

SYSTEM, STRUCTURE AND CONTRADICTION IN *CAPITAL* *

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Is it possible to analyse the relations between an event and a structure, or to explain the genesis and evolution of that structure, without being forced to abandon a structuralist viewpoint? These two questions are topical, and some have already hazarded an affirmative reply. A new situation is emerging, one of the aspects of which is the resumption of a dialogue between structuralism and Marxism. This is hardly surprising, as Marx himself, a century ago, described the whole of social life in terms of "structures", advanced the hypothesis of the necessary existence of correspondences between infrastructures and superstructures characterizing different "types" of society, and, lastly, claimed the ability to explain the "evolution" of these types of society by the emergence and development of "contradictions" between their structures.

But the appearance of the word "contradiction" might seem to cut short this resumed dialogue, for we all remember the dialectical "miracles" of Hegel and many more or less well-known Marxists. But can the question be so simply answered; is Marx's dialectic the same as Hegel's? Marx's own statements on this point are equivocal: it sufficed to "turn the dialectic right side up again" to make it "scientifically useful", and to strip off all the mystifications with which Hegelian idealism had surrounded it.

I should like to reconsider this question by returning to the text of *Capital*. In fact, I think I can show that, in basic principles, Marx's dialectic has nothing to do with Hegel's, because they do not depend on the same notion of contradiction. Traditional exegeses of Marx then collapse, giving place to a Marx largely unknown even to Marxists, a Marx capable of providing unexpected and fruitful elements for the most up to date scientific reflection.

1. *From the Visible Functioning of the Capitalist System to its Hidden Internal "Structure"*

What does Marx mean by an economic "system"? A **determined** combination of specific modes of production, circulation, distribution

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and consumption of material goods. In this combination, the mode of production of goods plays the dominant rôle. A mode of production is the combination of two structures, irreducible to one another: the productive forces and the relations of production. The notion of productive forces designates the set of factors of production, resources, tools, men, characterizing a determined society at a determined epoch which must be *combined* in a specific way to produce the material goods necessary to that society. The notion of relations of production designates the functions fulfilled by individuals and groups in the production process and in the control of the factors of production. For example, capitalist relations of production are relations between a class of individuals who have private possession of the productive forces and of capital, and a class of individuals without this property who must sell to the former the use of their labour power in exchange for a wage. Each class complements and presupposes the other.

For Marx, the scientific understanding of the capitalist system consists in the discovery of the internal structure hidden behind its visible functioning.

Thus, for Marx, as for Claude Lévi-Strauss,¹ "structures" should not be confused with visible "social relations" but constitute a *level of reality* invisible but present behind the visible social relations. The logic of the latter, and the laws of social practice more generally, depend on the functioning of these hidden structures and the discovery of these last should allow us to "account for all the facts observed".²

A very crude summary of Marx's thesis might go as follows: in the practice of the capitalist system everything *occurs* as if the wage were paid for the worker's labour, and as if the capital had of itself the property of automatic growth and of rendering a profit to its owner. In day to day practice there is no *direct* proof that capitalist profit is unpaid workers' labour, no *immediate* experience of the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist.

For Marx, profit is a fraction of the exchange value of commodities which remains in the hands of their owner after deducting prime costs. The exchange value of commodities presupposes a unit of measurement which makes them commensurable. This common unit cannot be the utility of the commodities since there is nothing in common at the level of use value between vegetables and a fountain pen. . . . The exchange value of commodities can only derive from what they have in common as products of labour. The substance of value is therefore the socially necessary labour for the production of these commodities. Profit is a fraction of the value³ created by the use of workers' labour power which is not paid as wages. Profit is thus unpaid labour, free labour. But in practice, in the eyes of capitalists and workers, everything takes place as if the wages were paid for all the labour provided

by the worker (bonuses, piece rates, overtime rates, etc.). Wages thus give the workers' unpaid labour the appearance of paid labour: "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 capitalistic mode of **production**."⁴

In fact, once wages appear as the price of labour, profit can no longer appear as unpaid labour. It necessarily appears as the product of capital. Each class seems to draw from production the revenue to which it has a right. There is no visible exploitation of one class by another. The economic categories: wages, profits, interest, etc., thus express the visible relations of day to day business and as such they have a *pragmatic utility*, but no scientific value. Once economic science bases itself on these categories it, in fact, does no more than "*interpret, systematise and defend* in doctrinaire fashion the conceptions of the agents of bourgeois production who are entrapped in bourgeois production relations. It should not astonish us, then, that vulgar economy feels particularly at home in the estranged outward appearances of economic relations . . . and that these relations seem the more *self-evident* the more their internal relationships are concealed from it. . . ."⁵

The **intelligibility** and coherence introduced by this systematisation of the **current conceptions** of members of the **society** can only result in mythology. "To talk of the price of labour is as irrational as to talk of a yellow logarithm." Myth here consists of a coherent theory of appearances, of what *seems* to happen in practice. The scientific conception of social reality does not "arise by abstraction" from the spontaneous or reflected conceptions of individuals. On the contrary, it must destroy the obviousness of these conceptions in order to **bring out** the hidden internal logic of social life. Therefore, for Marx, the model constructed by science corresponds to a reality concealed beneath visible reality. But he goes even further; for him this concealment is not due to the inability of consciousness to "perceive" this structure, but to the structure itself. If capital *is not* a thing, but a **social relationship**, i.e. a non-sensible reality, it *must inevitably disappear* when presented in the sensible forms of raw materials, tools, money, etc. It is not the subject who deceives himself, but **reality** which deceives *him*, and the appearances in which the structure of the capitalist production process conceals itself are the starting-point for individuals' conceptions. For Marx, a determined mode of **appearance** corresponds to each determined structure of the real, and this mode of appearance is the starting-point for a kind of **spontaneous** consciousness of the structure for which neither consciousness nor the individual are responsible. It follows that the scientific understanding of a structure does not abolish the spontaneous consciousness of that

structure. It modifies its rôle and its effects, but it does not suppress it.⁴

When **Marx** assumes that structure is not to be confused with visible relations and explains their hidden logic, he inaugurates the modern structuralist tradition. And he is fully in accord with this tradition when he proposes the priority of the study of structures over that of their genesis and evolution. Before getting onto this new theme, I should like to set down, without developing it, a rough comparison of **Marx's** scientific practice with Uvi-Strauss', by resuming the principal characteristics of the latter's celebrated analysis of the Murngin kinship system, to be found in *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*.⁷

This Australian kinship system was considered "aberrant" by specialists, because it could never be exactly classified in a typology of the so-called "classical" Australian systems. The latter are of three types, according as to whether the number of matrimonial classes is two, four or eight. It had been established that a moiety system prescribed marriage between cross cousins, but forbade it between parallel cousins. The four-section Kariera system was the same. Nothing was changed, therefore, in the order of prescriptions and prohibitions on passing from a two-class matrimonial system to a four-class matrimonial system. On the other hand, in the Aranda eight-subsection system, marriage between any first cousin, cross or parallel, was prohibited.

But the Murngin system differs both from the Kariera and from the Aranda systems. It contains eight subsections, just as the Aranda system does, but for all that, it authorizes marriage with the matrilineal cross cousin as the Kariera system does. But while the Kariera system authorizes marriage with both the cross cousins, the Murngin system forbids it with the patrilineal cross cousin, thus introducing a dichotomy between cross cousins. It also has other singular features: it demands seven lineages while four suffice for the Aranda system and two for the Kariera; its kinship terminology includes seventy-one terms, while that of the Aranda has forty-one and that of the Kariera twenty-one.

The dichotomy of cross cousins, preferential marriage with the matrilineal cross cousin and the other peculiarities of the system thus demand an explanation. Claude Uvi-Strauss has shown that this can be given if we assume the existence and action—beneath the explicit system of restricted exchange between eight subsections which is the appearance of the Murngin system—of an implicit four-section system of a quite different structure, of which the Murngin themselves are not conscious, and which the ethnologists specializing in kinship had not yet really identified and theorised: a structure which Uvi-Strauss calls "the structure of generalised exchange".

While in a system of restricted exchange, marriage always conforms to the same rule since if a man of A marries a woman of B, a man of B can marry a woman of A, in a system of generalised exchange, if a man of A marries a woman of B, a man of B will marry a woman of C, and a man of C a woman of A. A will then have taken a woman from B, but "in exchange" grants a woman to C. Here reciprocity takes place between a certain number of partners by the interplay of relations oriented in a determined and irreversible direction: $A \Rightarrow B \rightarrow C \Rightarrow A$. It can be shown that in a system of generalised exchange with four sections the matrilineal cross cousin is always in the class immediately succeeding that of Ego, whence he can always take a wife, while the patrilineal cross cousin is always in the preceding class, which is forbidden. The structure of such a system thus provides the theoretical formula for Murngin marriage, and establishes the law of the dichotomy of cross cousins.

It is then easy to show that if matrilineal moieties are added to a four-section system of generalised exchange, each section is redoubled into two subsections, producing an eight-subsection system which has the appearance of a double system of restricted exchange of the Aranda type. At the same time, all the other peculiarities of the system, the number of lineages, the enormously extended terminology, appear as so many necessary consequences of the functioning of this implicit structure, as complementary aspects of its internal logic.

The immense importance of Uvi-Strauss' demonstration is easily seen. While seeking to account for a peculiar, aberrant^s, case, not classifiable under the rubrics of the traditional ethnological typology, he discovered the existence^c and explained the nature of a new family of structures, which was much more complex than those previously known and, in particular, much more difficult to identify because the exchange cycle determined by it is not "so immediately perceivable". A new classification of kinship systems became necessary and possible, including within it the old typology of systems of restricted exchange whose peculiarity was now manifest. In the practical sphere a tool was now available to set out on a study of certain complex kinship systems in China, India, S.E. Asia and Siberia, which had so far seemed outside the notion of exchange.

Lévi-Strauss' methodological principles and conclusions had no less importance in the epistemological sphere. Whether a structure is **implicit**,¹⁰ as with the Murngin, or explicit, as with the Katchin, it is never directly visible and decipherable at the empirical level, but has to be discovered by theoretical labour in the production of hypotheses and models. Uvi-Strauss' structural analysis therefore rejects in principle Radcliffe-Brown's functionalist **structuralism**¹¹ and, in general,

the whole of Anglo-Saxon empirical sociology, for which structure is part of empirical reality.¹²

Structure is part of reality for Evi-Strauss as well, but not of empirical reality. A structure cannot therefore be opposed to the theoretical model built to represent it. The structure only exists in and through the human mind (*esprit*), and this is a rejection equally of the idealist and of the formalist **structuralisms** that lay claim to Lévi-Strauss.¹³ The latter's position is put, more explicitly than anywhere in *Structural Anthropology*, in a reply to Maybury-Lewis who had accused him of discovering pseudo-structures contradicting the ethnographic data: "Of course the final word should rest with experiment. However, the experiment suggested and guided by deductive reasoning will not be the same as the unsophisticated ones with which the whole process started. They will remain as alien as ever to the deeper analysis. The ultimate proof of the molecular structure of matter is provided by the electronic microscope, which enables us to see actual molecules. This achievement does not alter the fact that henceforth the molecule will not become any more visible to the naked eye. Similarly, it is hopeless to expect a structural analysis to change our way of perceiving concrete social relations. It will only explain them better."¹⁴

A secondary consequence of the structural method is its critique of all psychologism and sociological teleology. From *Structures Élémentaires* on, Evi-Strauss showed that Warner's psychological considerations gave an illusory answer to the problem of the existence of seven Murugin **lineages**.¹⁵ Warner tried to explain this by the need to resolve the tensions which would be produced in the group between Ego and his mother's brother, i.e. the father of his matrilineal cross cousin, his future wife, without this multiplication of **lineages**.¹⁶ We have seen that the answer owed nothing to psychology, but was to be found in the logic of the system of generalised exchange itself, while Warner did not even suspect the existence of the latter.

More basically, the analysis of the logic of a structure allows us to bring its possibilities and capacities for evolution into the open. Research into the origin and genesis of a structure is in some sense "guided" by a knowledge of its mechanism. In the Murugin case, Lévi-Strauss assumes that they had borrowed from elsewhere the **eight-subsection system** which they were forced to make compatible with their original matrimonial **system**.¹⁷ He then shows that such a system is "unstable", determining its possible forms and modes of evolution. He demonstrates that this instability is characteristic of all systems of generalised exchange which belong in principle to the "harmonic" **régime**, since their rules of filiation are the same as their rules of residence in the definition of the social status of an individual, while systems

of restricted exchange are in principle "dysharmonic and *stable*".¹⁸ He concludes from this that here is the basis for the unequal capacity of appearance and evolution of these two families of **structure**.¹⁹ These capacities are thus objective properties of the structures, properties independent of individuals and remaining essentially unconscious to them. For example, if the Murngin system is the product of borrowing and adaptation it is thereby the product of a conscious and desired activity, but, in essentials, the Murngin remained unconscious of the logic and evolutionary capacity of their new system which were not at all dependent on their intentions. In this perspective social evolution ceases to be a series of accidents of no *significance*.²⁰

This very brief analysis of a few fragments of the earliest work of **Lévi-Strauss** nevertheless suffices for a comparison between Marx and modern structuralism. It has allowed me to isolate in **Lévi-Strauss'** practice two principles of structural analysis: the first, that structure is part of reality, but not of visible relations, the second, that the study of the internal functioning of a structure must precede and illuminate the study of its genesis and evolution. I have already shown that the first principle can be found in Marx. I shall now go on to show that the architecture of *Capital* cannot be understood without the second.

2. *The Priority of the Study of Structures over that of their Genesis and Evolution.*

This priority is apparent from a simple glance at the architecture of *Capital*. The work does not start with the theory of capital, but by setting out the theory of value, *i.e.* by the definition of a group of categories necessary to the study of any system of commodity production, whether this is based on the labour of a free peasant, a slave, a serf, or a wage labourer, etc. This group of categories is developed from a definition of the exchange value of a commodity. Money is then introduced as a special commodity with the function of expressing and measuring the exchange value of other commodities. Coin is defined as a form of money. Coin ceases to function as a simple means of circulation of commodities and begins to function as capital when it brings in coin, when its use adds value to its initial value. The general definition of capital whatever its form—commercial, financial or industrial—is that it is value that makes value and brings in surplus value.

By the end of the second section of Volume I of *Capital* Marx thus has at his disposal the theoretical instruments necessary to identify the specific structure of the capitalist economic system, the capital-labour relation, and to construct the theory of capital. Before this theory could be undertaken, a rigorous definition of the notion of commodity

was essential, for within the capital-labour relation labour power appears as a commodity. This makes possible an analysis of the internal structure of the capitalist system, i.e. a study of the mechanism of the production of surplus value through the capital-labour relation. Volume I analyses at length the two forms of surplus value: absolute surplus value (obtained by lengthening the **working** day without increasing wages) and relative surplus value (obtained by decreasing the costs of employing the worker, by increasing the productivity of labour in the branches producing the means of subsistence of the workers and their families).

Only at the end of Volume I does the reader find Marx setting out the problem of the *genesis* of the capitalist production relationship via a discussion of what the classical economists called "the problem of primitive accumulation". Marx's procedure thus marks a break with any historicism or reliance on events. The genesis of a structure can only be studied under the "guidance" of a pre-existing knowledge of that structure. To study the genesis of the specific structure of the capitalist system is to determine the particular historical circumstances of the emergence of individuals who are free in person, but deprived of the means of production and of money and forced to sell the use of their labour power to other individuals who possess the means of production and money but are forced to buy others' labour power to set these means of production in motion and breed their money. But Marx only sketches this genesis in a rapid perspective of some of the conditions, forms and stages of the appearance of capitalism in Europe, and this does not constitute a history of capitalism. Among these stages we might mention the disbanding of feudal retinues in England, the expropriation and partial expulsion of cultivators, the "enclosures" movement, the transformation of merchants into merchant-manufacturers, colonial trade, the development of protectionism. All these appeared in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries here and there in Portugal, Spain, France and England, and generally resulted in the emergence of a large number of producers without means of production and their use in a new structure of production.

"The capitalist system *presupposes* the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realize their labour. As soon as capitalist production is once on its own legs, it not only *maintains* this separation, but *reproduces* it on a continually extending scale. The process, therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate

producers into wage labourers. The so-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as primitive, because it forms the prehistoric stage of capital and of the mode of production corresponding with it. The economic structure of capitalistic society *has grown out of* the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter sets free the *elements* of the former.²⁹¹

Thus to analyse the historical genesis of a structure is to analyse the conditions of emergence of its internal elements and the way they come into relation with one another. In its constitution, economic history presupposes that these elements and this relation are already identified, so it presupposes economic theory. In **Marx's** text the genesis of one system is described simultaneously with the dissolution of another, and these two effects depend on the same process, the development of internal contradictions within the old system (which must also be theorised).

This general progress from the identification of the structure to the study of its genesis might seem to founder on an obstacle that Marx himself considered. For how can the hypothesis of the appearance of internal contradictions inside a system be reconciled with the thesis that the functioning of this system necessarily *reproduces* its conditions of functioning? For example, the capitalist system's functioning mechanism ceaselessly reproduces the capital-labour relation on which it is built. The mechanism of profit and wage always allows the capitalist class to accumulate new capital and to reproduce itself as the ruling class, while on the other hand it forces the working class to put its labour power up for sale again, and to reproduce itself as the ruled *class*.²⁹² The capital-labour relation appears as the *constant element* in the capitalist economic structure throughout all the latter's variations: the passage from the capitalism of free competition to private or state monopoly capitalism, the appearance of new productive forces, changes in the composition of the working class, in its forms of trade union and political organization etc. The discovery and *definition* of this constant constitute the necessary point of departure for the scientific study of the system, of its genesis and evolution. The latter appears as the study of *variations compatible* with the reproduction of the constant element of the system structure. At this level the passage from political economy to economic history is once again set out. Synchronic and diachronic studies are possible (analyses of the various *states* of a structure corresponding to various *moments* in its evolution). But diachronic analysis of the variations which are compatible with the reproduction of a constant relation does not produce any structural incompatibles, any conditions of *change*.²⁹³

But can incompatible variations be produced *within* the functioning

of a system if the very maintenance of the system proves that they are compatible with its reproduction? Before I analyse **Marx's** notion of contradiction in detail, I should like to develop further that of "structural compatibility", for it plays a decisive double rôle which illuminates the whole method and plan of Capital. It allows Marx to account for the visible forms of the functioning of the capitalist system which he had initially rejected. It also allows him to explain the new rôle and new forms which the "antediluvian" forms of capital²⁴—commercial capital and finance capital—take on when they function in the framework of modern capitalism. I shall summarize these two points briefly so as to be able to deduce their methodological consequences. As we have seen, Marx first of all analysed the production mechanism of surplus value and showed that it consisted of production from unpaid labour. He then showed that the internal and necessary connection between surplus value and labour disappears once surplus value is put into relation with all the capital advanced by the capitalist rather than with the wage paid to the worker, i.e. it disappears once surplus value appears as profit. The results of Volume II allow him, in Part I of Volume III, to analyse the complex conditions for the realization of a maximum profit by the capitalist entrepreneur. I can leave aside these problems—those of the relations between value and price, price and profit, normal profit and super profit, rate of profit in various branches and at the level of the national economy, etc.—without loss for our purposes. What is essential is that we should remember **Marx's** conclusions. From his profit, which at the limit seems to have little relation to the real exploitation of his own workers, the capitalist must subtract a portion for the ground rent of the proprietor of the land on which his factory stands, another which goes as interest to a lender or to a bank, another which he owes to the State as taxes. The remainder constitutes the profit of his enterprise. By showing that the mechanism of the production of surplus value is the common origin of the visible forms of capitalist profit even though certain categories of capitalists seem to have no direct link with the production process, Marx made possible the analysis of the articulation of the internal structure of the system to the visible forms which he avoided on principle at the outset of his work.

Marx returns to these visible forms by defining at one and the same time their real function in the system and their internal compatibility with the essential structures that were given priority in his study. In modern terms, his progress would constitute a kind of ideal genesis of the various elements of a system on the basis of its laws of internal composition. Marx defined it himself in respect to money: "Everyone knows, if he knows nothing else, that commodities have a value-form common to them all, and presenting a marked contrast with the varied

bodily forms of their use-values. I mean their money-form. Here, however, a task is set us, the performance of which has never yet even been attempted by bourgeois economy, the task of tracing the *genesis* of this money-form, of developing the *expression* of value implied in the value-relation of commodities, from its simplest, almost imperceptible outline, to the dazzling money-form. By doing this we shall, at the same time, *solve* the riddle presented by *money*.¹¹¹

But I must avoid a misunderstanding which might arise from what I have called the ideal genesis of economic categories. For if an object becomes a commodity once it is produced for exchange, this exchange could be by barter and thus not imply the existence of any money. The exchange of commodities necessitates the specialisation of a commodity in the function of expressing and measuring the exchange value of other commodities only in determined concrete conditions (whether this commodity be *cocoa*, sea-shells, cattle or gold does not alter its function). Other precise conditions are necessary if a precious metal is to be imposed as the general form of money. Marx is thus not working as a Hegelian by the "deduction" of one category from another. He makes explicit the functions of one element within a structure, or of one structure within a system and explains the ranking of these functions. There is therefore no need to wait for the discovery of where and how the first money was invented to solve the "riddle presented by money". The object of economic theory is to render explicit these functions and their ranking in a given structure, and thus to articulate one to the others in a kind of logical genesis. But this genesis is not the real genesis and does not replace it. Once more economic theory, without being confused with economic history, provides it with the guide line for its analyses while developing thanks to its results. Here *Marx* totally rejects any historicism and any priority of the historical study of a system over its structural study, and anticipates by more than half a century the crises of linguistics and sociology which led de Saussure and Lowie to reject nineteenth century evolutionism.

"Rent *cannot* be understood without capital, but capital *can*, without rent. Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society. It must *form* the starting point as well as the end and can be developed before land-ownership is. After each has been considered separately, their mutual relation must be analysed. It would thus be *impractical* and *wrong* to arrange the economic categories in the *order* in which they were the *determining factors in the course of history*. Their order of sequence is rather determined by the *relation* which they bear to one another in modern bourgeois society, and which is the exact *opposite* of what seems to be their natural order or the order of their historical development. It is *not a matter of* the *place* which economic

relations occupy in the *historical succession* of different *forms of society*. Still less is it a matter of the order of their succession "in the Idea" (Proudhon) (a nebulous conception of historical movement). It is a matter of their *articulation* within modern bourgeois *society*.¹⁰⁰

This explains why the functioning of a structure must be compatible with the functioning of other structures, or must become so if they are to belong to the same system. It illuminates the status of the analysis of commercial and financial capital in *Capital*. Commodity production is not, in fact, exclusively characteristic of modern capitalism. To the extent that an important exchange of commodities existed in some societies with as different relations of production as the great states of the ancient East, Greek and Roman slave societies and the feudal societies of the Middle Ages, the functions of commerce and to a certain extent those of credit had also to exist. But in both cases the forms and importance of these commodity relations changed. **Marx** shows, for example, that the rates of usury in money trade and the immense gains from international commodity trade characteristic of many **precapitalist** societies were incompatible with the development of industrial capital, and that this last imposed the creation of new forms of credit and the establishment of much lower interest rates. This profoundly altered the proportion of the value of commodities returned to commercial or financial capital.

"The credit system develops as a reaction against usury. But this should not be misunderstood. . . . It *signifies* no more and no less than the *subordination* of interest-bearing capital to the *conditions and requirements* of the capitalist mode of *production*."¹⁰¹

Thus the appearance of new structures modifies the conditions of existence and *rôle* of older structures which are obliged to transform themselves. Our analysis closes with the emergence of the notion of a **limit** to the functional compatibility of different structures. We have once again arrived at the problem of the genesis of new structures and of **Marx's** notion of contradiction.

3. *Two Notions of Contradiction in "Capital"*

I shall start by listing the various contexts in which we find Marx talking of contradiction. First of all there is the contradiction between workers and capitalists. Then there are the economic "crises" in which contradictions appear between production and consumption, between the conditions of production of value and surplus value and the conditions of their realization, and basically between productive forces and relations of production. Finally there are the contradictions between capitalism and small peasant or artisan property, capitalism and socialism, etc. This simple list reveals differences of nature and importance among these contradictions, of which some are internal to the

system, and other exist between the system and other systems. They must therefore be **analysed** theoretically.

The first contradiction presented is that between capital and labour. between the capitalist class and the working class. One owns the capital, the other is excluded from ownership of it. One's profit is the unpaid labour of the other. What characterizes this first contradiction? It is inside capitalist "relations of production". It is thus an "*internal contradiction of a structure*".

This contradiction is *specific*²⁸ to the capitalist mode of production. It characterizes it as such, distinguishing it from other, slave-based, feudal, etc., modes of production. As it is specific, it characterizes the system *from the beginning*, and the functioning of the system continually *reproduces* it. It is therefore original, in the sense that it is present from the beginning, and remains until the disappearance of a system. It develops with the development of the system, it is transformed by the evolution of capitalism from free competition to monopoly and by the evolution of the trade union and political organization of the working class. This contradiction is antagonistic: the function of one class is to exploit the other. It reveals itself in the class struggle. It is visible to and to some extent deciphered by the psychologist and sociologist, who distinguish individuals by their different functions and statuses, by the economist and the historian; finally, the philosopher may take it as his object when reflecting on justice, inequality, etc.

Is this basic antagonism, which would seem to **occupy** the forefront of the historical **stage** in fact the basic **contradiction** of capitalism? No. For **Marx**, the latter is the contradiction between the development and the socialisation of the productive forces and the private ownership of the means of production.

"The contradiction, to put it in a very general way, consists in that the capitalist mode of production involves a tendency towards absolute development of the productive forces, regardless of the value and surplus-value it contains, and regardless of the social conditions under which capitalist production takes place; while, on the other hand, its aim is to preserve the value of the existing capital and promote its self-expansion to the highest limit (i.e. to promote an ever more rapid growth of this value)."²⁹

How is this contradiction visible? "This collision appears partly in periodical crises."³⁰

In a crisis, the basic contradiction appears in the contradictions between production and consumption and between production and circulation of commodities. More profoundly, it appears in the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

What are the characteristics of this contradiction?

power appears as the fruit of a victorious struggle both against feudal lordship and its revolting prerogatives, and against the guilds and the fetters they laid on the free development of production and the free exploitation of man by man.¹⁰³

Thus the basic contradiction of the capitalist mode of production is *born* during the development of the mode of production, and is *not present* from the beginning of the system. This contradiction appears without anyone wishing to make it appear. This contradiction is therefore *unintentional*. It is a result of the action of all the agents of the system and of the development of the system itself, and is never the project of any consciousness, is never anyone's goal. **Marx** is therefore drawing attention to *aspects of reality which cannot be referred to any consciousness nor explained by consciousness*. It is the mode of production itself, the valuation of capital, which produces this result "unconsciously".¹⁰⁴

But this basic, unintentional, non-original contradiction is not the opaque involuntary residue of intersubjective action. It is unintentional and without teleology, but transparent to *science* because it is "significant". It signifies the *limits* within which it is possible that capitalist relations of production, based on private property, may correspond to the development of the productive forces to which they have given birth.

These limits are "immanent" to capitalist relations of production, and cannot be "overcome",¹⁰⁵ since the valuation of capital depends on the exploitation of the great mass of producers; they are thus limits expressing *objective properties* of the capitalist mode of production (not of capitalists or workers as individuals or economic agents).

"The entire capitalist mode of production is only a relative one, whose barriers are not absolute. They are absolute only for this mode, *i.e. on its basis*."¹⁰⁶

These limits are the limits within which the relations of production can remain constant, allowing for gigantic variations in the productive forces. These limits are thus objective properties of the system and these properties establish the necessity for its evolution and disappearance. They can act on the system itself and are the *causality* of the structure on itself. "The *real barrier* of capitalist production is *capital itself*."¹⁰⁷

This causality acts everywhere, but it is impossible to localize its effect anywhere. It intervenes everywhere between one event and another to give each all its dimensions, whether conscious or not, *i.e.* the field of its effects, whether intentional or not. For **Marx**, the set of properties of the structure always comes between a cause and its effects, giving the action its objective dimensions.

Thus, while ceaselessly developing the productive forces, capital

"unconsciously" creates the *material* requirements of a higher mode of production".⁴¹ and necessitates the transformation of capitalist conditions of large-scale production based on private property into "general, common, social conditions".⁴² The development of capitalism makes possible and necessary the appearance of a socialist economic system, of a "higher" mode of production. But what does "higher" mean here, what is the criterion on which this value-judgement is based?

The criterion is the fact that the *structure* of socialist relations of production *corresponds* functionally with the conditions of rapid development of the new, gigantic, more and more socialised productive forces created by capitalism. The criterion thus expresses the possibilities, the objective properties, of a historically determined structure. This correspondence is totally *independent* of any *a priori* idea of happiness, of "true" liberty, of the essence of man, etc. Marx demonstrates the necessity and superiority of a new mode of production, thus establishing a value-judgement *without starting with an a priori* criterion of *rationality*.⁴³ This value judgement is not a judgement of "people", it does not demonstrate any progress in "morality", any victory of "ethical principles" in socialist society as against capitalist society. It is a judgement of the "properties" of a structure, of the particular conditions of its appearance and functioning.

The necessity for the appearance of a new mode of production no longer derives from a teleology concealed in the mysteries of the essence of man as revealed to the philosopher alone, be he materialist or idealist, for it is no longer possible to read into the historically determined contradiction of capitalist relations of production with a determined level of the productive forces the philosophical drama of the revolt of the "true essence" of man against the "dehumanised existence" imposed on the workers by the bourgeoisie.

In *Capital*, the analysis of the contradictions of the capitalist system radically separates economic science from any ideology, and Marx has nothing more to do with the young Marx. For ideology consists precisely of transforming the "merely historical transitory" necessity of the mode of production into a characteristic attributable to "Nature".⁴⁴ Marx's analysis rejects all the "humanist" justifications which might be given for the superiority of socialism. This does not mean that he rejects the real problems that may be expressed in a humanist ideology if it is materialist. But to analyse these problems theoretically is to determine the new possibilities for social evolution specific to socialist structures.⁴⁵ By suppressing capitalist relations of exploitation and domination, the socialist society creates new conditions of social evolution just as the capitalist system did by destroying the earlier feudal society and its forms of slavery.

I have distinguished two types of contradiction in *Capital*, and shown

that the basic contradiction illuminating the evolution of the system is the contradiction *between its structures*, and that this contradiction is born of the objective *limits* to the relations \mathcal{C} production maintaining themselves constant while the productive forces vary in certain proportions. Now I can attempt a definition of the theory of contradiction which is implicit in Marx, and, which I think, radically opposes Marx's dialectic to that of Hegel.

4. *The Radical Opposition between Marx's Dialectic and Hegel's Dialectic*

The terms which still obscure Marx's and Engels' presentation of this problem are well known. On the one hand, Marx declares that his dialectical method is the "direct opposite" of Hegel's, Engels that the dialectic was "useless in its Hegelian form" and that only Marx's dialectic is "rational". But at the same time, Marx adds that it suffices to put the Hegelian dialectic "right side up again" to find its "rational form", and to set it right side up again is to remove the "mystifying side" introduced by Hegel's absolute idealism. The matter seems simple and reassuring. But in recent articles⁴⁶ Louis Althusser has torn off this veil of words and forced us to see the unlikely absurdity of this hypothetical "inversion of Hegel".

"It is inconceivable that the essence of the dialectic in Hegel's work should not be contaminated by Hegelian ideology . . . that the Hegelian ideology could cease to be Hegelian and become Marxist by a simple, miraculous extraction."

For Althusser the specific difference of Marx's dialectic is to be found in the fact that the latter's contradictions are "overdetermined" in principle. This answer does not seem to me to grasp the essential point, although it provides valuable positive elements at another level. To take up the problem from another angle, Marx describes two kinds of contradiction. One of these, within the structure of the relations of production, appears before the other which is produced little by little between *the two structures* of the capitalist mode of production, the relations of production and the productive forces. The first contradiction appears and disappears with the mode of production. The second appears with the development of the system as an effect of the functioning of the first contradiction, but it is this second one which creates the material conditions for the disappearance of the system: it is the fundamental contradiction. The relation between the two contradictions thus shows that the *first* contradiction, within the relations of production, *does not contain within itself the set of conditions for its solution*. The material conditions of this solution can only exist outside it as the productive forces are a *reality completely distinct* from the relations of production and *irreducible* to them, a reality

which has its own internal conditions of development and its own temporality.

The other conditions of solution of the contradiction in the relations of production are found at the level of the political, cultural super-structures, and these structures are equally irreducible to the relations of production and have their own modalities of development. For Marx the solution to an internal contradiction of the structures of the relations of production is not created solely by the internal development of this contradiction. The greater part of the conditions of this solution is outside the contradiction, and irreducible to its content.

On the other hand, the possibility of resolving the second contradiction, between the structures of the economic system, is born of the internal development of the system (and, as we shall see, from the movement of all the structures of the society). The solution to this second contradiction is a change in the structure of the relations of production *to make them correspond* with that of the productive forces. This change implies the exclusion of private ownership of the means of production, thus suppressing *the very basis of the internal contradiction* in capitalist relations of production. But this suppression is only possible at a certain moment in the development of the mode of production, a moment in the development of the productive forces. The class contradictions within the relations of production may "simmer" but no solution will emerge necessarily, unless there is development of the productive forces (on the contrary, there may be a cyclical reproduction of social conflict, stagnation, etc.).

Our analysis definitely excludes the possibility that Marx could have held a theory of the "identity of opposites". This hypothesis was, in fact, invented by **Hegel** to show that there is an *internal solution to the internal contradictions of a structure*. If such a solution is possible, each of the elements contradicted within the structure must at the same time be its own opposite. The thesis must be itself and its opposite the antithesis if the synthesis is already contained in their contradiction. **Marx's** work radically excludes this possibility, for neither the elements in contradiction within a structure, nor the structures in contradiction within a system *are reducible to one another*, identical to one another.

This shows that the identity of opposites, the basic structure of the Hegelian dialectic *is only necessary* to provide "proof" of absolute idealism and *to establish Hegelianism* as the absolute knowledge of the absolute spirit, a totality which itself contradicts itself in the exteriority of nature and the interiority of the Logos, maintaining its identity through all its contradictions. The identity of opposites is, in fact, the magical operator which **Hegel** had to provide himself to build the palace of **ideas**⁴⁷ which is absolute knowledge, and to give

a rational appearance to the ideological sleight of hand which serves as the unprovable point of departure for absolute **idealism**. Thus **Hegel's** philosophical idealism determines the specific internal content of this notion of contradiction, and this structure, based on the principle of the identity of opposites, is the direct inverse of **Marx's**, making the dialectic "useless for science".¹¹ In fact anything, i.e. nothing, can be proved with the hypothesis of the identity of opposites.

It is now easy to understand why Marx declared from the *Contribution* on: "Hence, *it is the simplest matter* with a Hegelian to treat production and consumption *as identical* . . ."¹² and added: "The result we **arrive** at *is not* that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they are all members of one totality, differences within one *unity*."¹³

And in *Anti-Dühring*, **Engels** defended **Marx's** dialectical method by showing that it could not be reduced to "these dialectical . . . mazes . . . this mixed and misconceived idea (according to which) *it all amounts to the same thing in the end*,"¹⁴ where the negation of the negation serves "as the midwife to deliver the future from the womb of the past", and consists of "the childish pastime of . . . alternately declaring that a rose is a rose and that it is not a *rose*."¹⁵

Here Althusser's analyses are really relevant. The postulate of the identity of opposites guaranteed **Hegel** at any time an imaginary internal solution to the internal contradictions to be analysed, and this solution is usually a magical ideological operation within a "simple" dialectic.

How then can we explain the impotence of **Marx's** commentators in the localisation of the radical differences between Marx and **Hegel**? The answer is hardly complex. The *theoretical distinction* of the two kinds of contradiction (within and between structures), and the clarification of their reciprocal articulation were never explicitly stressed or developed by either **Marx** or **Engels**. This being so, the "eye-catching" contradiction was that between capitalists and workers, and the second contradiction was confused with this one, i.e. with the structure's internal contradiction. Analysis thus slid over into the sphere of **Hegel's** mystified and mystificatory dialectic, the fascinating dialectic of the identity of opposites, the internal solution, etc. And **Marx's** and **Engels'** equivocal formulations did not help to dispel this fascination, nor did the antiscientific habits of dogmatic Marxism: "The capitalist mode of appropriation, the result of the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of the proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of the *negation*."¹⁶

But what is for Marx no more than a metaphor, a way of expressing the movement of capital, becomes for Engels "an extremely **general**—and for this reason extremely far-reaching and important—law of development of nature, history and thought".*

In fact, to the extent that the specific character of **Marx's** notion of contradiction remained unanalysed, the notion of the negation of the negation was the only general Hegelian concept which still *seemed rational* when the mystification of the identity of opposites had been got rid of.

As I understand it, **Marx's analysis** of the basic notion of contradiction between structures tallies **with** the most recent scientific *practice*.¹⁴ The notion makes explicit certain objective properties of structures, the objective *limits* to their possibilities of reproduction, to their remaining *essentially constant*, given the variations of their internal and external conditions of functioning, and, more *profoundly*, to their reproducing their relations, their *connection* with other structures. The appearance of a contradiction is, in fact, the appearance of a *limit* to the conditions of invariance of a structure. Beyond this limit a change in structure becomes necessary. In this perspective, the notion of contradiction I am putting forward would perhaps be of interest to cybernetics. This science explores the limit possibilities and internal regulation that allow any system, physiological, economic or whatever, to maintain itself in spite of a determined range of variation of its internal and external conditions of functioning. This analysis brings together the sciences of nature and the sciences of man. To give a frivolous example, I could suggest that if a glaciation caused the disappearance of the dinosaur from the face of the earth, this species did not perish through the spontaneous development of its internal contradictions, but through a contradiction between its internal physiological structure and the structure of its external conditions of existence.

My theory of contradiction should therefore be able to restore to the dialectic its scientific character, and, for the same reasons, this scientific dialectic can only be materialist. For if the dialectical method no longer depends on the hypothesis of the "identity of opposites" and if the contradictions *born* of the functioning of a structure express its "limits" and are partially conditioned in appearance and resolution *outside* that structure, there is *no internal teleology* regulating the evolution of nature and history.

On this basis it should be possible to establish a new **dialogue**—centering on the hypothesis of the necessary correspondence of structures—between the sciences and Marxism and between structuralism and Marxism. I should like to close this essay with a confrontation of this hypothesis and another of **Marx's** theses which might seem to

contradict it, or at least to reduce its importance by ideological sleight of hand: I mean the thesis of the determinant rôle played "in the last instance"¹ by economic structures in the evolution of social life.

* * *

Everyone is familiar with the famous sentence from the *Preface* to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: "(The) relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of (the) material powers of production. The set of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. . . . The mode of production of material life **determines** the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. . . . With the change of the economic base the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly **transformed**."²

The peculiar causality that Marx grants to the economic in the interplay of the set of all the reciprocal causalities of infrastructure and superstructures has generally been misinterpreted. We have seen that even within the infrastructure Marx distinguishes between relations of production and productive forces, and never confuses these two structures. This irreducibility of structures cannot be confined to the economy, and we must start from the fact that each social structure has for Marx its own content and mode of functioning and evolution. This irreducibility immediately excludes two kinds of interpretation of the determinant causality of the economy.

On the one hand, non-economic structures cannot "emerge" from economic relations; the causality of the economic cannot be the genesis of the superstructure from within the infrastructure. On the other hand, non-economic structures are not simple "phenomena" accompanying economic activity with only a passive reaction on social life while the economic relations are the sole active causality with more or less "automatic"³ effect. In either case, it is hard to see by what bizarre alchemy the economy becomes, say, kinship, or for what mysterious reason it should be (badly) hidden behind kinship. We must therefore look elsewhere for an answer, and study the notion of "correspondence" of structures more closely.

For example, let us examine the process of production in our capitalist society. The relations of production between capitalists and workers and the latter's obligation to work for the former seem largely independent of the religious, political or even familial ties which they may have among themselves. Each social structure seems broadly "autonomous", and the economist tends to treat non-economic structures as "exogenous variables", and to look for a rationality that is

economic "in itself". The correspondence of structures therefore seems mainly "external". In an archaic society, this is not the situation. The Marxist economist, for example, easily distinguishes between the productive forces of these societies (hunting, fishing, agriculture, etc.), but he cannot distinguish their relations of production "in isolation". Or at best, he can distinguish them in the functioning of the kinship relations themselves. The latter determine the rights of individuals to the land and its products, their obligations to work for others, to receive or to give. They also determine the authority of certain individuals over others in political and religious matters. In such a society, kinship relations dominate social life. How, within Marx's perspective, can we understand both the *dominant rôle* of kinship and the *determinant rôle* of the economy in the last instance?

This is impossible if economy and kinship are treated as base and superstructure. In an archaic society kinship relations *function as* relations of production, just as they function as political relations. To use Marx's vocabulary, kinship relations are here *both* infrastructure and superstructure⁵⁰ and it would be a fair guess that the complexity of kinship relations in archaic societies relates to the multiple functions they take on in such societies.⁵¹ It could also be suggested that the dominant *rôle* and complex structure of kinship relations in archaic societies are related to the general structure of the productive forces and their low level of development, which impose the co-operation of individuals and therefore group life for subsistence and reproduction.⁵²

In this abstract example, the economy-kinship correspondence no longer appears as an external relation, but as internal correspondence, without for all that confusing economic relations between kinsfolk with their political or sexual relations, etc. Thus, to the extent that kinship in this kind of society really functions as relations of production, the determinant *rôle* of the economy does not contradict the dominant *rôle* of kinship, but is expressed through it.⁵³

This perspective makes it possible to predict one of the contributions Marx will make in the future to the scientific study of social structures and their multiple evolution, a contribution profoundly different from those his exegesis attribute to him, or deny him. For what are, in fact, irreducible are the functions and evolution of structures, so their differentiation should be explained by the transformation and evolution of their functions. It would be possible, for example, to guess that the appearance of new conditions of production in archaic societies will modify their demography, demand new forms of authority, and bring with them new relations of production. It is a fair guess that beyond a certain limit the old kinship relations will no longer be able to fulfil these new functions. The latter will develop outside kinship and will bring forth distinct political and religious social structures which will

in their turn function as relations of production. It is not the kinship relations that are transformed into political relations, but the political function of the old kinship relations which develops on the basis of new problems. The kinship relations will shift into a new **rôle** with a different social importance, and the political and religious relations, charged with new functions (both infra- and superstructural), will come to occupy the liberated central place.

To explain the determinant **rôle** of the economy is at the same time to explain the *dominant rôle* of **non-economic** structures in a given type of society, and societies distinct in time and space belong to the same "type" if their *structure as a whole* is comparable, i.e. if the *relation* between their social structures determined by the *functions* and the *importance* of each of them is comparable. This perspective makes it possible to reconcile the usual oppositions: structure-event (anthropology-history) and structure-individual (sociology-psychology) in a new way.

An event—whether from outside or inside—always acts on the whole structure by acting on one of its elements. The set of known and unknown properties of one or several structures always intervenes between a cause and its effects. This structural causality gives an event all its consciousness and unconscious dimensions and explains its intentional and unintentional effects. It is therefore incorrect to abandon the structuralist viewpoint or to *leave structure aside to account for events*. When, by their acts, men create the conditions for the appearance of new structures, in fact, they open up the way to new fields of objective possibility of which they are largely ignorant, which they discover through events and whose limits they submit to necessarily when the conditions of functioning of these structures vary, and when these no longer fulfil the same function and are transformed. The intentional behavioural rationality of the members of a society is always inscribed within the basic unintentional rationality of the hierarchical structure of the social relations characterizing that society. Instead of starting from the individuals and their hierarchies of preference to explain the **rôle** and relation of the structures of a society, it is necessary rather to explain this **rôle** and this relation in all their aspects, known or unknown by the society, and look in this hierarchy of structures for the basis of the hierarchy of "values", i.e. the social norms of prescribed behaviour. This hierarchy of "values" could then illuminate the hierarchy of needs of individuals playing a given **rôle** with a given status in the society.

This would make it impossible to challenge history with **anthropology**⁶⁸ or anthropology with history, to set psychology and sociology or sociology and history in sterile opposition. The possibility of human "sciences" would definitely depend on the possibility of **dis-**

covering the laws of the functioning, evolution and internal reciprocal correspondence of social structures. And one day these human sciences could give the lie to Aristotle by becoming sciences of the "individual" as well. The possibility of human "sciences" depends on a generalization of a method of structural analysis which has become capable of explaining the conditions of variation and evolution of structures and their functions. This generalization is today very unevenly developed, depending on whether the study is economics, kinship, politics or religion. Perhaps **Marx's** work, purged of equivocation, could help accelerate this development.

NOTES

1. Claude Uvi-Strauss: "On Structure" in *Structural Anthropology*, Ch. XV, p. 279.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 280. [This is a direct translation of the French text used by **Godelier** (*Anthropologie Structurale*, p. 306); Uvi-Strauss' (original) English version reads: "make immediately intelligible all the observed facts" — Translator's note.]
This is a deliberate simplification, for profit may or may not correspond to the surplus value really produced in an enterprise.
3. Capital I, p. 540 (Moscow 1961). Emphases N.G. unless otherwise stated.
4. Capital III, p. 797.
5. In the same way for **Spinoza** knowledge of the second kind (mathematical knowledge) does not suppress that of the first kind (everyday experience).
Claude Uvi-Strauss: *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté* (Paris 1949), Ch. XIV, pp. 216–246. See also A. **Weil's** algebraic study, Ch. XIV, pp. 278–287.
Compare the consequences of the experiment on "black-body" radiation, a tiny "detail" (cf. Bachelard) which upset the whole of the nineteenth century physical perspective which grew out of Newton's work.
This is not precisely true. Uvi-Strauss gives **Hodson** the merit for the discovery of the correlation between the rule of matrilineal cross **cousin** marriage and the existence of a specific social structure. But **Hodson** thought that this structure could only be tripartite and patrilinear, while it can contain any number of sections and it is only necessary that it be "harmonic". (*Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*, op. cit., pp. 292–293; **Hodson**: *The Primitive Culture of India*, 1922.)
This case makes its discovery even more difficult as the appearance of the system suggests another structure, that of the Aranda system. But "instead of the true symmetry of the Kariara and Aranda systems, we find a **pseudo**-symmetry which in reality arises from two super-imposed asymmetrical structures." *Structures Élémentaires*, op. cit., p. 242.
6. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown: *Structure and Function in Primitive Societies* (London 1952).
7. Claude Uvi-Strauss: "On Manipulated Sociological Models" in *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde*, Deel 16, *Anthropologica*, (s-Gravenhage 1960), p. 52.

Hence **Lévi-Strauss'** many critiques of the idealism and formalism which have, in fact, become the principle adversaries of scientific structuralism; cf. "La Structure et la **Forme**", *Cahiers de l'ISEA*, and the preface to *Le Cru et le Cuit*.

14. "On Manipulated Sociological Models", op. *cit.*, p. 53.
15. Structures *Élémentaires*, op. *cit.*, p. 253.
16. Warner: "Morphology and Function of the Australian Murngin Type of Kinship", *American Anthropologist*, Vols. 32-33, pp. 179-182.
Cases of borrowings of all or part of a social institution in the range of kinship, myth, dance, etc., are common in Australia. Stanner was able to observe directly a case of borrowing a kinship institution by the **Nangio-meri** (Structures *Élémentaires*, op. *cit.*, p. 227).
17. For example, the **Kariera** system is matrilineal and patrilocal.
19. "This characteristic (of harmonic **régimes**) explains why the realization of a system of classes is so rare wherever marriage is determined by a law of generalized exchange" (*Ibid.*, p. 272).
20. Hence **Lévi-Strauss'** critique of nineteenth century associationist evolutionism (*Ibid.*, pp. 128 and 185).
21. Capital I, pp. 714-715.
22. This is not weakened by the phenomenon of social mobility which allows certain workers to become capitalists, or which is produced by competition and the **ruin** of certain capitalists or category of enterprises.
This diachrony seems to be always recreated in the synchrony or at least to show the multiple modes of existence of the same structure, once given the local variations of its conditions of functioning. Cf. Marx: ". . . the same economic **basis**—the same from the standpoint of its main conditions—due to innumerable **different** empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., (is not prevented) **from** showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances." (Capital III, p. 772).
24. Capital III, p. 580.
25. Capital I, pp. 47-48.
26. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, trans. N. I. Stone, (Chicago 1904), pp. 303-304. [Corrected—Translator's note]
27. Capital III, p. 586.
28. Capital III, p. 856.
29. Capital III, p. 244.
30. Capital III, p. 258.
31. Capital III, p. 237.
32. Capital III, p. 861.
33. Letter to Kugelmann, 17th March, 1868.
34. Capital I, pp. 748-749.
35. Capital I, p. 168.
36. Capital I, p. 715.
37. Capital III, p. 254.
38. Capital III, p. 245.
39. Capital III, p. 252.

40. *Capital III*, p. 245, Marx's emphasis.
41. *Capital III*, p. 254.
42. *Capital III*, p. 259.
43. Engels writes, in a letter to Paul Lafargue, 11th August, 1884: "Marx rejected the 'political, social and economic ideal' you attribute to him. A man of science has no ideals, he elaborates scientific results, and if he is also politically committed, he struggles for them to be put into practice. But if he has ideals, he cannot be a man of science, since he would then be biassed from the start." (*Correspondance Engels-Lafargue*, Editions Sociales, Paris, p. 235.)
44. *Capital III*, p. 237.
45. See Marx's whole discussion of the **Gotha** programme and his savaging of its humanist declarations of "equal rights", justice for labour, etc.
46. "Contradiction et **Surdétermination**" and "Sur la Dialectique **Maudistalienne**", re-edited in *Pour Marx*, Paris 1965; "Contradiction and **Overdetermination**", *New Left Review* 41, Jan-Feb 1967.
47. In *The Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard takes issue with **Hegel** and rationalism over this point, opening the way to existentialism.
48. When **Lenin** declares that the dialectic is "the theory of the identity of opposites" or "the study of the contradiction in the very essence of things", I suggest that he is proposing a false equivalence between these two definitions.
- In the same way, Mao Tse Tung constantly confuses the unity of opposites with their identity: "How . . . can we speak of identity or unity (of opposites)? The fact is that a contradictory aspect cannot exist all by itself. If there is not the opposite aspect, each aspect loses the conditions of its existence. . . . Without landlords, there would be no tenant-peasants; without tenant-peasants, there would also be no landlords. Without the bourgeoisie there would be no proletariat; without the proletariat there would also be no bourgeoisie. . . . All opposite elements are like this: Under certain conditions they are on the one hand opposed to each other and on the other hand interconnected, interpenetrated, inter-permeated and interdependent; that is what we mean by identity." (*On Contradiction*, Peking 1960, p. 47; and in *Selected Works I*)
49. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, *op. cit.*, p. 282.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 291. [Corrected, *Translator's note*]
51. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 169.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 195. As Marx and **Engels** well knew, the dialectical method did not lead **Hegel** to confuse all opposites in their identity, nor to incoherence in his philosophical discourse. No doubt the identity of opposites is both *the principle and the object* of this discourse, and therefore, its *imaginary basis*, the speculative foundation of the theoretical validity of absolute idealism. But it is not the sole principle invoked by **Hegel** since the principle of the identity of opposites *a fortiori* establishes the principle of their unity. There can therefore be positive islands in the sea of **Hegel's** speculative discourse, induced from a reflection on the unity of opposites. For example, in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, the master-slave relation, within the speculative identity of master and slave (the master is the slave of his slave, the slave the master of his master), the relation of master and slave is constituted by two asymmetrical relations, that of master to slave, and that of slave to master, which are not superimposed or confused.

The master-slave relation is **polarised** by this fact, and evolves in a determined, irreversible direction.

Perhaps what Marx meant by the positive "nucleus" (Kern) of **Hegel's** dialectic is the following group of properties: the unity of opposites, the asymmetry of the relations within this unity, a relation oriented in a certain direction and animated with an irreversible movement. Perhaps certain Hegelian analyses, of secondary importance, could be added to this group of properties: for example, the hypothesis of the **transformation** of quantity into quality.

This illuminates the two metaphors used by Marx to indicate the relations of his dialectical method with that of **Hegel**: the metaphor of the "nucleus" and that of the "inversion". For it was not sufficient to put the Hegelian dialectic back onto its feet to give it a completely "rational" air, since it was first necessary to amputate the principle of the identity of opposites which was both its first methodological principle and the last basis of absolute idealism. Such nuclear fission shows that the nucleus itself was not preserved intact within **Marx's** dialectic as the metaphor pretends.

But it is difficult to imagine that Marx, the only nineteenth or twentieth century thinker to revolutionize both philosophy and a domain of scientific knowledge, could be completely mistaken about his relations to **Hegel**. Probably what Marx conceived as **his** theoretical debt to **Hegel**, as the positive heritage handed down to him, was **this** fragment of the nucleus: the concept of the unity of opposites and the group of attached properties. In that case it has to be stated—as Marx himself did—that as an explicitly developed theory of the unity of opposites, the dialectical method has as yet no scientific, **i.e.** no real existence. This is even more true if, as we shall see, the various kinds of contradiction should perhaps be linked to the concept of the "limit", which means that there were already **—as** the very existence of Capital proves—**as** many implicitly dialectical analyses as there were scientific practices elucidating the limits of functioning in domains of "objects" investigated by the sciences. But nothing ensures a priori that, once explicit, the methodological principles of each of these practices (whose operational norms work in the shadow of the scientific exploit) will take their places in one unique, unifying dialectic.

53. Capital I, p. 763.
54. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 193: cf. p. 190, the fifteen-line sketch of the dialectical evolution of humanity from primitive communism to real communism via private property.
55. And within this practice, mathematics and cybernetics have a privileged place in the exploration of the notion of the "limit". This is one of the reasons their use is becoming more and more general in the social sciences. But the real effectivity of mathematics is circumscribed in principle within the limited set of problems which can already be **formalized** and for whose treatment mathematics has sufficient operational power.

For more complex problems of structural analysis—for example the analysis of the modalities of the connection of the structures of a system (whether social or not) so as to be able to explain why these modalities induce a dominant function within these connected structures—the scientific concept of structure is apparently still too narrow. Further, to use the concept of a limit is to determine the set of relations allowed between the structures of a system, the set of variations compatible with these

structures. It is also to determine the set of incompatible variations which would provoke the elimination of one of the connected structures and change the system. If the first already seems to have been partially explored (for example, the mathematical concept of a *category* of sets takes as its object a set of things *and* the system of functions allowed between these things), we are still largely ignorant as far as the second is concerned.

As soon as mathematics is applied to a field of problems for which it is still too weak, there is a risk of creating illusory knowledge, scientific phantoms. There is also a risk that without knowing or wishing it, *i.e. with no ideological intent*, the invisible but real line which always separates scientific knowledge from ideology will have been crossed.

56. Engels: letter to Joseph Bloch, 21st September, 1890: "If somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase." (Marx-Engels: *Selected Works II*, p. 488).
57. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, op. cit.*, pp. 11-12; Marx-Engels: *Selected Works I*, p. 363. [Corrected, *Translator's note*]
58. Engels: Letter to Starckenberg, 25th January, 1894.
59. In *The Origin of the Family. Private Property and the State* (Marx-Engels: *Selected Works II*, p. 170, Preface to the First Edition), Engels, by declaring that "the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life", implies that kinship plays a determinant *rôle alongside* the economy, whereas in these societies it is really an element of the economic infrastructure.
60. This **plurifunctionality** of kinship has led **Beattie** and other anthropologists to claim that kinship has no content of its own, but is a container or symbolic form in which the content of social life is expressed (economic, political, religious relations and so on), *i.e.* that kinship is merely language, a means of expression. While not quarreling with the notion that kinship functions as a language symbolising social life, Schneider objects that kinship also has its own content which can be brought out by *subtracting* from its functioning the economic, political and religious *aspects*. The set of relations of consanguinity and alliance which serve as the means of expression of social life and serve as the *terms* of the symbolic language of kinship will then appear. Here kinship is both a particular content of social life and serves as the mode of appearance and expression of all other contents.

But when he sets out to rediscover a content for kinship in this way, Schneider hardly evades the **biologism** for which he condemns Gellner. Everyone knows that the set of biological relations of consanguinity and alliance is not kinship, as kinship is always a particular "group" of these relations within which descent and alliance are socially regulated. Because these relations *are* selected and "retained", real kinship is not a biological fact, but a *social* one.

Schneider and **Beattie** have in common the error of looking for the content of this kind of kinship *outside* the economic, the political and the religious, since kinship is neither an external form nor a residual content but functions *directly* and internally as economic and political relations and so on, and therefore functions as a mode of expression of social life and as a symbolic form of that life.

The **scientific** problem thus becomes the determination of why this is

so in many types of society, and, in the methodological sphere, the conclusion would seem to be that the conceptual couples: form-basis, container-content are not the right ones for an account of the functioning of social structures.

Gellner: "Ideal Language and Kinship Structure", *Philosophy of Science*, vol. XXIV, 1957; Needham: "Descent Systems and Ideal Language", *Ibid.*, vol. XXVII, 1960; Gellner: "The Concept of Kinship", *Ibid.*, vol. XXVII, 1960; Barnes: "Physical and Social Kinship", *Ibid.*, vol. XXVIII, 1961; Gellner: "Nature and Society in Social Anthropology", *Ibid.*, vol. XXX, 1963; Schneider: "The Nature of Kinship", *Ibid.*, vol. XXXI, 1964.

61. On this see Claude Lévi-Strauss: "The situation is quite different in groups for which the satisfaction of economic needs rests entirely on conjugal society and the sexual division of labour. Not only are man and woman differently specialised technically, and therefore depend on one another for the construction of the things necessary for daily tasks, but they devote themselves to the production of different kinds of food. A complete, and above all a regular diet thus depends on that veritable 'production co-operative', the household. . . . Particularly in primitive societies, where the harshness of the geographical environment and the rudimentary state of technique make hunting and gardening, collecting and gathering equally hazardous, existence is almost impossible for an individual left to himself." (*Structures Élémentaires*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.)
62. Marx wrote of the "rank and influence" of social structures in a society characterized by a determined production: "It is the universal light with which all the other colours are tinged and are modified through its peculiarity. It is a special ether which determines the specific gravity of everything that appears in it." (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Introduction, *op. cit.*, p. 302.)
63. Cf. Roland Barthes: "Les Sciences Humaines et l'Oeuvre de Lévi-Strauss", *Annales*, Nov.—Dec. 1964, p. 1086.