



Fetishism and ideology : a review of theoretical problems

Nikolas Rose

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Erratum

An unfortunate confusion occurs in Nikolas Rose's article 'Fetishism and Ideology' in *I&C:2*, due to the omission of several lines. On p.48, the passage that begins on line 24 should read as follows:

The rate of surplus values may be formalised as $\frac{s}{v}$; the rate of profit, on the one hand as $\frac{s}{c+v}$, where s=surplus value, c=constant capital and v=variable capital. However, Marx, up to the middle of *Capital*, III, treats surplus value as equivalent to profit, and constant + variable capital as equivalent to cost price of production. Hence the rate of profit, on the other hand, may be formalised as $\frac{\pi}{Pcp}$, where π =profit and Pcp=cost price.

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Introduction

Attempts to develop a 'Marxist theory of ideology' frequently begin from the assumption that the bases for such a theory exist implicitly within the writings of Marx himself. The starting point for such attempts is often the concept of fetishism which Marx employs in *Capital*, together with a series of related concepts (essence, appearance, real relation, phenomenal form, inversion, reversal, a-conceptual, irrational and so forth) (1). The present paper discusses the articulations of these concepts in *Capital*, and reviews some fundamental problems which these articulations entail. I argue that these problems undermine the possibility of developing a coherent 'theory of ideology' based upon the concept of fetishism, and that attempts to develop such theories are possible only at the price of theoretical incoherence and political impotence. The argument which I develop necessitates an examination of the status and function of these concepts within *Capital* itself, and this examination suggests that, in this area at least, the text contains unresolved theoretical difficulties.

The positions developed here are, to a large extent, based upon the published and unpublished work of others (2). My justification for rehearsing and extending this work here lies both in the importance of the problems raised for Marxist analyses of the social formation today, and in my assessment that the pertinence of these problems has yet to be fully appreciated, and cannot be overestimated.

Practice of Reading

It is first necessary for me to make some brief comments upon the practice of reading *Capital* which informs this paper. This practice breaks with the assumption that we may assign, *a priori*, a particular discursive unity to a given text. That is to say, I do not believe that we may assume that *Capital* has a unified theoretical structure which may be discovered through a particular privileged mode of analysis, and which then allows the appearance of non-coherent concepts or notions to be consigned to the status of accidents, slips of the pen, or 'survivals' of a previous discursive structure. Indeed I would argue, although this is not the central

concern of the present paper, that *Capital* is a text which is deeply fissured and multiply fragmented.

In this paper, from a consideration of the text of *Capital*, Volumes I, II and III, I construct two 'discursive figures' concerning the 'problem of fetishism'. These discursive figures, which I will provisionally define as relatively coherent articulations of concepts and relations, are produced in a practice of theoretical work on the text. They are neither 'obvious' — present in their fullness on the surface of the text awaiting observation by the most careful reader — nor are they the 'truth' of the text — a deep semantic core which generates its surface structure. I would argue that, although one figure or the other may be regarded as dominant in different sections of the text, many key passages may be made intelligible if read in terms of the *co-operation* of these figures. The figures which I construct have different epistemological structures and different theoretical and political consequences. I produce them with the sole aim of registering certain key problems for contemporary Marxist theory and political practice. I would wish these comments concerning the practice of reading and the construction of figures to be borne in mind throughout the present paper.

The Figures of Fetishism

I will begin by indicating, in general terms, the area of problems that will concern us. Throughout *Capital* Marx distinguishes between a level of phenomenal forms, apparent movements, manifestations, representations and appearances in commodity producing societies, and a level of essences, of real movements and real determinations. In relation to the latter, the former is described as a-conceptual, irrational, imaginary or inverted, and, on occasions, as fetishised. These concepts are used by Marx in his key discussions of the value-form, the money-form, the wage-form, and, of course, the commodity-form. He argues that it is the phenomenal forms which determine the consciousness of agents of production, through the experiences which they produce. The phenomenal forms, which conceal real determinations, also form the basis for bourgeois systems of law, and for the various practices which are necessary for capitalist production to occur, such as those of accounting. The theories of the vulgar economists are merely elaborations upon these phenomenal forms. For example, in his discussion of the wage-form and the notion 'price of labour', Marx writes:

Hence, we may understand the decisive importance of the transformation of value and price of labour-power into the form of wages, or into the value and price of labour itself. This phenomenal form, which makes the actual relation invisible, and, indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation, forms the basis of all the juridical notions of both labourer and capitalist, of all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, of all its illusions as to liberty, of all the apologetic shifts of the vulgar economists. (I,p.540)(3)

The work of science is to penetrate the phenomenal forms to discover the real determinations which they obscure. In political economy, the

discourse of classical economics opened this terrain of science, but could not complete this work, for its class origins prevented it from raising certain central questions, in particular the historically specific and transient nature of capitalist society, and the true source of value. Thus, later in the chapter we have just quoted, he argues:

For the rest, in respect to the phenomenal form, "value and price of labour", or "wages", as contrasted with the essential relation manifested therein, viz., the value and price of labour power, the same difference holds that holds in respect of all phenomena and their hidden substratum. The former appear directly and spontaneously as current modes of thought; the latter must first be discovered by science. Classical Political Economy nearly touches the true relation of things, without, however, consciously formulating it. This it cannot do so long as it sticks in its bourgeois skin. (I,p.542)

In this paper, then, I shall attempt to construct the figures in which we may think the movements implied in this schema, the movement from real relations to phenomenal forms to consciousness and systems of representation, and the reverse movement of science penetrating the phenomenal forms to discover the real determinations which phenomenal forms obscure.

In constructing these figures I shall suggest some answers to the following questions:

1. What is the *Subject* of this movement?
2. What is the *mechanism* of this movement?
3. What are the *limits of effectivity* of this movement?
4. What are the *theoretical functions* of this movement?
5. What is the *status of the determinations* constructed in the movement of science?

It will not, of course, have escaped your attention that, in the above indications, the term fetishism has not appeared. Contrary to the implications of much work in this area, whilst we may choose to index the whole theoretical structure involved here with this term, Marx himself restricts his use of it in *Capital* to precise points. These are where he wishes to suggest that the effects of the distinction and relation between the 'level' of phenomenal forms and the 'level' of real relations is such that *things* take on the character of active, productive subjects, whilst social relations take on the character of things. We shall see, I hope, that it is not the case, as a Lukács would have us believe, of a general process of 'reification' in commodity producing societies – and argument that sees *things* anywhere and everywhere it looks. Rather it is a specific and theoretically limited ascription of the concept, within its discursive field, to certain features of such societies which appear, at the level of phenomenal forms, to possess certain 'powers' – for example those of self expansion – which they in fact owe to their place in a sys-

tem of relations. In any event, Marx's concept of fetishism is incomprehensible outside of the discursive figures which sustain it, and it is to the construction of these figures that I shall now turn. I shall index the two figures I construct here (of course more are possible) with the terms *alienation* and *externalisation*.

a. The Figure of Alienation

Those who argue that Marx's work had the form of a continuity, of the simple, progressive development of a thought, often hang their theoretical hats upon a peg provided by a common word — alienation — and an apparently cognate theoretical structure — fetishism. We know that the 'dispute' concerning the presence or absence of a 'break' between the 'early' and the 'mature' works rests upon a precise point — that of the *Subject* or *motor* of the domain of Marx's theory in *Capital*. In a word, is that Subject *anthropological* and fetishism hence merely a delineation of the processes of alienation in their historical specificity (c.f. Geras, 1971, p.70), or is the discourse of *Capital non-anthropological*, in that the processes of which it speaks have a *motor*, but no Subject in the sense of a unitary cause or point of origin (c.f. Althusser, 1976, p.94-99)

Of course, the implications of my suggestion that a text has no necessary theoretical unity are that this question is, in a certain manner, displaced. The issue which now confronts us is therefore not one of the *identification* of a *problematic*, but of the *construction* of a *figure in dominance*. Now, I will approach the construction of this figure in *Capital* somewhat obliquely, through a schematic discussion of two texts written by Marx prior to 1845 — the (1843) *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, and the (1844) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. I hope, in this way, to clarify some important questions which will arise when we return to *Capital*.

The central elements of the figure dominant in these works concern a relation of *Subject* and *predicate*, a relation which is one of *abstraction*, *reversal* and *hypostatization*. In the *Critique*, Marx argues that Hegel's doctrine of the state inverts the actual relation between the real Subject, the empirical, existing world, and the 'universal' or concept — an abstraction from the real which is then seen as existing in its own right. The Subject is then regarded as a manifestation of this universal, of the Idea, as a predicate of its predicate. The true relation between Subject and predicate has been reversed, the abstraction has been hypostatized. But this reversal and hypostatization has occurred not only in philosophy, but in the real itself:

Hegel should not be blamed for describing the essence of the modern state as it is, but for identifying what is with the *essence of the state*. That the rational is real is *contradicted* by the *irrational reality* which at every point shows itself to be the opposite of what it asserts, and to assert the opposite of what it is.
(*Critique*, p.127)(4)

In the *Critique*, the structure of inversion of Subject and predicate concerns not only the relation between state and civil society but, crucially, the relation of man and property. Property, which ought to be an attribute of man, a manifestation of his powers, becomes itself a Subject with powers; man, who ought to be the true Subject, becomes the predicate of private property (c.f. *Critique*, p.173-5).

It is this analysis of private property that Marx develops in his famous section on estranged labour in the *Manuscripts*. Marx begins this section by assuming the presence of certain historical features of capitalist society – private property, the separation of labour, capital and land, and the dominance of wage labour. He then elaborates a means of thinking production under such conditions in terms of the relation of Subjects and predicates, or, as he considers it, he gives the ‘economic fact’ (the estrangement of the worker and of his production) ‘conceptual form’ and, in analysing the concept, analyses the economic fact. In the process of production, the labourer (true Subject) invests the products of his labour with his essence – this process of externalisation or objectification of the labourer in his product means that his labour becomes an object, existing independently of him and alien to him, confronting him as an autonomous power:

This fact (that labour produces both commodities and itself as a commodity) simply means that the object that labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a power *independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour embodied and made material in an object, it is the *objectification* of labour. The realization of labour is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labour appears as a *loss of reality* for the worker, objectification as *loss of and bondage to the object*, and appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation* (*Entäußerung*) ... The externalisation (*Entäußerung*) of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien. (*Manuscripts*, p.324)

Not only is the relation of labour to its products one of estrangement, but the activity of production itself is alienating, for under these historical conditions labour is external, forced, and the labourer belongs to another, to capital. Such a situation is foreign to man’s species-being, in the objectification of which man creates the objective world:

Estranged labour therefore turns *man’s species-being* . . . into a being alien to him and a *means* of his *individual existence*. It estranges man from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence (*Wesen*), his human essence.” (*Manuscripts*, p.329)

Estrangement, in this figure, thus concerns the relationship between *man* and his products, *man* and his activity, *man* and his essence and *man* and other men:

Man's estrangement, like all relations of man to himself, is realized and expressed only in man's relationship to other men. (*Manuscripts*, p.330)

The relation between *worker* and *capitalist* is produced precisely in this relation of estrangement between *man* and *man*:

Thus through *estranged, alienated labour* the worker creates the relationship of another man, who is alien to labour and stands outside it, to that labour. The relationship of the worker to labour creates the relation of the capitalist ... to that labour. *Private property* is therefore the product, result and necessary consequence of *alienated labour*, of the external relation of the worker to labour and to himself. (*Manuscripts*, p.332-3)

Indeed Marx's analysis reveals to him that private property is actually at one and the same time the *product* of alienated labour, and the *means of realisation* of alienation. Human development and social history is thus the trace of the movement of the relation of man and essence, of the loss and refinding of this essence, of its estrangement and re-appropriation. Successive forms of society are thus the modes of existence of this relation of alienation and, at the same time, the modes of its supercession. In communist society the supercession of private property is the re-appropriation of the human essence by man himself — the movement of history is the movement of this *becoming*:

Communism is the *positive* supercession of *private property* as human *self-estrangement* and hence the *appropriation* of the *human* essence through and for man ... The entire movement of history is therefore both the *actual* act of creation of communism — the birth of its empirical existence — and, for its thinking consciousness, the *comprehended* and *known* movement of its becoming. (*Manuscripts*, p.348)

Let us now consider this figure in relation to the questions which we posed earlier.

(i) The Subject of alienation

This figure proposes a conception of history as a process with a Subject, that is to say, history is unified by its constant reference to a single point of origin. The Subject of history here is *Man*, and the science of history is thus nothing other than the science of Man. The science of history, and of the social, is hence an anthropology:

Nature as it comes into being in human history — in the act of creation of human society — is the *true* nature of man; hence nature as it comes into being through industry, though in an estranged

form, is true *anthropological* nature." (*Manuscripts*, p.355)

Two consequences follow from this: *First* of all, both the process of production and all social relations are viewed as relations between human subjects – human subjects are a necessary point of reference for all analysis of social life. *Second*, history is a teleological process, and the motor of that process is Man. History is the necessary loss and re-appropriation by Man of his essence. The loss was the condition for the beginning of history, for it characterises the necessary objectification of Man in his products, but the end of this history was assured in its beginning – history is a *project*.

(ii) The mechanism of alienation

While the effects of alienation are clear, its mechanism remains unspecified. What is produced in history is a reversal of the relation of Subject and predicate both in the real – where such a reversal (e.g. the domination of labour by capital) is the form of existence of alienation – and in thought, which simply hypostatizes this reversal, takes the appearance of reality for its essence, alienated labour for the essence of labour. The key to an understanding of the mechanism of alienation is the concept of *abstraction*. Marx's concept of abstraction refers both to a process which takes place in reality – the abstraction (separation) of Man from essence in production – and in thought – the abstraction of appearances from their real Subject (Man) and the ascription of essential qualities to such abstractions.

Two consequences are worthy of note: *First*, Marx's critique of political economy, and other discourses, is not a critique of the *analyses*, but rather of their *hypostatization*. Hence no economic concept is criticised in the *Manuscripts*, for these categories *express* the facts, they simply do not *understand* them. Thus, for the *Manuscripts*, a reading and analysis of the *discourse* of political economy passes for an analysis of the *reality* of political economy. *Second*, the concept of abstractions, and its dual role, is only possible on the basis of what Ranciere (1971, p.42-8) terms an *amphibology*. That is to say, the analysis of economic production process and the products—has been transposed into an analysis of the nature of Man—the relation between the generic activity of Man, the manifestation of an essence and the embodiment of that essence in a hostile power.

iii) The limits of effectivity of alienation

The figure of alienation thus proposed has *no limits of effectivity*, that is to say it has no conditions of existence which are independent of itself. Each and every region of society is an expression of the same fundamental contradiction – the alienation of the human essence in the movement of private property. In fact, it is the recognition of this essential unity which is constitutive of this figure, for the role of Marx's critical discourse is to discover beneath the manifold contradictions in

every sphere of human existence — politics, law, economics etc. — the truth of alienation which they express, to give these separate and abstracted contradictions their universal, general and human form in the separation of Man from essence. Alienation characterises the principle of society both in its totality and in all its individual parts. The explanatory principle at work here is one of global expressive causality, a universal essence immanent in all its phenomena.

Let me end this digression into Marx's early works, whose relevance will, I hope, become apparent, without commenting upon my fourth and fifth questions. I will merely assert at this point that we *know* what this figure cannot think: it cannot think a history which has *no unity* or purpose, which has *no single* movement or simple cause, which is motored by *dispersed* struggles of determinate classes in specific and *heterogenous* social formations, in which the outcome of such struggles is both undetermined and decisive. That is to say it cannot think, it cannot be the theory of, a Marxist revolutionary politics, but merely of a utopian socialist humanism.

But what then of *Capital*? A simple glance at the text is sufficient to register the presence of certain common words — alienation, estrangement, externalisation, fetish, reversal all make their appearance in key passages, as do notions of inversion of subject and predicate and the domination of the former by the latter. Consider, for example, the following passages:

It is now no longer the labourer that employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the labourer. Instead of being consumed by him as material elements of his productive activity, they consume him as the ferment necessary to their own life-process, and the life-process of capital consists only in its movement as value constantly expanding, constantly multiplying itself. (I, p.310)

The way in which surplus-value is transformed into the form of profit by way of the rate of profit is, however, a further development of the inversion of subject and object that takes place already in the process of production. In the latter, we have seen, the subjective productive forces of labour appear as productive forces of capital. On the one hand, the value, or the past labour, which dominates living labour, is incarnated in the capitalist. On the other hand, the labourer appears as bare material labour-power, as a commodity. (III, p.45; c.f. also I, p.423 and III, p.264)

Are we to assume, on the basis of such passage, as Colletti (1974, 1975) or Geras (1971) might argue, that there is an essential *continuity* between the discursive structure of *Capital* and the early works which we have discussed? On this point we must be clear — the presence of the same word in two texts by no means assures the presence of the same concept, for concepts are defined by their articulation within a discursive

sive figure. And nor does the presence of a concept in a given passage assure the dominance of a discursive figure in the text as a whole. Let me sum up my argument on this issue in anticipation: the dominant discursive figure in *Capital* differs fundamentally from the anthropology of Subjects, predicates and reversals which has been discussed above. The concepts signalled by the common terms in these figures — alienation, externalisation and so forth — are radically dissimilar, the figure operates according to very different principles.

To argue, as I will, that the figure of alienation is not dominant in *Capital* does not, of course, imply that it is not present — indeed we have marked certain signs of its presence above. For the text, as I have argued, is no unity. The presence of this figure is often signalled by the invocation of a religious analogy reminiscent of its Feuerbachian origins (c.f. I, p.72), or by the use of the concept of personification (which we shall discuss below). The detailed textual analysis which would demonstrate the *co-operation* of these figures in certain key passages is beyond the scope of the present paper. (5) However, perhaps the clearest way to illustrate the separation of figures and principles is to proceed to construct the figure which, I argue, is dominant in *Capital*, the figure of externalisation. For this figure too is not without its problems, and these problems lead to the heart of some issues of crucial importance for Marxist theory today.

b. The Figure of Externalisation

Considering the 'Trinity Formula' of the vulgar economists, Marx comments:

(It is) natural for the actual agents of production to feel completely at home in these estranged and irrational forms of capital-interest, land-rent, labour-wages, since these are precisely the forms of illusion in which they move about and find their daily occupation. (III, p.830)

Let us consider what this comment might imply, with reference to Marx's discussion of interest-bearing capital (6). Marx argues that in interest-bearing capital the relations of capitalist production assume their most *externalised*, most *estranged*, most *alienated*, most *irrational* and most *fetish-like* form. For interest is the most externalised form of surplus-value — interest is a phenomenal form of profit which is, in its turn, only a phenomenal form of surplus-value.

Recall the formula for the circuit of interest-bearing capital:

$$M - M'$$

A certain quantity of money appears, in and of itself, to possess the power to generate an increase. However analysis reveals that this in-

crease, far from being a property intrinsic to money itself, first of all derives from profit. The money lent out by capitalist A is used by capitalist B to finance production which generates a profit. The principal can then be returned to capitalist A, together with a portion of the profit in the form of interest. Like land, capital is rented out as a value-creating thing, and a portion of the profit which derives from its deployment is the payment to its owner for its use in production. The finance capitalist thus temporarily cedes possession, but not property, in the money to the industrial capitalist and receives a portion of the profit in return. Thus what the circuit of interest-bearing capital first of all *conceals* is the dependence of the apparent powers of self expansion, which it attributes to money, upon the process of *production* (7), a dependency revealed in the circuit-of-money-capital:

$$M - C \dots P \dots C' - M'$$

Thus we get the fetish form of capital and the conception of fetish capital. In $M - M'$ we have the meaningless form of capital, the perversion and objectification of production relations in their highest degree, the interest-bearing form, the simple form of capital, in which it antecedes its own process of reproduction. It is the capacity of money, or of a commodity, to expand its own value independently of reproduction — which is a mystification of capital in its most flagrant form. (III, p.392)

But the recognition that the increase in interest-bearing capital is dependent upon the process of production is not in itself sufficient. Consider the circuit of money-capital:

$$M - C \dots P \dots C' - M'$$

This formula, Marx argues, also has an illusory character, for it implies that the surplus generated in the process of production is a function of capital, and hence obscures the fact that this surplus, characterised by the expression $M' = M + m$, is conditional upon the purchase of one particular commodity — human labour power — with its ability to create more value in a given period than is required for its reproduction. This crucial distinction, the distinction between constant and variable capital and the relation of the surplus to the latter, is revealed in the full, conceptual formula:

$$M - C_{MP}^L \dots P \dots C' - M'$$

which expresses the totality of the circuit, its relations with other circuits in the process of reproduction of capital, and that which makes this process possible — capital as a relation of production predicated upon wage-labour — the entry of labour power into production as a commodity (c.f. II, p.60-4).

We are now in a position to understand the relationship of the concept of fetishism to that of externalisation, to understand the movement which is constitutive of this figure. This movement is one from real, conceptual processes to phenomenal, a-conceptual processes; the greater the distance of this movement, the more externalised the form, the more fetish-like the character. For fetishism is characterised by the *disappearance of the process in the result*:

In interest-bearing capital, therefore, this automatic fetish, self-expanding value, money generating money, are brought out in their pure state and in this form it no longer bears the birthmarks of its origin. (III, p. 392)

Commodity-capital, the direct product of the capitalist process of production, is reminiscent of its origin and is therefore more rational and less incomprehensible in form than money-capital in which every trace of this process has vanished ... (II, p.48)

Thus we can see that the movement from rational to irrational, from conceptual to a-conceptual, from real to phenomenal, is a movement of *concealment*. The phenomenal forms of commodity producing societies are thus forms of concealment; it is in this sense that interest-bearing capital is an a-conceptual form — for it conceals the true nature of capital as a *relation of production* involving wage labour and the appropriation of surplus-value. What is at stake here, in this figure of externalisation, is precisely the *movement* by which the relations of production disappear in the phenomenal forms in which they are manifest, and the *distance* which this movement establishes between the relations of production and the form of their appearances.

Two comments seem appropriate at this point. Firstly, it is necessary to be clear that what is at issue in this figure concerns reality, or rather two realities and the distance between them. For the phenomenal forms are not *illusory* appearances, they are realities. *They are the form of the reality which capitalist relations of production produce*, a reality which is simultaneously the form of manifestation of those relations and the form of their concealment. Thus we can understand Marx's comments in his discussion of the commodity:

“(To the producers) the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but *as what they really are*, material relations between persons and social relations between things” (I, p.73)

What is proposed here is that the phenomenal forms are the necessary forms of appearance of capitalist relations of production; their reality, for Marx, is a reality *with regard to perception*, it is a reality of visibility. Consider, for example, this passage from a discussion of ‘The Capitalist's Grounds for Compensating’:

All these phenomena (which competition shows) *seem* to contradict the determination of value by labour time as much as the nature of surplus-value consisting in unpaid surplus-labour. *Thus everything appears reversed in competition.* The final pattern of economic relations as seen on the surface, in their real existence and consequently in the conceptions by which the bearers and agents of these relations seek to understand them, is very much different from, and indeed quite the reverse of, their inner but concealed essential pattern and the conception corresponding to it. (III, p.209)

Yet if the status of the phenomenal forms, in this figure, is one of a reality of visibility, the status of the real determinations is also a reality, a reality of invisibility. Indeed the work of a science is defined precisely by its opposition to the world of appearances:

... all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided. (III, p.817)

The constitutive feature of science, then, is its resolution of the visible in the terms of the invisible, the resolution of the apparent motion in terms of the real motion:

... a scientific analysis of competition is not possible, before we have a conception of the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are not intelligible to any but him, who is acquainted with their real motions, motions which are not directly perceptible by the senses. (I, p.316)

We will return, on several occasions, to this problematic of knowledge and vision, for many of the difficulties of this figure will be found to cohere around this point. But at this point let me merely remark that we have established that fetishism, in this figure of externalisation, concerns the relationship, and the distance, between these two realities—a distance between the visible reality of appearance and the invisible reality of essence; a relation in which the former is an inversion and concealment of the latter.

The second issue in need of comment at this point concerns the fetish, or, more precisely, that in which the fetish-character consists. The distance established between the relations of production in commodity producing societies and the form of reality which they produce entails a certain corollary effect, that of fetishisation. The greater this distance, the less the movements of capitalist production appear the product of a particular relation of production, and the more they appear the property of the things which merely support or mediate that relation — money, commodity or whatever. This effect, this reversal or inversion of the determination between production relations and their bearers which is apparent in commodity producing societies, presents itself as a subjectivisation of the *material* supports of production, and the mater-

ialisation of the *social* determinations of productions. The supports appear as autonomous Subjects, possessing certain powers in and of themselves, social relations as merely the static forms of mediation of these natural properties. The thing is ascribed properties which pertain to a relation, the relation is ascribed properties which pertain to a thing. But let us be clear at this point: fetishism, in this figure, is one particular and limited form of the appearance produced by the distance established between real and phenomenal – it is neither constitutive of that distance nor exhaustive of its effects. Fetishism is not definitive of the form of appearance itself, it is merely a characteristic of certain of its particularities.

Before moving on however, one point at least requires some clarification. For why is it, in this figure, that these determinate relations of capitalist production establish phenomenal forms in which they cannot appear except in the form of their concealment? For Marx is clear that such concealment is not *universal*, but historically specific to this mode of production (c.f. I, p.78-9). I would argue that Marx thinks this reason principally in terms of a *necessity* – that, in this figure, to establish the necessity of the distance between real and phenomenal is, at the same time, to theorise its occurrence. The necessity is thought as, at least, four times determined:

1. To ameliorate the *contradictions* of the capitalist mode of production (c.f.I,p.103-4).
2. To conceal the *historically specific*, and hence transient character of the capitalist mode of production (c.f. I, 80-81).
3. To secure certain processes which are *conditions of existence* of capitalist production – for example forms of law and contract, forms of calculation and other practices of accounting, the interests and experiences of the agents of production (c.f. III, p.25-40).
4. To repress that which is actually *constitutive* of the capitalist mode of production, the absence upon which its existence is predicated – the value-creating powers of human labour and its exploitation (c.f.I, p.577).

I will say no more at this point concerning the implications of the relation between the necessity of a process and its occurrence which is proposed in this figure; we shall see presently that these implications open onto a field of problems of considerable importance.

We are now, I hope, in a position to summarise the first movement that is proposed in this figure of externalisation. This movement proposes that capitalist relations of production exist only to the extent that they can establish a dislocation between themselves and the appearances in which they are manifested, and the space of this dislocation is that obtaining between real relations and their phenomenal forms. Let us express the mechanism of this dislocated presentation through the use of one of Marx's own words – *Darstellung* – a word to imply the act of production of a representation. Thus we could say that capitalist relations of production must necessarily produce as their representations a set of phenomenal forms and apparent connections which constitute

the concrete surface of capitalist society. These phenomenal forms are forms of concealment of real determinations, these apparent connections are forms of inversion of real connections, and the nature of this inversion conditions the production of the effect of fetishism.

(i) The Subject of externalisation

We can now mark the distance between the figures of alienation and externalisation, in relation to the first of our five questions. In the figure of externalisation we are concerned with no human essence, no anthropological process involving man and his predicates. Indeed we appear to be confronted here not with a *Subject*, but with a *motor*, and the motor of this movement of externalisation is not *Man*, but a particular structure of relations, none other than the *relations of production*. The terms externalisation and estrangement concern not the estrangement of Man from his objects, but the distance between the reality of the relations of production and the reality of the social relations which they establish. The processes of inversion involve not persons and things, but forms of connection and articulation. Fetishism is not a specular moment of abstraction but a property of forms of reality. The figure of externalisation is, to this extent, *non-anthropological in its character*.

(ii) The mechanism of externalisation

Whilst the mechanism of alienation was characterised as *abstraction*, what is involved in externalisation has the characteristics of a *production*. Yet, while we have applied a word to this relationship of production between two realities – *Darstellung* – have we yet provided the *concept* of the mechanism involved here (8)? Marx provides us with two sets of concepts, and specifies a necessary mechanism which relates them. Both sets of concepts denote, in a reflective mode, realities. A hidden reality, discovered by science, produces an apparent reality, obvious to all. To this extent, this figure is consistent with the epistemology which Marx sketches in his comments on method in the 1857 Introduction (9), and with the concept of determinate abstraction which he develops there. It will be recalled that the status of the determinate abstractions produced by science is one of reality – the concepts reproduce the concrete in thought, they are the appropriation of the concrete in thought. Thus scientific concepts are not only the way in which the real is known, they are the way in which the real exists. The real exists in the form of its knowledge, in a form awaiting its *discovery* by science. Thus we can understand why it is possible for a phenomenal form to be 'a-conceptual' and a real relation 'conceptual'. Thus too we can understand the mechanism of the *Darstellung*, for if the conceptual forms, as real relations actually exist in the real, as *Kerngestalten*, or inner mechanisms, these mechanisms may produce their effects, their representations, by a simple mode of causality (10). Such is the mode of causality proposed by the mechanism of externalisation. To the difficulties posed by such a mechanism we shall return below.

At this point we must move back from our questions to the analysis of the figure itself. For if the first movement of this figure is now clear, a second movement is also necessary. This second movement appears so unproblematic that it often escapes notice, but it is both required (theoretically) and assumed (practically). It is the movement in which the phenomenal forms and relations which constitute the concrete surface of capitalist society are experienced and reflected in the consciousnesses of the agents of production. The schema proposed is as follows. Certain subjects, as economic agents, are distributed to certain places in the system of relations that constitutes the phenomenal reality produced under capitalist relations of production. The place to which these subjects are distributed, the place which they occupy in the system of relations, provides them with certain experiences. At the same time the position which they occupy with respect to the relations of production determines certain interests. The subjects located in these places act as bearers or personifications of the interests determined by the position of their place within this structure of economic relations. The experience of these subjects is determined by the position of their place within the structure of phenomenal relations which these economic relations, these relations of production, produce. Thus capitalists and labourers have interests whose principles and differences are determined by the place they occupy in the production process. Their subjectivities are *determined by these interests, mediated by their experiences and reflected in their consciousness, and then expressed in their activities.*

Take, for example, the argument as to the transformation of labour power into wages, which Marx develops at the beginning of Part VI of Volume I of *Capital*. The argument is identical in form for both labourer and capitalist subjects. Thus, the capitalists interests in this matter are solely those of receiving as much labour as possible for as little money as possible. His experience indicates a regular relation between the level of wages and the function of labour — for example variations in wages with the length of the working day, or differences in the wages of different labourers who do the same job. He thus does not come to see that what he buys with his wages is not labour but labour power. Therefore he views labour as of equivalent status to any other commodity entering into the production process, and carries out his calculations on this basis. A subject situated in this place could not fail to see, not fail to calculate thus, for such is how the phenomenal forms of reality, the apparent motion of capitalist society *appears*, how it must appear to that capitalist subject. And that subject is a rational being, it is necessarily endowed with the characteristics of rationality which enable it to assess what is in its interests. The assessment is made on the basis of that subjects experience, the knowledges upon which the operations of rational assessment of interests are carried out are derived directly from experience. Experience is experience of the phenomenal forms of reality, it is experience of the apparent motion. Knowledge is a reflection of that apparent motion in consciousness. The place occupied in the structure of phenomenal reality determines the 'view' which the subject has of this phenomenal reality, hence the subjects

experience of that reality, and hence their knowledges. Knowledges are hence derived from an adequation between consciousness and an object exterior to it, mediated through the faculty of experience. The simple fact of occupation of a particular place by a subject is thus sufficient to secure the necessary interests, necessary consciousnesses, and hence their necessary outcomes, by virtue of the faculty of experience and the concealment of real determinations in the phenomenal forms which are given to experience (11).

We have now constructed both of the movements involved in this figure of externalisation, movements which ensure that the relations of capitalist production secure for themselves, and in themselves, certain conditions of existence which are necessary for them to function. I shall return in a moment to pose some questions to the movements proposed here, and, in the final part of this paper, to work briefly at some of the problems involved in one specific example in *Capital*. These problems are, perhaps, illustrated if I attempt to answer the third and fourth of the questions which I posed at the beginning of this paper, with respect to this figure.

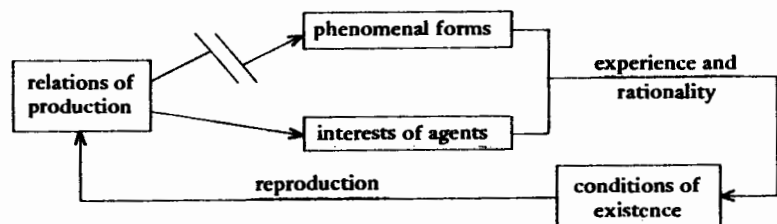
(iii) The limits of effectivity of externalisation

The figure of externalisation suggests that capitalist relations of production are not self sustaining, certain conditions must be met for their continued existence. Amongst these conditions are forms of consciousness (such as expectations and attitudes), accounting practices (such as forms of calculation of profit, methods of book-keeping), legal and juridical practices and so forth. Yet this figure also proposes a mechanism by which these conditions are *secured by the relations of production themselves*. To that extent the conditions of existence are not independent, they have no independent history, exert no independent determinations, have no independent effectivity within the social formation. A certain structuration of the relations of production not only requires these practices to occur, it actually *provides* them, it *guarantees* that the necessities of its existence do, in fact exist. Thus we can say that the figure of externalisation has *no limits of effectivity*, no region or level of the social formation which is of pertinance to the movement of production is not structured by the relations of production.

(iv) The theoretical functions of externalisation

We have seen that the theoretical functions of the figure of externalisation are to ensure that the economy works 'all by itself'. It requires nothing that it does not itself provide. No independent theorisation of its conditions of existence is required. To theorise the laws of motion of the economic, of the processes of production and circulation of capital, is to theorise the laws of motion of capitalist society. The double movement of the figure of externalisation with its single dislocation between real relations and phenomenal forms is none-the-less a continuous movement of expression, a movement in which the relations of production are ascribed the characteristics of a Subject — a single,

constitutive point of origin. We could illustrate this structure in the following diagram:



The Subject of the figure of externalisation is no longer anthropological, it is no longer *Man* which is at issue here. But theoretical problems do not conveniently disappear with the elimination of anthropology, and it is with an examination of some of the problems involved in this figure, and their political implications, that I will be concerned in the remainder of this paper.

Problems of Externalisation

In order to arrive at the position from which certain important problems can be identified in the 'theory of fetishism' proposed in *Capital*, it was first necessary to construct the dominant figure of this discourse, and to mark the distance of this figure from the speculative anthropology dominating the early texts. It is upon the terrain opened by this figure that the problems of fetishism and ideology of relevance to Marxist analyses of contemporary social formations may be posed. I would suggest that two major areas of difficulty, linked at a fundamental level, may be identified.

a. Knowledge and Vision (12)

We have seen that the figure of externalisation proposes that the relations of production construct a series of places and ascribe certain interests to those places. These empty places are then filled with subjects who, by virtue of occupying that place, experience reality in a certain manner and obtain knowledge through that experience. The method by which knowledge is acquired has the characteristics of perception — subjects are placed in a particular relation with the structure of phenomenal reality, hence see that reality in a particular way, and hence acquire a particular knowledge of that reality. If this knowledge does not comprehend real relations it is because the objects given to it obscure these real determinations — reality itself is misleading. Thus, in the case of fetishised knowledge, this figure is dependent upon the classical empiricist notion of knowledge. Knowledge is conceived as consisting in a relationship of adequation between a real, given, external object and the concept of that object. This real object of knowledge pre-exists the knowledge process, and is unaffected by it; it is given directly to the subject of knowledge in an immediate way through that subjects experience.

The subject proposed by the figure of externalisation has thus all the characteristics of the subject of empiricism. Yet the epistemology upon which this figure depends is, in the strongest sense of the word, *impossible*. For if we owe nothing else to the developments of semiology, we surely must grant it credit for the rigorous and sustained demonstration of the impossibility of any theory of knowledge which founds itself upon some confrontation between a given object in the real and a naïve experiencing subject, a confrontation in which reality contains not only itself but also the knowledge of itself. For knowledges consist not in a series of nominalistic categories secreted in the real, but in systems of concepts and notions, of signifiers, ordered internally according to relations of contiguity and difference. Whatever the relationship is between these knowledges and that which they are knowledge of, it can never be that implied by the metaphor of vision or any of its analogues – reflection, refraction, inversion or whatever. And these considerations hold just as much for those knowledges deemed 'ideological' as for those deemed 'scientific'. Knowledges are never secreted in the real and abstracted by naïve experiencing subjects – they are constituted only through determinate forms of organisation of signifying relations(13).

The subject of the knowledge process proposed in this figure shares another characteristic with the subject of empiricism, for not only is it endowed with the capacity of acceding to a pre-existing knowledge through the capacity of experience which enables it to abstract it from the real, it is also granted the faculty of rationality, which enables it to judge this knowledge, to calculate the effects of its actions on the basis of its interests. Like its interests and its experience, its rationality is pre-given, and the form of that rationality is the form of its necessity. For on the basis of its place, and the interests ascribed to that place, and on the basis of the knowledge gained by its experience, the experience of occupying precisely this place, the subject must make rational assessments of what is in its interests. The forms of economic calculation engaged in by subjects, for example, are necessitated by that place, and secured by the simple fact that such forms satisfy the pre-given requirements attached to that place. Thus such forms, for example the development of double entry book-keeping or the mode of calculation of profits, can exert no independent determinations, they have no independent conditions of existence and no specific effectivity. I shall return in a moment to draw out the consequences of such a position for an analysis of 'ideology'.

It is necessary first to ask what makes possible, in this discourse, the ascription to the subjects of this figure all the faculties characteristic of the subject of empiricism. I think the key to this possibility can be found in Marx's use of the concept of *personification*. The concept of personification allows the discourse to function *as if* the occupants of the places established by the relations of production were *human subjects*. For Marx, this appears merely as a device, a technique for the

clarity of exposition:

To prevent possible misunderstandings, a word. I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense *couleur de rose*. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. (I, p.10)

Thus Marx is enabled to discuss social relations *as if* they were relations between people, and indeed it is often precisely at the points in the discourse of *Capital* where the concept of personification is deployed, that the anthropology which I have characterised in the figure of alienation erupts into the text. Whilst in this anthropology, as we have seen, social relations do indeed concern human relations, the category of subject in the figure of externalisation designates not a person, but a support for the relations of production. And while such supports *may* be human, they are not *necessarily* human — as for example in the case of public companies, joint-stock companies and so forth (14). The concept of personification does not, in itself, rule out the consideration of the function of such non-human entities as supports of relations of production, yet what it allows in this figure is the untheorised ascription of all the faculties of the constitutive subject of humanist philosophy to such supports, for it is only on the assumption that the possibility of experience and rationality are intrinsic to such subjects that the figure may operate. The consideration of such non-human subjects of the relations of production merely emphasises what is also the case for human subjects — that criteria of rationality, identification of interests, forms of calculation are not essential or pre-given in those subjects, they are themselves constructed within determinate social practices which have their own specificity, their own history, their own conditions of existence and their own effectivity.

Let me pause to summarise, in the light of these remarks, what is implied by the structure of this figure of fetishism. Despite the apparent elimination of anthropology, this figure requires a humanist subject of knowledge, subject of reason for its operation. These faculties must be assumed as pre-given in these subjects, for it is only on this basis that they are able to fulfill their function as agents of production, as bearers of the relations of production. These faculties are hence a-social, pre-social, the conditions of possibility of any *socialité* whatever. They are both necessary for the structure of social relations, and yet necessarily assumed outside that structure. Subjects gain their knowledge from seeing the structure from the perspective in which they are placed, they divine their interests and act rationally in accord with them. To reject the possibility that knowledges arise from a relation of presence, of adequation between a concept and an object external to it, to deny that the subjects of social relations are necessarily human subjects and to reject the possibility that forms of rationality are essential to such subjects is, of necessity, to abandon the attempt to construct a 'theory of ideology' based upon the externalisation figure

of fetishism in Marx's *Capital*.

b. Concepts and Realities

Let me turn to examine, very schematically, a related problem. We have already seen that the mechanism of the *Darstellung* that obtains between real relations and phenomenal forms is made possible by the assertion of the *reality* of the former. Real relations, for Marx, are existents in the real, and as such existents they can produce real effects. A visible reality, obvious to all, is produced by the action of an invisible reality, waiting to be discovered by science. The work of science is to penetrate behind the misleading veil of external appearances, to make visible the invisible, to grasp in thought the real determinations which really produce the visible reality. Thus whilst ideological knowledge, for Marx, is simply an elaboration of the perception of the visible, as in his discussion of the theories of vulgar political economy (e.g. III, Ch.XLVIII), scientific knowledge is an elaboration of a different perception, a perception of the invisible — both knowledges fall within an empiricist conception of knowledge as vision.

To deny, as I have argued, that knowledges can every consist in a systematisation of the products of the perception of human subjects is thus not merely to problematise the notion of ideology proposed in the figure of externalisation, it is also to question the notion of science which founds it. For not even scientific knowledge can consist in this relation of adequation between concepts and the real. Science does not 'discover' a structure of existents which operate their effects in reality, sciences articulate a structure of concepts and relations implicated in determinate practices and with determinate effectivities. Such concepts and relations can never be 'given' in reality itself, neither to science nor to ideology. What is at stake in the displacement of an 'ideology' by a 'science' is not a movement of knowledge closer to a hidden reality, but a shift between two systems of concepts, implicated in different practices and with different effects. Thus the 'relations of production' are not existents in the real producing a set of phenomenal forms given to knowledge in the form of ideology, they are *concepts*, produced in a determinate discourse with a particular history, with its own conditions of existence, implicated in particular practices and exercising particular effects. The distance between 'ideology' and 'science', between 'phenomenal forms' and 'real relations', is not a distance between two realities, nor a distance between concepts and reality, but a distance between two discourses, and a distance between the political effects of these discourses. The epistemology of this figure of fetishism can be of no assistance in assessing these effects, or in generating a political practice towards them.

c. Fetishism and its Consequences

We have seen that what is proposed in this figure of fetishism is a double movement with a single dislocation, in which the relations of production generate their phenomenal forms and, in the same process, secure all their necessary conditions of existence. The relations of cap-

italist production thus function both as the source and as the subject of that necessary misrecognition of themselves which is the pre-requisite for their existence. A determinate structure of the relations of production thus not only specifies, but actually produces what Althusser (1970, p.65-6) terms the "society effect" — that is to say that this figure of fetishism specifies a mechanism which produces all those practices necessary for a capitalist social formation to *exist as a society*. And we have seen that, although we are concerned with a relational rather than a punctual origin, the relations of production do indeed fulfill the function of a Subject in this figure of fetishism. They are the genetic origin of the structure of the social formation, the principle of its unity, and, in a strong sense, the Subject of history. We are confronted with the proposition of a single linear causality, a single fundamental cause. The relations of production *can* have no really independent conditions of existence, their conditions of existence *can* have no really independent effects. Within this figure, to specify the structure of the relations of production is to specify the structure of the social formation in its totality.

Thus here the structure of the relations of production determines places, interests, experiences and forms of representation. Forms of representation, 'ideology', are effects produced at the essential, economic level of the relations of production. Their role is to fulfill a necessary function, a function which is both provided and secured outside themselves. The concept of ideology which is produced here is evidently *reductionist*, the concept of the social formation evidently *essentialist* and *economistic*. Yet it is vital for Marxists to recognise that, while certain forms of representation, for example the legal constitution of the enterprise or a particular way of calculating profit, *may* be a condition for the existence of a certain structuration of the relations of production, these forms are in no way *produced* or *provided* by such a structuration of the relations of production itself. They have a certain history, are inscribed in certain practices and are the site of struggles whose nature, effects and outcomes cannot be simply deduced functionally from certain concepts of the relations of production. These struggles have real effects, they effect real changes in forms of political organisation, in the magnitude and distribution of profits, in the form and status of the enterprise, in the balance and organisation of relations of power. To think these struggles within the forms of reduction proposed by the figure of fetishism is to abandon the possibility of theorising them in their own specificity, to reduce them to the empty banality of a single cause, to effectively exclude engagement with them at an appropriate political level.

The Object of Capital and the Discourse of Fetishism

It is clearly not within the scope of this paper to attempt an assessment of the implications of the rejection of the figures of fetishism for the discourse (or discourses) of *Capital* as a whole. I have limited the scope of my arguments to the question of ideology, yet it is clear that the

problems are by no means so easily isolated, we cannot simply pare away one problematic region and expect that the structure that remains will be intact. I will end therefore by making some very schematic and provisional comments on this issue, largely in the form of an example which concerns the calculation of profit.

To begin with a preliminary remark. It has been argued that it is misplaced to address questions concerning the issue of ideology to the text of *Capital*, that the object which *Capital* constructs concerns simply the economic instance of capitalist social formations, that is to say the mode of production. I have argued that the discourse of *Capital* concerns, in Marx's own terms, the laws of motion of capitalist society, and that the theoretical object which it constructs consists in a mode of production together with its necessary effects and conditions of existence. The figures of fetishism hence appear as 'solutions' to a problem created by this discourse, that of securing the provision of these effects and conditions of existence, and that this problem, and some solution to it, is *necessitated* by the structure of this discourse.

I will schematically illustrate this point with reference to the argument concerning profit proposed in *Capital*, III, Chapters 1, 2 and 5 (15). This example may also serve to clarify those points I have argued earlier in this paper, and will therefore involve certain repetitions. For Marx, the rate of profit, which concerns the theoretical space of 'price', is determined by the rate of surplus-value, which concerns the theoretical space of 'value'. The rate of surplus value may be formalised as $\frac{s}{c+v}$ where s = surplus-value, c = constant capital and v = variable capital. The rate of profit, on the other hand, may be formalised as $\frac{\pi}{P_{cp}}$ where π = profit and P_{cp} = cost price. Now Marx argues that the calculation of the cost of production (P_{cp}) must *necessarily* be carried out by the capitalist in production. This is because profits are identified by capitalists as the difference in monetary terms between the cost price of commodities and their selling price. This capitalist cost of production must be calculated, he argues, because capitalists must set aside a certain sum in order to be able to recommence production at the start of the next production period; P_{cp} is the calculation which enables the capitalist to determine how large a sum must be so set aside. Hence P_{cp} is not simply, for Marx, a 'book-keeping category', but a necessary calculation for the reproduction of the production process at the level of the enterprise. Now this cost or production is produced by adding the cost, in financial terms, of means of production and labour. Both means of production and labour enter the production process as commodities, and hence, in the calculation of cost price, the capitalist treats them identically — their price enters at an equivalent level into the calculation of the (capitalist) cost of production. Since they are not distinguished in the calculation it appears to the capitalist that profit springs simultaneously and equivalently from both; the capitalist thus expects an equal rate of profit from all portions of capital advanced. This obliterates the 'real' distinction between constant and variable capital (in which the surplus 'really' arises only as a result of the contri-

bution of variable capital) and makes profits appear to the capitalist to result from the combination of machines, raw materials and so forth, with labour (that is the purchase of the activity of the labourer for a given period) rather than from the unique attributes of human labour power (the specific property of human labour whereby it creates more value in a given period than is required for its reproduction). It therefore conceals the fundamental truth that profit is acquired by the capitalist solely by virtue of his appropriation of surplus labour, for the necessary calculation which he carries out, and its necessary form, means that he does not associate differential profit with the contribution of labour rather than the contribution of the means of production.

It is virtually unnecessary for me to point out the manner in which this argument can be constructed according to the figure of externalisation which I have outlined. Profits are here the necessary form of appearance of surplus labour under capitalist relations of production. Profits stand in a relation to surplus-value as phenomenon stands to essence, and the movement of essence to phenomenon is a movement of concealment. This concealment is necessary for capitalist production, the effects which the movement of concealment produces are necessary effects. These effects require certain forms of knowledges. The required form of knowledge is acquired through the means of experience, and the form of these means is a form of perception. Capitalists obtain these appropriate knowledges through the attribute of vision; since they are placed in this particular place in the production process, they perceive this process in a particular way, and hence they obtain an appropriate knowledge. The knowledge they obtain is also appropriate to the interests which the relations of production ascribe to the place which they occupy — and these interests are identical with their *class* interests. Knowledges produce certain forms of calculation which serve these interests — the capitalist cost of production is calculated in such a way that it reflects the fact that capitalists as a class are not interested in real relations, and indeed the form of calculation serves their real interests in concealing these relations. The forms of calculation generated on the basis of experience and interests also have a reproductive role, in that they reproduce the concealment of the real determinations through the expectations which they support. Thus the calculation of cost price of production generates certain expectations on the part of the capitalist — viz. that profits should be earned equally on all portions of capital. And it is crucial to stress that, in Marx's argument, these expectations, interests and forms of calculation are not simply contingent concomitants of the structure of capitalist relations of production, they are necessary effects, necessary conditions for the reproduction of those relations.

It would be redundant for me to rehearse here the critique of the mechanism which Marx provides for the securing of these necessary effects. For the problems which arise are not limited to those of the mechanism itself, but are produced by the theoretical structure which requires it. For as soon as it is proposed that the relations of production themselves

provide the mechanism which secures their conditions of existence in other practices, no theoretical solution can avoid reducing the effectivity of those practices to that of fulfilling a function which is provided outside of them. However sophisticated the processes suggested, what is ultimately at stake is a reductionist concept of those practices themselves, and an economic conception of the social formation. The autonomy of the extra-economic practices can only lie in the fact that they may fulfill these functions in various ways; both the functions are assigned, and their successful operation guaranteed, outside these practices, in the structure of the economic itself. For example, Althusser's attempt, within this theoretical structure, to resolve this problem by asserting the relative autonomy of the ideological, and by generating a level of apparatuses and practices within the ideological level founders on precisely this point. For the function of these apparatuses and practices is unified at a level outside of themselves, unified at the level of the economic where it is produced in order to secure the reproduction of the relations of production. It can be no surprise therefore that, whatever the apparent complexity of this attempt, it reduces in the end to a sophisticated functionalism (16).

Let me conclude with an example, both of contemporary pertinence, and relevant to the section of *Capital* which I have been discussing. The example concerns precisely the issue of the forms of calculation of profits employed by capitalists today. The calculation and declaration of profits have considerable importance, for they both serve as indicators as to the places where investable capital will flow and are an important revenue source for the state in the form of corporation taxation. Whilst Marx argues that capitalist rates of profit are calculated according to a ratio of profit to cost price of production, profits in Britain are predominantly calculated according to a ratio whose denominator concerns not the cost price of production but the total capital employed in the enterprise. The form of calculation of profits is, in fact, conditioned by the legal form of the enterprise. For example joint stock companies have a legal obligation to maintain themselves as a 'going concern', that is to demonstrate to their shareholders, who are denied access to the personal funds of the proprietors of the enterprise, that they are maintaining their capital intact. This demonstration is provided in the form of company accounts, in particular in the form of the balance sheet. The nature of the balance sheet, and the calculations contained therein, are determined by certain legal and accounting discourses, and inscribed within determinate practices. It is these discourses and practices which thus condition these crucial calculations. The current debates over the proposed shift from historic-cost to current-cost accounting take place in conditions which are laid out by these discourses and practices; the decisions which are taken by the legally recognised, and yet state-independent, professional body which rules on 'best practice' in the accountancy profession will have real effects upon the levels of, and distribution of, profits amongst enterprises of various types. These debates concern, for example, what can count as capital in the declaration of accounts, that is to say what

form of calculation of capital best serves to fulfil the legal obligation of the joint stock company to demonstrate that it is maintaining its capital assets intact. Should machines, for example, have their capital value assessed on the basis of their initial cost less depreciation, should inflation be taken into account by some form of indexing or on the basis of the replacement price of machinery, what allowance should be made for the depreciation of monetary holdings to take into account the decline in the real purchasing power of money pounds?

Now these debates, which concern 'no more than' book-keeping categories, are in no way necessitated or produced by a particular structure of the relations of production. They take place at the intersection of legal, accounting, economic, political and other discourses, inscribed within particular practices. There is no way in which the economic can be regarded as their prime cause, or the sole, or even principal determinant of their outcome. The discourses and practices implicated have both a really independent, though inter-related history, and really independent, though inter-related effectivities. The forms of calculation and declaration of capital and profit which are so conditioned will have real effects upon the level and distribution of profits amongst different branches and sectors of the economy, say between banking and property sectors on the one hand and heavy industry, textiles and other enterprises which hold high levels of stocks and physical assets on the other. Such effects, I would argue, have political consequences which demand that Marxists engage with them, and that their engagement be consistently theoretically informed. To remain within the forms of functionality which I have outlined is to abandon this possibility.

It is necessary therefore to recognise that, while we may be able to specify conceptually the legal, juridical and ideological conditions of existence of a determinate structure of the relations of production, these conditions of existence are neither provided, nor is their presence guaranteed, by that structure of the relations of production itself. Different practices have their own history, their own characteristics and their own effects, they are neither linked in a relation of functionality, nor is there a general form in which the relations of determination between practices may be theorised. Whilst there are certainly relations of dependence which exist between different practices, neither the nature nor the direction of these relations of dependence can be specified in general or universal terms, nor legislated for in advance. I must stress here that these questions are not of 'merely theoretical' interest, they are crucially related to the processes by which political practices of transformation of social relations, and of the relations of production, may be specified. The prevailing reductionist conceptions of ideology, and associated economic conceptions of the social formation, are simply unable to generate a theoretically informed political practice which can engage with the non-unified, dispersed and uneven contradictions between social practices which confront Marxists today. Neither, as I have attempted to show in this paper, can the concepts provided in *Capital*, cohering around the figures of fetishism, be assumed to be adequate to this task.

Notes

- (1) See, for example, the recent papers by Geras (1971), Mephram (1973), Holloway and Picciotto (1977), Hall (1977, p.60-64), as well as the work of Ranciere cited below.
- (2) The principal sources for the argument I develop are: Jacques Ranciere's (1965) contribution to *Lire le Capital*, translated in four parts (1971a, 1971b, 1972, 1976), an unpublished paper by Paul Hirst (1972) which contains an incisive critique of Ranciere's position, Ben Brewster's (1976) introduction to the publication in English of the fourth part of Ranciere's article, Etienne Balibar's (1973) response to questions posed to him by the editors of *Theoretical Practice*, and Paul Hirst's (1976) critique of Althusser's theory of ideology. In addition, I draw heavily upon papers given to a seminar on Marxist Economics, held at the Institute of Education in 1977, by Stuart Burchell, David Fishman, Grahame Thompson and Jim Tomlinson, for my comments in the final section. These authors cannot, of course, be held responsible for the interpretation which I make of their work.
- (3) References to *Capital* are given by citing the volume number, in Roman numerals, followed by the page or chapter number. Page references are to the works referenced as: Volume I - 1970; Volume II - 1972; Volume III - 1974.
- (4) References to the *Critique* and the *Manuscripts* are to the Penguin edition of *Early Writings* (1975).
- (5) This paper is a condensed extract from work in process for a thesis on Marxist theories of ideology.
- (6) See *Capital*, III, Ch.XXIV. A similar, but somewhat extended discussion can be found in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part III, Addendum I. My argument follows Ranciere (1976) in the main.
- (7) Marx cites some amusing consequences of the conception of capital as growing eternally by virtue of its innate properties (III, p.393-8).
- (8) At this point, a word of clarification is necessary. Ranciere applies to this mechanism a concept developed by J. Lacan, that of *mise-en-scène*, or staging. He cites the following passage from Lacan's 'Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache', *Ecrits*, Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1966, p.649:

If so, when Daniel Lagache sets out from a choice he offers me between a structure in some sense apparent (which would imply the critique of what the descriptive character contains that is natural), and a structure that he can call at a distance from experience (since it is a matter of the "theoretical model" he recognizes in analytical metapsychology), this antinomy neglects a mode of structure which, although a third, should not be excluded, i.e. the effects that the combinatory pure and simple of the *signifier* determines in the reality in which that combinatory is produced. For is structuralism what enables us to pose our experience as the field in which It (ça) speaks or is it not? If yes, "the distance from experience" of the structure disappears, since it acts there not as theoretical model but as the original machine which stages (*met en scène*) the subject there' (Quoted in Ranciere, 1976, p.375)

Ranciere's use of this concept clearly attempts to avoid the conclusion that, as I have argued, an essentialist mode of causality operates this figure. He proposes a mode of metonymic, or structural causality, of which L. Althusser writes:

The structure is not an essence *outside* the economic phenomena which comes and alters their aspect, forms and relations and which is effective on them as an absent cause, *absent because it is outside them*. *The absence of the cause in the structure's 'metonymic causality' on its effects is not the fault of the exteriority of the structure with respect to the economic phenomena; on the contrary, it is the very form of the interiority of the structure, as a structure, in its effects*. This implies therefore that the effects are not outside the structure, are not a pre-existing object, element or space in which the structure arrives to *imprint its mark*: on the contrary, it implies that the structure is immanent in its effects, a cause immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that *the whole existence of the structure consists in its effects*, in short that the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its particular elements, is nothing outside its effects. (Althusser, 1970, p.188-9).

Whilst it is clear that my belief is that such a mode of causality does not govern this figure of fetishism, it is necessary also to point out that the invocation of structural causality merely displaces, but does not erase, the problem which will concern us here (see ii below). For, as B. Hindess and P. Hirst point out, the conception of structural causality is based upon an epistemological rationalism which conflates analysis at the level of discourse with relations of determination obtaining in some extra-discursive, given object:

Once epistemological conceptions are rejected there can be no justification for the conception of social formation as historical individual. There is no basis for the conception of the unitary 'society effect' complete with an external boundary to that 'effect' and internally differentiated structural levels. . . . Social formation like mode of production and relations of production, is a *concept*. It is a concept which functions in theoretical discourse in the formation of other concepts, and in the specification of determinate objects of discourse, for example, of determinate forms in which determinate relations of production and their conditions of existence are provided. The concept of a determinate social formation is not the appropriation in thought of an independently existing 'concrete' social formation, and the order of discursive formation of the concept cannot be conceived, as it is, for example in the doctrines of structural causality and of determination in the last instance, as reflecting in thought the order of effectivity of the real. (1977, p.48)

The effects of these epistemological problems upon the figure of externalisation are discussed in a later section.

- (9) C.f. the section on 'The Method of Political Economy', in Marx, 1973.
- (10) By a simple mode of causality I mean either a linear or an expressive mode, as opposed to a metonymic or structural mode, as discussed in Note 8 above.
- (11) The argument is also applied in reverse: non-commodity producing societies are 'transparent', for example slave societies (I, p.541), Robinson Crusoe's (I,p.77), Communist societies (I, p.78-9).
- (12) My argument, in the main, follows Hirst (1972).
- (13) C.f Althusser, 1970, p.34-40. It must be stated that this is *not* an idealist position, although its positive implications cannot be developed here. The work of M.Foucault (esp. 1972, 1973) is particularly instructive in this regard.

- (14) C.f. Hirst, 1976, p.401-2, for a brief discussion of this issue.
- (15) The discussion in this section is indebted to the papers by Burchell et al. cited in Note 2 above.
- (16) C.f. Hirst, 1976, for an analysis of this position.

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