of class demarcation unmistakably separates two categories of human beings: the 'technical' division of labour is quite simply a mask hiding the fact that some people are permanently 'penned' in the situation of the working class while others can have either high-level posts that are immediately attributed to them, or fairly or (very) broadly open-ended 'careers'.²⁴

22 'Simple wage-earners': we would have to examine the matter more closely even in this respect. An engineer's income, for example, allows him to 'invest his savings' in the stock market, to cite only that case. From the standpoint of his revenue, such an engineer is no longer 'a mere wage-worker', but takes part in capitalist exploitation by way of the redistribution of speculation on surplus-value.

23 The last lines of *Capital*, unfortunately broken off, prove it.

24 Let me point out an extremely tenacious and, from a theoretical and political standpoint, noxious illusion here. What happens in an enterprise (since we are taking an

2) This line of demarcation exactly coincides with another, the one that ‘justifies’ the first. Some people (engineers, upper-level supervisors and technicians, factory directors and all their assistants) hold a *monopoly* on certain contents and forms of knowledge, and thus on a form of ‘know-how’, while others (common labourers, unskilled and skilled workers) are ‘*penned*’ in other contents and forms of know-how. The monopoly of the managers, engineers and upper-level supervisors and technicians has its counterpart in *what is in practice a prohibition* for the great majority of workers, exhausted by the production rate. The myth about all imaginable ‘evening courses’ notwithstanding, this prohibition prevents them from ‘breaking out of’ the contents and forms of ‘knowledge’ in which exploitation pens them.

This segregation, internal to all productive processes, throws the ‘social’ nature of every putatively technical division of labour into sharp relief. It is not always to the advantage of the supposedly ‘knowledgeable’ engineers and other upper-level technicians, who are ignorant of very many things that the workers learn in their practice or through personal effort. This does not go unnoticed by the workers, who often ‘resolve’ problems that baffle certain engineers. The workers judge them accordingly – a circumstance which, combined with the experience of being

enterprise as our example) is never more than an *effect* of what happens in the capitalist system as a whole, and thus an effect that can in certain cases be literally *undecipherable* at the level of the enterprise alone. Precisely that holds for the social ‘distribution’ or ‘penning in’ of people that we are here denouncing. Any ‘engineer’ will tell you: ‘Fine, but so what? I need someone to run a milling machine, so I run an ad. A milling machine operator answers it. I hire him. Is it my fault that he’s *just* a milling machine operator?’ Literally, taken in its own limits, this is not ‘wrong’. But, precisely, ‘competencies’, that is, qualifications or the lack of them, *owe their existence not to the enterprise* as such, but to a system *external* to the enterprise, the school system that ‘educates’, more or less, different individuals (employing mechanisms that we shall be studying) in ways that vary with the milieu from which they come. These mechanisms reinforce the practical, economic and ideological prohibitions (or ‘cultural’ prohibitions, those studied by Bourdieu and Passeron) which *distribute in advance*, on a class basis, the individuals recruited by the enterprise. In this respect, the entrepreneur’s [*sic*] reasoning is not ‘wrong’. It simply proves that he is not ‘in control of’ events. But these events that ‘are beyond his control’ nicely correspond *in advance*, by an amazing coincidence, to a dispositive for ‘distributing-penning in’ people that is always already ready and waiting in his enterprise, for the purpose, precisely, of exploiting workers. The reason is that the school system that supplies ready-made, at the national level, a predisposition for the ‘distribution-penning in’ of people that becomes concrete reality in the enterprise is the capitalist school system corresponding to the capitalist class’s system of exploitation, *not some other school system*. It cannot be other than what it is, whether certain dreamers like that or not, as long as the foundations of capitalist exploitation remain in place – namely, capitalist relations of production.

‘penned’ in one’s position, contributes to class consciousness and the working-class struggle.

As far as the great mass of its effects goes, however, the official monopoly on certain kinds of knowledge and the practical prohibition that keeps workers from acquiring such ‘knowledge’ maintain the omnipotence of the social division of the relations of production in the relations of a supposedly purely technical ‘division of labour’. They do so by virtue of the authority that that monopoly and prohibition exercise over the relations of production. There is never organization, management and division of labour without hierarchical relations of authority. But authority is always on the same side: it is always the same people who wield it and the same who are subjected to it, for all intents and purposes their whole lives long.

3) The proof is that no organization of the labour process in any factory can ever do without *sanctions* enforcing this class domination, without a form of *repression* in no way beholden to policemen, since it is exercised in the division of labour itself and by its agents. Nothing – unless a factory has an ‘ultramodern’ staff trained in the pseudo-scientific techniques of ‘human-resources’ ‘social psychology’, and perhaps not even then – can eliminate the need for functions of surveillance and repression, which may or may not be performed by the same agents who are responsible for the organization of labour: supervisors, engineers, and so on. Fines, demotions, the attribution or withholding of bonuses, and dismissals are workers’ daily lot. An unspoken class struggle plays itself out at this level. In limit cases, it involves hiring procedures accompanied by more or less ‘political’ checks, if not police-like enquiries, as well as constant ‘surveillance’ of trade union representatives and activists and even dismissals, illegal dismissals included. In fact, many employers would rather be fined by a labour court – they lump the fines in with ‘overheads’ – than ‘tolerate’ the presence of an ‘undesirable element’ whose activity, they rightly fear, may end up costing them more than a court condemnation. Most labour inspectors, as everyone knows, have no power to stop ‘abuses’, when they do not collude with those who commit them.

Internal repression is brought to bear on wage-workers by *wage-workers* taking their orders from the management of an enterprise, which is always a class management implementing a policy of exploitation or super-exploitation. This completes the practical demonstration that the purely ‘technical’ division of labour is just a façade for a very different kind of division, the *social division of labour*, which is an effect of the division between classes. It is no accident that the workers call engineers, very

aply, ‘little bosses’. The fact that a certain evolution is under way among some engineers makes no real difference as far as the overall problem is concerned.

That is why the class distinction between ‘manual labour and intellectual labour’, to which Marx refers from *The German Ideology* on, is indeed a reality, despite the crude, crass nature of the formula.²⁵ It is produced by all class societies. It is still produced, and increasingly produced, by modern capitalist class society, despite the ‘spectacular progress of science and technology’ and the growing numbers of ‘intellectual workers’ in new categories, such as ‘researchers’, whom we shall discuss when the time comes. That is why Marx was on the mark when he said that socialism should ‘abolish the distinction between manual and intellectual labour’.

That is why Lenin’s desperate insistence on the need to establish a new, *polytechnic* school education (it unfortunately had small success), which would, moreover, *combine manual labour in real production* with intellectual labour, was – and is – so important.²⁶ That is why it seems to us that the news reaching us through what we can gather about certain experiments of the Cultural Revolution (mandatory training periods in basic production units for ‘intellectuals’ of all orders, ‘controlled’ shake-ups in the distribution of different manual and intellectual jobs among the producers, a real upgrading of jobs involving only implementation to posts of great authority and responsibility) has something to do with the class struggle against the radical determination, in our country, of the ‘technical division of labour’ by the ‘social division of labour’.

There is no further need, in my view, to demonstrate that it is a question of class struggle in all this, and that this class struggle is directly rooted

25 This opposition between ‘manual labour’ and ‘intellectual labour’ obviously has to be much more thoroughly elaborated at the theoretical level, for it is no more than a *first* formulation pointing to an incontestable reality. When Marx coined this phrase, he plainly had in mind very ‘classical’ references to a situation in which those who either did nothing at all (beyond enjoying their fortunes or giving orders to the exploited) flattered themselves that they were all ‘working’ with their intelligence alone, so as to make it clear that the lower classes, since they lacked intelligence, could plainly only work with ‘their hands’ (Plato). Marx was also thinking of big industry, in which the worker is a pure and simple (automatic) extension of the (automatic) machine. The reality of the matter is more complex: no manual labour is possible without a modicum of intellectual ‘labour’. However, as far as the basic *principle* goes, Marx’s distinction is perfectly justified, in that it points to a *real class distinction* the *precise* forms and effects of which require further investigation.

26 In *Schools* (forthcoming), we will publish a long text by Krupskaya on this question. The text leaves no room at all for doubt: it evokes Lenin’s almost desperate efforts and the failure of his educational policies. [EN: The projected book was not successfully completed as planned. See Etienne Balibar’s preface to the present volume.]

in the effects of the relations of production in the process of production itself.

Recapitulating the results of our analysis, we may say the following:

1) Capitalist relations of production are relations of capitalist exploitation. This exploitation is accomplished by way of an extortion of surplus-value consecrated by the limits of the wage relation. Wages are paid in exchange for work performed in productive enterprises.

2) Within this production, the relations of production find expression in effects which, overlapping with and reinforcing the effects of class and class struggle, culminate in the following overriding result: the irreducible dominance exercised by the social division of labour over the 'purely technical' pseudo-division of labour. That social division of labour, an effect of the distribution of individuals in classes, culminates in a double, joint line of demarcation, in the enterprise itself, between a *monopoly on certain jobs* (associated with certain kinds of 'knowledge') reserved for one part of the 'personnel', and the '*penning*' of another part of the 'personnel', the workers, *in subaltern jobs* (plus a prohibition on 'knowing').

3) We can, then, put all of an enterprise's employees in three major categories:

a) The category of those who perform only *functions of production*. It includes all the workers: common labourers, unskilled labourers, skilled labourers and (sometimes) a handful of technicians. These are the proletarians, in the strict sense.

b) The category of those who perform *functions of exploitation* that are always *simultaneously* functions of production (engineers, upper-level technicians, production managers, and so on).

c) The category of those who perform *functions of repression* that may be combined with functions of exploitation (supervisors, from foremen to certain engineers) or may not be (the goons expressly recruited in a number of factories to serve as informers and execute, among other tasks, all the police manoeuvres of the gutter-level anti-union struggle).

All these employees are *waged* and must therefore be counted, on one ground or another, among the 'exploited'. There are, however, major disparities in their wages and working conditions (workers are subjected to exhausting work rhythms, while engineers work under completely different conditions), to say nothing of the basic distinction between functions of pure production on the one hand and the highly varied combination of functions of exploitation, production and repression on the other. When all this is taken into account, it will be agreed that the *forms of class struggle*, unconscious and conscious, that obtain within the process of production alone are *complex in the extreme*.

4) It must in any case be understood that the sole basis and purpose of all the elements (including the three functions) just analyzed is *exploitation* of wage-workers, especially those who are the ‘most exploited’, always more harshly exploited: pure agents of production or *proletarians*.

It must be understood that the whole system of monopoly and ‘penning in’ and all the differences in function, including the repressive ‘function’ (just one of the system’s internal elements), converge to the sole end of accomplishing this exploitation or super-exploitation.

It is an anarchist mistake to claim that ‘production runs on repression’. To do so is to foreground just one of the component elements of the process of production-exploitation, and a subordinate one at that: repression.

How does production-exploitation ‘work’?

First and foremost, it ‘works’ because proletarians and other wage-workers must, just to *survive*, take jobs in the production that exploits them, *since none of the means of production are in their hands*. That is why they show up ‘all by themselves’ at the personnel office and, after they have been given work, set out ‘all by themselves’ to take their jobs on the day-shift or night-shift. That is the absolutely determinant cause, but not the only one.

Production-exploitation also ‘works’ thanks to *the currently existing dispositive of the means of production*, the assembly line [*chaîne*] that pulls the workers in and inexorably forces them to adapt to its pace. As Marx long ago compellingly pointed out, workers have ceased to be ‘working hands’ and have become mere automatic extensions of their machines.

Production-exploitation also ‘works’ thanks to *the bourgeois ideology of ‘work’*. The workers are the first to be subjected to its effects, because it is an ideology of the capitalist class struggle. This ideology that ‘makes the workers go’²⁷ comprises the following basic elements, which are so many illusions and impostures, yet ‘are successful’ as long as the workers’ class struggle does not combat them: 1) the bourgeois legal illusion according to which ‘labour is paid for at its value’; 2) the corresponding legal-moral ideology which has it that one must ‘respect one’s labour contract’ and, through it, the enterprise’s house rules and regulations; 3) the technicist-economistic ideology which has it that ‘there must, after all, be different jobs within the division of labour’ and such-and-such individuals to fill them. This ideology does a great deal more to make workers ‘go’ than repression does.

27 [TN: *Fait marcher*, a key phrase in *On Reproduction*. It means ‘makes go/function/work/fall into line/march’, and also ‘hoaxes’, ‘bamboozles’.]

Production-exploitation 'works', *finally*, with the help of certain repressive measures, some spontaneous, others very carefully thought out (by the 'bosses on the front line'): goons plus 'house unions' (consider Simca and Citroën).

It will readily be understood that, under these conditions, the workers' class struggle in production does not unfold all by itself. It is rooted in, and takes shape in, exceedingly harsh day-to-day realities of exploitation, of the *experience* of exploitation; in the experience of the class line between 'manual' and non-manual workers, a line that is not blurred by one or another technician's or engineer's 'liberal' or even 'progressive' behaviour (often just a mask for 'paternalism'); and in the experience of the actual behaviour of supervisors, engineers and agents of repression. This class struggle, however, runs squarely up against the powerful weapons of the capitalist class struggle, which are the more redoubtable in that they do not always resemble weapons: above all, after control of the means of production and extortion of surplus-value, *the illusions/impostures of the bourgeois ideology of work* just discussed. Trade union activists waging the class struggle are well aware of this: they have to fight this ideology step by step, taking up the same combat day after day to root this mystification out of their own consciousness (no easy task) and their comrades'. Struggle against exploitation (wages, production rates, unemployment), struggle against the impostures of the bourgeois ideology of work, struggle against repression: such are the three *always interlinked* forms of the economic class struggle in production.

If this is right, then we can understand:

1) why *the class struggle* is basically conducted in the forms of the division of labour and the working conditions prevailing in enterprises, and why *the political class struggle is rooted in the economic class struggle*;

2) why the economic class struggle is a struggle against incessantly intensified exploitation: not only against the brutal material form of exploitation, capitalism's tendency to reduce wages, and against the class 'techniques' for increasing productivity (speed-up, and so on), *but also* around the question of the technical-social division of labour that prevails in enterprises, and against bourgeois ideology and repression. The working class's class consciousness is built up thanks not only to its experience of its material exploitation (wages, production rates), but also to its experience of the forms in which it is 'penned' in the division of labour. It can be built up only in an ongoing ideological struggle against the bourgeois ideology of work.

It will be understood, then, why the capitalist class and its ideologues have so powerful an interest in presenting the technical-social division

of labour, which is, in the final analysis, a class division of labour, as a *purely technical* division. It will be understood why overt struggle against this mystification and imposture of the capitalist class struggle can acquire such importance for the proletariat's revolutionary class struggle. Economism, in whatever form it appears, including that of 'self-evident truths' about 'technology' and 'technicity', is the primary danger threatening the very foundations of working-class consciousness, at the point where capitalist exploitation is carried out: in production.

It will further be understood why those who have an interest in disguising the class relations of the social division of labour as the 'neutral' relations of a supposedly 'technical division' of labour, denounced by Marxist theory in its entirety, also have so deep an interest in treating capitalist relations of production as mere *property* relations, mere legal relations. We are beginning to understand that, between a 'technicist-economistic' interpretation of the division of labour and a legalistic conception of the relations of production, one and the same unity obtains: the unity of the bourgeois ideology of the capitalist class struggle. We shall see in a moment the practical consequences that this can have for the workers' movement itself.

V CONCLUSION: THE RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION
MUST NOT BE MISTAKEN FOR PURELY TECHNICAL
RELATIONS OR LEGAL RELATIONS

If what we have just said is on the mark, it is clear that the relations of production no longer have anything to do with mere *property* titles. Legal titles and, consequently, legal relations are merely a form that sanctions a real content altogether different from that form: namely, the relations of production and their effects.

We have just seen at how deep a level the relations of production and class relations and, therefore, the class struggle deriving from them, operate in the real relations prevailing in the production process itself.

The description with which we began our exposition for the sake of convenience is clearly untenable. The relations of production do not come into play, in the form of property titles, *before* and *after* the process of production, simply in order to justify and lend legal sanction to control of the means of production and its products, and, thus, extortion of surplus-value. The relations of production are not a legal 'umbrella' under the protection of which a perfectly and purely technical productive process is realized.

Hence a twofold ideological confusion that must be avoided at all costs:

1) The technical confusion: as we have seen, the relations of production are not purely technical relations, but, rather, relations of capitalist exploitation, inscribed as such in the concrete life of production as a whole.

2) The legal confusion: the relations of production are not legal relations. They are something quite different: they affirm class relations in production itself.

If that is right, we begin to glimpse what is covered by the scientific Marxist concept of the mode of production. We have defined it as 'a way of tackling nature'. We have seen that 'tackling' here means mobilizing productive forces under the aegis of relations of production. In class societies, these relations of production are relations of exploitation. The mode of production of a class society (of a social formation divided into classes) is quite the opposite of a mere technical process of production. At the same time as it is the locus of production, it is the locus of class exploitation and of class struggle as well. It is in the productive process of the mode of production itself that the knot of class relations and the class struggle bound up with exploitation is tied. This class struggle pits the proletarian class struggle against the capitalist class struggle: it is an *economic* class struggle, but also, from the outset and simultaneously, an *ideological* class struggle, and thus a class struggle that has, consciously or not, *political import*. Every other form of class struggle is rooted in this basic class struggle, including the *political* class struggle properly speaking, in which all forms of class struggle are tied together in a knot of critical importance.

It is easy to understand the capitalists' interest in depicting the process of production as the opposite of what it is: as a purely technical rather than an exploitative process. It is also easy to understand their interest in depicting the relations of production as something quite different from what they are: as legal relations, not relations included in class relations and the class struggle.

It is also easy to understand that the destiny of every class struggle, the *victorious* revolutionary class struggle included, ultimately depends on an accurate conception of the relations of production. To 'build socialism', it will be necessary to establish new relations of production that abolish, concretely, the exploitative effects of the previous relations of production, together with all their class effects. The construction of socialism can therefore not be settled with purely legal formulas: *ownership* of the means of production plus better technical organization of the labour process. At the limit, these are formulas which, if they are not seriously

criticized and corrected, and very soon at that, may end up trapped in the economic-technicist-legal-humanist-bourgeois ideology of work.

Every misunderstanding of these formulas and their inexorable logic does an objective disservice to the revolutionary cause and the construction of socialism.

The Reproduction of the Conditions of Production

We have not yet finished with the mode of production. We must now bring out something that we glimpsed in the course of our analysis when we discussed the necessity of *renewing* the means of production to make production possible. That was a passing hint. We shall now consider the matter in full.

As Marx said, even a child knows that if a social formation did not *reproduce* the conditions of production while producing, it would not last a year.¹ Thus the ultimate condition for production is *the reproduction of the conditions of production*. It can be ‘simple’ (only just reproducing the conditions of previous production) or ‘on an extended scale’ (expanding them). We shall leave this crucial distinction aside in Volume 1 and return to it in Volume 2.

What, then, is *the reproduction of the conditions of production*?

The reader should be warned that we are here entering a domain that is both very familiar (since *Capital* Volume 2) and singularly misunderstood. The tenaciously self-evident truths (the empiricist kind of ideological self-evident truths) of the point of view of *production* alone, or even of simple productive practice (which is itself abstract with respect to the process of production), are so much a part of our everyday ‘consciousness’ that it is extremely difficult, not to say practically impossible, to rise *to the standpoint of reproduction*. Yet, outside this standpoint, everything remains abstract (not just one-sided, but distorted). That holds even at the level of production and, *a fortiori*, at the level of simple practice.

Let us try to examine matters methodically and clearly.

To simplify our discussion, and bearing in mind that every social formation is characterized by a dominant² *mode of production*, we may say

1 Karl Marx, Letter of 11 July 1868 to Kugelmann, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1955, p. 209.

2 We repeat: *dominant*. For in every social formation in a process of historical

that the process of production puts the existing *productive forces* to work under determinate *relations of production*.

It follows that, in order to exist, every social formation must, while it produces, and in order to be able to produce, *reproduce* the conditions of its production. It must therefore *reproduce*

- 1) the productive forces;
- 2) the existing relations of production.

I REPRODUCTION OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION

Everyone now admits (including both the bourgeois economists who work in national accounting and modern 'macroeconomic theorists'), because Marx compellingly proved it in *Capital* Volume 2, that no production is possible unless it ensures reproduction of the *material* conditions of production in strictly regulated proportions: reproduction of the *means of production*.

The average economist is, in this respect, no different from the average capitalist. He will tell you that, every year, it is necessary to make provisions to *replace* what is used up or wears out in production: raw materials, fixed facilities (buildings), instruments of production (machines), and so on. We say the average economist = the average capitalist, because both express the viewpoint of *the enterprise*; they content themselves with simply commenting on the terms of its financial accounting *practice*.

We know, however, thanks to the genius of Quesnay, the first person to pose this problem that was 'staring everyone in the face', and the genius of Marx, who solved it, that the reproduction of the material conditions of production cannot be thought of at the level of the *enterprise*, because it does not exist in its real conditions at that level. What happens at the level of the enterprise is an *effect* that only gives some *idea* of the necessity of reproduction, but does not at all enable us to think its mechanisms.

A moment's reflection will convince us of this. Mr X, a capitalist who produces woollens in his mill, has to 'reproduce' his raw material, machines, and so on. However, *he* does not produce them for his own production, other capitalists do: Mr Y, a big Australian sheep-breeder;

development (or non-development), there is a mode of production that *dominates* the earlier modes still *surviving* in that social formation. That is why we once wrote that, to the present day, there are *at least* two modes of production in every social formation. (Cf. Emmanuel Terray, *Marxism and 'Primitive' Societies*, trans. Mary Klopper, London, 1972, pp. 178-9.)

Mr Z, a big machine-tool manufacturer, and so on. *They, too*, in order to produce these products necessary for the reproduction of Mr X's conditions of production, have to *reproduce* the conditions of their own production, and so on to infinity. And everything has to happen in proportions such that, on the national and even world market, *the demand for means of production (for reproduction) is satisfied by the supply.*

To envisage this mechanism, which entails a sort of 'endless spiral', we have to take Marx's 'global' approach. That is, we have to study the *relations of the circulation* of capital between Department I (production of means of production) and Department II (production of means of consumption), as well as the realization of surplus-value, in *Capital* Volumes 2 and 3.

We shall not go into an analysis of this question. Here, it is enough to have evoked the necessity of reproducing the *material* conditions of production.

II REPRODUCTION OF LABOUR-POWER

Yet something will surely have struck the reader. We have discussed the reproduction of the *means* of production, but not that of the *productive forces*. Thus we have ignored the reproduction of that which distinguishes the productive forces from the means of production: the *reproduction of labour-power*.

Observing what goes on *in* the enterprise, especially the financial accounting practice of anticipating investment and depreciation, gave us a rough idea of the *existence* of the material process of reproduction. Now, however, we are entering a domain in which observing what goes on in the enterprise is, if not totally blind, then very nearly so, and for good reason: the reproduction of labour-power takes place essentially *outside* the enterprise.

How is the reproduction of labour-power ensured?

It is ensured by giving labour-power the material means of reproducing itself: *wages*. Wages appear in every firm's account books, but as 'wage capital',³ not at all as a condition of the material reproduction of labour-power. Yet that is clearly how wages 'work', since they represent only that *portion* of the value produced by the expenditure of labour-power that is *indispensable for its reproduction*: that is, indispensable for reconstituting the wage-worker's labour-power (what he needs to procure food, clothing, and shelter; in short, what he needs to present himself at the

3 Marx has provided the scientific concept for wages: *variable capital*.

factory gate again *the next day*, and every further day God grants him). Let us add: what is indispensable for raising and educating his children as well, in whom the proletariat reproduces himself as labour-power (in n copies, where $n = 0, 1, 2$, and so on).

Let us recall that the quantity of value (wages) required to reproduce labour-power is not determined by the needs of a 'biological' minimum wage alone, but by those of a *historical* minimum. (English workers need beer, Marx says, while French proletarians need wine.) Thus it is a historically *variable* minimum.

Let us also recall that this minimum is historical in a twofold sense, in that it is defined not by the historic needs 'recognized' by the capitalist class, but by those *imposed* by the proletarian class struggle (a twofold class struggle: *against* lengthening the working day and *against* wage cuts). We can, however, leave this crucially important point aside, since it does not directly bear on what we are trying to show here.

For it is not enough to guarantee labour-power the *material* conditions of its reproduction if it is to be reproduced as labour-power. We have said that the available labour-power must be 'competent'. That is, it must be such that it can be put to work in the complex system of the productive process, in specific posts and specific forms of cooperation. As a result of the development of the productive forces and the *type of unity* historically constitutive of the *productive forces* at a given moment,⁴ labour-power must be (diversely) *skilled*. Diversely: that is, as required by the *social-technical* division of labour, its different 'jobs' and 'posts'.

How is this reproduction of (diversely) qualified labour-power ensured in a capitalist regime? It is ensured differently from social formations based on slavery or serfdom: the reproduction of the qualification of labour-power *no longer tends* (it is a question of a tendential law) to be ensured '*on the job*' (instruction during production itself) but, increasingly, *outside* production, by the capitalist school system⁵ and other instances and institutions that we shall discuss at greater length in a moment.

But what do people learn at school? Everybody 'knows' the answer: they stay in school for longer or shorter periods but, at all events, they learn reading, writing and arithmetic. That is, they learn a handful of techniques, and quite a few other things besides, including elements (rudimentary or, on the contrary, advanced) of 'scientific culture' or 'literary culture' that are of direct use in different jobs in production (one curriculum for

4 See Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, [trans. Ben Brewster, London, Verso, 1997].

5 See *Schools*, forthcoming in autumn 1969. [See Chapter 2, n. 26.]

workers, a third to engineers, still another for technicians, a final one for senior managers, and so on). Thus they acquire 'know-how'.⁶

What everybody also 'knows', however – that is, what nobody *cares to know* – is that, *alongside* these 'techniques' (reading, writing and arithmetic) and this 'learning' (elements of 'scientific and literary culture') that function as 'know-how', *alongside, but also in the process of acquiring* these techniques and this learning, people also learn, at school, the 'rules' of good behaviour, that is, the proprieties to be observed by every agent in the division of labour, depending on the post he is 'destined' to hold in it. These are rules of professional ethics and professional conscience: that is, to put it plainly, rules of *respect* for the social and technical division of labour, and, in the final analysis, the rules of *the order established by class domination*. People also learn 'to speak proper French' at school, to 'write properly', which in fact means (for the future capitalists and their underlings) to 'order workers around properly', which in fact means (the ideal case) to 'talk properly' to them so as to intimidate or cajole them – in short, to 'con' them. The 'literary' curricula in secondary and higher education serve that end, among others.

To put this in more scientific terms, we shall say that the reproduction of labour-power requires not only that its *qualifications* be reproduced, but that its *submission* to the rules of respect for the established order be reproduced at the same time. This means, for the workers, reproduction of labour-power's *submission to the dominant ideology* and, for the agents of exploitation and repression, reproduction of *its capacity to handle the dominant ideology* properly, so as to ensure the domination of the dominant class 'verbally'.

In other words, the school (but also other state institutions such as the Church or other apparatuses such as the army, which is as free

6 'Know-how'. This can mean simple *techniques* (knowing how to read, write, count, read a map, find one's way in a chronology, recognize this or that object or reality, and so on). But it can also mean 'knowledge' [*savoirs*], that is, the rudiments or elements (sometimes even relatively advanced) of scientific learning (let us leave literature aside). We must here introduce a very important distinction. One does not learn 'science' at school, nor even at university, as a rule. One learns scientific results and methods of reasoning and demonstration. Basically, one learns to '*solve problems*' or do '*practical exercises*'. That is not, however, 'science', but, rather, elements of methodology and scientific results that constitute *by products* of living science. Living science exists, let us say, in scientific research alone. (Lengthy commentaries could be made on that simple sentence.) To capture the difference in a phrase, let us say that the essence of living science consists less in solving problems than in *posing* the problems to be solved. Thus what one learns of science in schools and universities is techniques for manipulating and exploiting certain scientific results and methods completely detached from their 'real life'. That is why we can range all of the following under a single rubric: know-how; elementary techniques; and elements, even if they are relatively advanced, of scientific learning.

and mandatory as school, to say nothing of the political parties, whose existence is bound up with the state's) teaches 'know-how', but in forms that ensure *subjection to the dominant ideology*, or else the 'practice' of it; every agent of production, exploitation, or repression, to say nothing of 'professional ideologues' (Marx), has to be 'steeped' in that ideology in one way or another in order conscientiously (and with no need to have his own personal gendarme breathing down his neck) to carry out his or her task: the task of the exploited (the proletarians), the exploiters (the capitalists), the auxiliaries of exploitation (supervisory personnel), or the high priests of the dominant ideology, its 'functionaries', and so on.

Thus we see that the *sine qua non* for the reproduction of labour-power is the reproduction not only of its 'qualification', but also of its *subjection to the dominant ideology* or of the 'practice' of this ideology. Let us clearly spell out that one has to say 'not only but also', for it is *in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that the reproduction of the qualification of labour-power is ensured*.

With that, however, we discover a new reality: *ideology*. A long analysis is required to broach this question. We shall introduce it with two remarks.

The first remark will round off our analysis of *reproduction*. We have just rapidly examined the forms of the reproduction of *the productive forces*, that is, the means of production and labour-power. But we have not yet broached the question of the *reproduction of the relations of production*. This question is *the number-one question, the crucial question* for the Marxist theory of the mode of production. To neglect it would be a theoretical omission – worse, a *serious* political mistake.

We shall therefore discuss it. To acquire the means we need to discuss it, however, we have to make another long detour. We ask the reader to follow us patiently and attentively.

The second remark is that, to make this detour, we have to ask our old question again: *what is a society?*

Base and Superstructure

We have already had occasion to insist on the revolutionary nature of the Marxist conception of the ‘social whole’ with regard to what distinguishes it from the Hegelian ‘totality’.¹ We said (this thesis simply restates well-known propositions of historical materialism) that Marx conceives the structure of every society as constituted by ‘levels’ or ‘instances’ articulated by a specific determination: *the infrastructure* or economic base (the ‘unity’ of the productive forces and the relations of production) and the *superstructure*, which itself comprises two ‘levels’ or ‘instances’: the political-legal level (law and the state) and the ideological level (the various ideologies: religious, moral, legal, political, and so on).

I ADVANTAGES OF A TOPOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION

This conception is of theoretical and didactic interest: it *makes us see* the difference between Marx and Hegel. It has a crucial theoretical advantage as well: it allows us to inscribe in the theoretical *dispositive* of its essential concepts what we have called the *index of effectivity* of each one. What does this mean?

It will be readily agreed that this representation of the structure of every society as an *edifice* comprising a base (or infrastructure) on which the two ‘floors’ of the superstructure are erected is a metaphor. To be quite precise, it is a spatial metaphor: the metaphor of a topography [*topique*].² Like all

In *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, Paris, Maspero, 1965 [Louis Althusser. *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, Verso, 2010; Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (abridged English version), London, Verso, 2009].

2 Topography, from the Greek word *topos*, place. A *topography* represents, in a defined space, the respective *places* occupied by various realities: thus the economic is *at the bottom* (the base) and the superstructure is *on top*. In this way, the topography makes visible what is at the ‘foundations’ (the base) and what is determined by the base (the superstructure).

metaphors, this one, too, suggests or makes us see something. What? Precisely the fact that the upper floors could not ‘stay up’ (in the air) all by themselves if they did not rest, precisely, on their *base*, and its foundations.

Thus the object of the metaphor of the edifice is, above all, to represent ‘determination *in the last instance*’ by the economic base. The effect of this spatial metaphor is accordingly to assign the base an *index of effectivity* known by the famous terms: determination in the last instance of what happens in the ‘upper floors’ of the superstructure by what happens in the economic base.

Setting out from this index of effectivity ‘in the last instance’, the ‘floors’ of the superstructure are obviously endowed with *different* indices of effectivity. What kind of indices?

We can say straight away, with no risk of error, that the upper floors of the superstructure are not determinant in the last instance, but are, rather, *determined by the effectivity* of the base; and that if they are determinant in their own way (which we have not yet defined), they are such insofar as they are *determined by the base*.

Their index of effectivity (or determination), as determined by the determination in the last instance of the base, is *thought* in two forms in the Marxist tradition: 1) the superstructure is ‘relatively autonomous’ with respect to the base; and 2) the superstructure ‘reacts back on’ the base.

We can therefore say that the big *theoretical* advantage of the Marxist topography, that is, of the spatial metaphor of the edifice (base and superstructure), is that it simultaneously *makes us see* that questions of determination (or of index of effectivity) are crucial; that it makes us see that it is the base which determines the whole edifice in the last instance; and, consequently, that it *requires us to pose* the theoretical problem of the type of ‘derivative’ effectivity that is specific to the superstructure, or, in other words, that it *compels us to think* what the Marxist tradition designates with the linked terms of the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the action of the superstructure back on the base.

On the other hand, the major disadvantage of this representation of the structure of all societies by the spatial metaphor of the edifice is, obviously, that it is metaphorical; in other words, that it remains *descriptive*.

It now seems to us imperative to represent things differently. Let there be no mistake: we are *in no sense* rejecting the classic metaphor, since it is

[TN: The following sentence in the footnote has been crossed out: ‘Everyone “knows” and “sees” that the upper floors of a house do not stay up in the air all by themselves, but “rest” on a base and its foundations.’]

this metaphor itself which requires that we go beyond it. And we are not going beyond it in order to reject it as obsolete. We would simply like to try to *think* what it gives us in the form of a *description*.

II LIMITS OF A TOPOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION

Let us lay our cards on the table. We think that it is by setting out from reproduction that it becomes possible and necessary to envisage the existence and nature of the *superstructure*. Simply adopting the standpoint of reproduction sheds light on several questions whose existence the spatial metaphor of the edifice *indicated*, but to which it could not furnish a conceptual response.

We have to make a new stipulation here.

In the texts we referred to a moment ago,³ we tended, taking up certain indications made by Marx and his successors, to emphasize the *distinction*, within the superstructure, between what we called, on the one hand, the legal-political superstructure (law and the state) and, on the other, the ideological superstructure (the various ideologies). To emphasize this distinction was itself a way of *making the reader see* that there are differences in indices of effectivity between these two 'levels' of the superstructure as well.

Here, the spatial metaphor of the edifice also helped us to show that the legal-political superstructure is, as a rule, '*more*' effective than the ideological superstructure, although the ideological superstructure, too, is endowed with 'relative autonomy' in its relations with the legal-political superstructure and is capable of 'reacting back' on it.

However, in emphasizing this *distinction* (between the two forms of the superstructure), we remained within the logic of our metaphor and, accordingly, within its limits: those of a *description*. Here, too, it has become imperative to represent things differently. That is, we should represent the relations between, first, the law-state and, second, the ideologies in a way *different* from that dictated by the logic of the descriptive metaphor of the edifice.

Let us take our idea to its logical conclusion. We should also represent *differently* from how we have so far what is involved in the singular dyad designated by our expression *legal-political* superstructure. We should account for the *hyphen* that unites law and the state in the expression legal-political, asking exactly what we can and should *think* to justify (or question) this hyphen. Finally, we should also ask why we use (and

3 For Marx and Reading Capital.

whether it is legitimate to use) an expression that puts law *before* the state, and whether it would not, rather, be preferable to put law *after* the state – or whether these questions of before and after, far representing a solution, are merely the index of a problem that should therefore be posed in completely different terms.

All these questions, which we are raising in summary fashion, but, we think, correctly, can be summed up in the form of the following problems:

What is law?

What is the state?

What is ideology?

What are the relations between law, the state and ideology?

In what kinds of ‘groupings’ (law–state or state–law, and so on) can we represent these relations in order to think them?

Our basic thesis is that it is only possible to pose these problems (and therefore to resolve them) *from the viewpoint of reproduction*.

We will briefly analyze law, the state and ideology *from that viewpoint*. And we will try to bring out what happens from the viewpoint of practice and production on the one hand and, at the same time, of reproduction on the other. Only by taking this *difference* between reproduction and production into consideration can we provide the solution to the problems that we are here posing.

One final remark before we enter into this analysis. Since we are looking for answers to complex questions that bear on the very *order* that they imply, and since we are, for the time being, ignorant of that order, we shall adopt a *provisionally arbitrary* order, which we shall of course have to rectify once we have made these analyses. We propose, then, to proceed in the following arbitrary order: law, state, ideology. We shall see that, as we proceed, we shall have to modify that order for an unexpected reason: we are going to discover a new reality.