



CHAPTER 4

Structural Marxism and Its Critique

Abstract This chapter contends with the discursive turn in which images of social structure and social change shifted from anatomical conceptual metaphors to relational thinking that captures social structure as a complex articulation of interlinked ideological, political, and economic instances. The examination begins with one of the most influential takes in the so-called return to Marx, addressing the Althusserian theory of ideology, which discourse theorists have accused of ‘yoking together’ a totality in connection with the larger structure of society in ideological terms. In fact, Althusser and his colleagues studied ideology’s practical application as a discursive interpellation of subjects. When discourse theory ultimately prevailed, it had adapted this part of the theory of ideology, while the concept of the capitalist mode of production has been excised from sociological discussions. Informed by awareness of ‘the spectre of Marx(ism)’, where social sciences are haunted by the ghostly notions of class-struggle and bourgeois ideology, this chapter turns attention to the less famous modes-of-production controversy in French new economic anthropology, which drew ethnographers’ gaze to class, ethnicity, and gender issues.

Keywords Althusser, Louis • Hegemonic Struggle • Ideology • New Economic Anthropology • Modes of Production

ALTHUSSER'S THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

In the 1950s, Althusser was teaching political philosophy, and he published his first monograph, *Montesquieu: Politics and History*, as the decade neared its end.¹ He held his first seminar on Marx in 1961–62, enfolded his students in his Marxian journey by considering Marx's own path. Althusser had begun his 1960 article 'On the Young Marx' by citing a *The German Ideology* passage in which Marx states that the neo-Hegelians had not abandoned the bourgeois philosophy, meaning that their ideas were still situated in connection with idealism. Althusser claimed that with that manuscript, from 1845, Marx extricated himself from the realm of German ideology. These contributions demonstrate that Althusser was oriented philosophically to 'anti-humanism'. So was the philosopher he had tutored earlier, Foucault, who later speculated that 'man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea' (1966/2002, 422). Marxist humanists, in turn, countered anti-humanism by claiming that Marxism is the most developed form of humanism in that it reveals the alienated conditions of capitalist relations of production in which men have to live their lives.

For Althusser, Marx broke from idealism not by way of inversion of the Hegelian dialectics but epistemologically, inventing a new problematic (1966/1969). This ushered in an area of study different from what came before Marx. In reference to the work of his former supervisor, Althusser called the rupture marked by Marx's deviation from Hegel an epistemological break. Nevertheless, Althusser did not identify this break, from ideology to science, as sudden. He pinpointed it as starting with *The German Ideology* and reaching completion with *Capital*. For the intervening span of time in which Marx considered the relations of production to be constitutive of the entire structure of society in relation to the class struggle, Althusser used the term 'historical materialism'. Portraying the

¹ Born in 1918 in Algeria, Althusser was a member of the French Communist Party (PCF) who, through his teaching, may have had greater influence on the generation of French intellectuals than any other philosopher did. He taught philosophy for decades at the *École normale supérieure* (ENS), in Paris, where the studentship he had begun in 1939 was interrupted by the draft. From the French army, he was captured by German troops as a prisoner of war. After World War II, Althusser began his studies (*agrégation*) in philosophy proper, writing his thesis on Hegel, under the supervision of Gaston Bachelard. In 1948, Althusser took up a teaching position at ENS, where he would work for over three decades, and it was in the same year that he joined the PCF, on the recommendation of his colleague Jean-Toussaint Desanti.

passage wherein Marx calls for setting Hegel back on his feet as only a caricature,² Althusser opined that ‘mature Marx’ did not cleave to the Hegelian framework of concepts: rather than simply turn those concepts inside-out, Marx superseded Hegel’s approach completely with new concepts given shape in his critique of classical political economy, which followed his criticism of Hegelian philosophy.

In 1964, the discussion in Althusser’s seminar series focused on Marx’s *Capital*, and the following year saw minor publishing house Maspero print his *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital* in its ‘Theory’ series. These books were intended for a small audience, but their combined sales came to exceed a hundred thousand copies. Althusser and the members of his reading group, including Étienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, Roger Establet, and Jacques Rancière, all co-authors of *Reading Capital*, became well known virtually overnight. Furthermore, the influence of their analyses extended to internal critique of the PCF and opposition to Marxist humanists in the realm of politics and philosophy. Although Althusser was a member of the communist party, his reading of Marx was a critical one with regard to communist ideology.³

In *Reading Capital*, Althusser and his colleagues paid attention to sometimes ambiguous concepts that Marx himself had left undefined. They approached this project by virtue of a ‘symptomatic reading’, conducted in a manner akin to that of a psychoanalyst examining patients’

²Althusser’s ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’ in *For Marx* (1965/ 1969) begins with the following words pertaining to Hegel, from Marx (alluding to Marx’s 1873 ‘Afterword to the Second German Edition’, from *Capital’s* Vol. 1): ‘With him [Hegel] it [dialectic] is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell’.

³In May 1968, revolutionary sentiments broke through in Paris, with 10 million people joining a general strike that left the French government on the brink of collapse. This led to new elections. Althusserian vocabulary influenced many of the student rioters but still had to adapt and adjust to a new politico-historical conjuncture. Simultaneously, reformers tried to establish socialism with a human face in Czechoslovakia, in contrast against the prevailing communist Soviet model, but the result was another forceful defeat by Soviet forces: the Prague Spring fell in the very territory that had birthed its alliance. Later after these events, Euro-communism displaced Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism within the communist parties of France, Italy, and Spain. In addition, the contradictions in advanced capitalism—with antagonism and social inequality evident amid unprecedented social mobility, economic prosperity, and well-being—prompted emancipatory movements and the rise of various countercultures. The PCF was among the leading parties in France at the time, and Althusser struggled against both communist-Soviet-brand Marxism’s and bourgeois Marxist humanism’s interpretations in theory and practice alike.

speech utterances. In this practice, the analyst pays attention to what is absent from the patient's speech—i.e., what the patient does not say explicitly. Marx analysed the treatises of classical political economy to make it explicit that, with their economic categories, they neglected the appropriation of surplus value of labour. Characteristic of the classical political economists' approach was a failure to address the value of labour in relation to capitalist exploitation, which was explicitly identified but never discussed. It was evident to the classical political economists but not defined as a problem in classical political economy. Althusser found this symptomatic of bourgeois ideology.

In the context of Althusser's 1962–63 lectures in structuralist philosophy, he invited Lacan, whose work had been rejected institutionally, to teach at the *École normale supérieure*, or ENS. Lacan's seminars would become major events there. Although Althusser never participated in those seminars, psychoanalysis entered Marxist discussion with the printing of Althusser's article 'Freud and Lacan' in a journal of the French Communist Party. Althusser drew a parallel here, stating that Marx had founded a new science of the capitalist mode of production while citing Lacan's characterisation of Freud as the founder of a science of the unconscious (Althusser 1971, 198).⁴ Althusser presented the object of psychoanalysis as 'the unconscious', which is formed in the course of 'the humanization of the small biological creature' in a human child (p. 205). From the perspective of a former prisoner of war, Althusser went on to state in the following sentences (pp. 205–206):

psycho-analysis is concerned with [...] a war which is continually declared in each of its sons, who, projected, deformed and rejected, are required, each by himself in solitude and against death, to take the long forced march which makes mammiferous larvae into human children, *masculine* or *feminine subjects*.

⁴Lacan's 'return to Freud' appeared in the 'Rome Discourse' (i.e., 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', from 1953). It influenced psychiatry in both theory and practice. Arguing against the ego-psychological and neurobiological leanings of psychoanalysis, Lacan made explicit Freud's psychoanalytic idea that our innermost being is structured socially by the discourse of the other—that is, the symbolic order wherein the symbolic function of language is seen as constitutive of the 'split subject'. In this connection, the human mind or *psyche* is constituted in relation to language and culture. The International Psychoanalytic Association expelled Lacan for, above all, his theoretical break from Freudian tradition and his unorthodox psychoanalytical practice (Dosse 1991/1997, 95, 104).

This passage creates an evocative image that links becoming a subject with a war that many survive at least superficially while others are wounded deeply such that they never recover from the struggle at all. For him, psychoanalysis does not revolve around a biologically or psychologically fixed essence of gendered human beings or around some culture or society wherein individuals are alienated as its subjects; it has to do with ‘the aleatory abyss of the human-sexual itself’ (p. 206). He referred to the contingency of subjectivity that will emerge out of the corporeal human beings. While Althusser never denied the importance of the psychoanalytical theory of the transition from the mirror stage to a speaking subject, he disagreed with the psychoanalytical reading of ideology, wherein early childhood determines unconscious processes in the subject’s becoming.

As elaborated upon in Althusser’s most famous essay in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ (1971), the titular apparatus (the ISA) operates by ideological means and establishes the subjects of ideology (*Subiectum*, for ‘throw under’). This emphasis on ideological mechanisms opened abstract theory to empirical analysis. Schools, churches, families, law, politics, trade unions, media, and culture all reproduce bourgeois ideology that has to penetrate both the workers and the capitalists, along with the civil servants and indeed all the ideologists themselves (Althusser 1971, 133, 143). The state apparatus, in turn, functions primarily through repression. In the end, none of the classes can be hegemonic without obtaining consent through the ISAs. Where Althusser was writing, in France, the capitalist social formation of the day was made up of numerous ISAs, with the education-oriented ISA reproducing class relations wherein most people graduate to farming and other realms of labour while only a small elite continue their studies. In contrast, he found the pre-capitalist social formation to feature only one dominant ISA, the religious state apparatus of the Catholic Church, against which the French Revolution reacted in accordance with the ideas of the Enlightenment, including the iconic liberty, equality, and fraternity as symbols of the democratic and republican state (pp. 142–157).

According to Althusser, each specific ideology has a history of its own. Ideology in general, however, has no history; it is like the unconscious, which is eternal. In other words, ‘ideology has no history’ (pp. 159–176). Ideology is an ‘imaginary relationship of individuals to their real [material] conditions of existence’; i.e., without the social relations of production and class relations, ideology is not expressive. It also has a material existence: the thoughts or expressions from which ideologies seem to be

composed are not transcendental in any spiritual sense. Rather, they all have material substance through the ISAs (see pp. 162–170). Moreover, people are born as subjects of the ideology. After all, they have been expected, and they are called by a certain name from the day of their birth. In a passage I alluded to earlier on, Althusser says, on p. 174, in one of his most cited statements:

[I]deology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’

At this point, an individual who identifies with the ideological call of an authority is already subject to the ideology wherein he or she is ‘hailed’. Althusser articulated the above-mentioned idea that ideology is an ‘imaginary relationship’ of individuals to ‘the real conditions of existence’—that is, to the material relations of production and reproduction (1971, 162). He thus indicated that the social relations are real, not purely imaginary or symbolic, that they exist independently from our thoughts and yet we can conceptualise them only by means of language that materialises in practice (see Marx 1857/1973, 101; see also Hall 1985, 103–105). In this respect, Althusser speaks about the symbolic and overdetermined character of all social relations.

According to colleagues of Althusser, such as Balibar (1965/1970) and Nicos Poulantzas (1968/1975), the Marxist approach can be criticised by pointing to the dominant role of politics and ideology in preceding epochs. After all, people do not live only from the economic basis. In *Capital*, Marx had given the critics a rather terse reply, however, that ‘it is the mode [of production] in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism [as an ideology], played the chief part’ (Marx 1867/1909, Note 42). Althusser talks about ‘the economic’, which determines ‘in the last instance’ which of the other instances, such as the ideological and political, are dominant at the time in question. For *Reading Capital*, Balibar (1965/1970, 212–213) homed in on the importance of the concept of the mode of production, which is ‘doubly articulated’ by a combinatory relation ‘between the forces and relations of production’. In this respect, a social formation can comprise two or more

modes of production (see also Poulantzas 1968/1975, 14–15). This leads to the question of the articulation of modes of production and the ways in which pre-capitalist modes can combine with the capitalist relations of production.

Interestingly, Althusser's philosophical rigour led to ethnographic fieldwork being carried out in Africa in times of decolonisation and capitalist neo-colonialism. Among the outputs were the French-language works of Godelier, Meillassoux, Terray, and Rey—or the articulation school of economic anthropology.

PATRIARCHS, PEASANTS, AND ARTICULATION OF MODES OF PRODUCTION

New economic anthropologists criticised American 'dependency theorists' such as Andre Gunder Frank, for whom the underdevelopment in Latin America was due to the uneven flow of commodities from periphery to core. In addition, they criticised modernisation theorists, for whom there was only one global capitalist world-system, a notion prominent in the work of world-systems theorist Immanuel Wallerstein. In contrast to the sociological thinking of modernisation theorists, who considered developing countries to be at a stage of transition to the capitalist mode of production, French new economic anthropologists' empirical fieldwork in postcolonial Africa showed that the Third World was not following the same path at all. Moreover, the debate on modes of production also affected the class struggle through influence on the formation of class alliances and socialist strategies in practice, especially in Latin America.

For his 'Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America', featured as the first paper in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, Laclau (1977) proceeded from the 'restricted' concept of the mode of production (see Wolpe 1980, 6–15). According to Laclau, the mode of production consists of articulation of the possession of the means of production, which is the pivotal element—a form of appropriation of the surplus—and the development of the division of labour and productive forces. Laclau began his introduction to the concept of articulation by bringing up the discussion of the articulation of modes of production, in which connection he criticised dependency theory and the sociology of development. Laclau also challenged the conception of capitalism as a singular world system. Laclau

posited that the relations of production in Latin America comprised feudal elements just as much.⁵

In France, the new approach to economic anthropology was devoted to describing the pre-capitalist social formations in a conjuncture where the non-capitalist forms articulated with capitalism. From this relational standpoint, the scholars were interested in the articulation of the pre-capitalistic forms of production with the colonial and capitalist forms and in the effects of these on the relevant developing countries. The claim that two or more modes can coincide and articulate with one another at the same time is a departure both from Marx's explanations and from Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology and the more liberal tradition of economic anthropology (see Clammer 1975; see also Copans and Seddon 1978). In line with elaboration on their predecessors' arguments, the new economic anthropologists concluded that the growth of the capitalist world-system takes place through its boundary regions, which requires that the pre-capitalist social formations articulate with capitalism. At this point, I shall briefly outline the main ideas surrounding the controversy on what was dubbed the articulation of modes of production in the structural-Marxist line of thought, populated with the elements of gender, ethnicity and class struggle (see Raatgever 1985; see also van Binsbergen and Geschiere 1985).

Godelier (1973/1977) refined the Althusserian framework with the premise of anthropological fieldwork for uncovering the pre-capitalist social formations as a part of the social structure articulated in line with new logic. He posited that the structure of pre-capitalist social formations is based on kinship relations that enable the exploitation of descendants. For this reason, Godelier did not accord a dominant position to the economic as determining the position of all other instances in a pre-capitalist social formation. Rather, the economic is not discernible from other instances. Accordingly, the empirical problem here is to describe the connections among labourers, non-labourers, and instruments of labour in domestic communities wherein livelihood is organised around descent groups. In this respect, reproduction of productive forces and relations of

⁵ Laclau's conception of the articulation of modes of production, however, diverged from the structural-Marxist approach: in the essay, he states that their starting point is 'the economic, political and ideological instances, which are present in all modes of production and whose articulation constitutes the specificity of that mode' (1977, 72–73). In short, he asked why there are only these instances and not others, while also posing the question of how the specific instances' articulation occurs in practice.

production take place because of kinship relations refining a domestic or lineage-based mode of production, which differs fundamentally from the capitalist mode of production.

The exponents of new economic anthropology concluded that the structure of society is arranged around kinship relations. For instance, in 1964, Meillassoux (see 1975/1981) empirically described a patrilineal system among the Guro people of the Ivory Coast. The elders of the villages exercise direct control over labour power because of social reproduction. Community members worked in communally owned fields to produce goods that were then appropriated by their elders. In these circumstances, production is not based on possessing means of production or holding private land. Instead, the village elders benefited from restrictions in access to circulation and exchange of goods, especially, used for marital payments. By establishing a family, younger men produce dependants and eventually can acquire the status of an elder. Hence, the non-productive members of Guro society maintained patriarchal dominance relative to the productive members by controlling the circulation and exchange of not only goods but also women.

After studying the people neighbouring the Guro, Dida, Terray revisited Meillassoux's ethnographic study five years after it was empirically conducted. Applying Althusserian categories that Godelier had introduced to the field, Terray (1969/1972) paid specific attention to means of production and forms of co-operation (such as hunting with nets) that require more teamwork than agriculture does. Hence, Terray found, unlike Meillassoux, that more than one mode of production may be exercised in distributing the means of labour and organising the ways of co-operating. With his corresponding description of the 'self-subsistence economy' of the Guro, Terray drew a distinction between two modes of production: The first mode dominates in a lineage-based system involving simple co-operation in agriculture, along with fishing, gathering, and animal husbandry. The second is visible in a 'tribe-village system', which he considered a more complex and egalitarian way of organising the social relations of production and distributing the productive forces used for hunting.

Various new economic anthropologists have argued with one another about the range of social relations necessary for characterising the articulation of modes of production in pre-capitalist social formations. Rey's take on the matter was that patrilineal groups as seen among the Guro formed from relations of production that indicate an exploitative relationship between the producers (peasants) and non-producers (the proprietors),

which other economic anthropologists did not consider a class relationship. Taking issue with Rey's understanding, Meillassoux responded with a claim that no one group takes advantage of another within a domestic mode of production per se, since both women and young men can achieve the status of an elder in the course of time. Hence, he reasoned, exploitation takes place only through the 'articulation of modes of production', because of a domestic mode that cannot exist as such without capitalism (1975/1981, 87). In the domestic mode of production, however, village elders' control over the productive members differs from the use of 'free labour' within a capitalist system, wherein the workers possess their labour power used as a commodity exchanged for wages.

With reference to class struggle, Rey, however, insisted that in the domestic mode of production, the exploitation of productive members of Guro society is specifically due to the appropriation of their labour. In Rey's work with the matrilineal groups living in the French Congo, for instance, the exploitation of surplus labour, for which the elders were not paying, was apparent through the subordination of young men who cannot become village elders, to whom they provide free labour. In this polygamous system, men become elders only outside their local residence or by accident without a guarantee of ever getting married. In addition, they offer marital payments increasingly in the form of money for the elders. Consequently, young men are pushed to sell their labour to proprietors of the land in exchange for wages, which puts an inexpensive labour force at the disposal of nearby plantation owners.

In early modern Europe, feudalism both protected and resisted capital as the transition to capitalism unfolded. Some pre-capitalist social formations seem to display resistance, at least to revolts (e.g., the Arab Spring), that crystallise amid ongoing neo-colonisation. Rey's treatment in 'Class Alliances' presents the articulation of the feudalist and capitalist modes of production as commencing with the class alliance between capitalists and proprietors. Marx described the latter more than a century earlier in the context of land rent as a feudalist form of appropriating surplus labour from the serfs. The claim by which Rey countered Marx's argument is that the 'ground rent is a relation of distribution [...] of another mode of production with which capitalism is articulated' (Rey 1973/1982, 31). Hence, the feudal form of ground rent taking over peasants' surplus labour exists also within a capitalist system. This articulation between two systems benefits both the capitalists and the land-owners, who can co-exist in a class alliance for an extended time.

Although the entrenchment of these relations depends on specific historical circumstances, it shows a tendency to impoverish peasants who are tied to land they do not possess themselves. Rey's work on what he called the articulation of modes of production depicts the transition from one mode of production to another as occurring through a class drama played out on the stage of ideological and political instances, which are not cast as static states of being. The first phase of the articulation sees alliance of non-producers (land-owners and capitalists) activated against direct producers (the peasants) dispossessed of their land and instruments of labour in a phenomenon that protects both the capitalist and pre-capitalist social formations (pp. 21, 27). After this phase, capitalism takes root in the pre-capitalist social formation and the peasants must provide their labour outside their domestic communities. This move creates conditions analogous to the prevailing situation in many developing countries (p. 52). Moreover, elimination of the pre-capitalist modes of production requires a process of capitalist neo-colonisation to take place, rooted in extra-economic coercion and violence. The final phase, visible in the most developed countries, such as the United States, involves capitalist markets completing the destruction of peasant production, whereupon developing countries have no other option than to provide low-cost labour and raw materials. Rey's key point is that the transition from one mode of production to another is not set in advance. It goes beyond the economic base in the social forming of ideological and political instances that influence uneven, contingent and economic development. In this context, the concept of articulation is a tool intended for understanding the connections between/among multiple modes of production.

At the core of the controversy was articulation of social relations between the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes. The parties in this debate regarded the social formations in developing countries as the articulation of the subordinated and pre-capitalist mode(s) of production under the dominance of capitalism, where capitalism has destroyed feudalism yet other forms of production persist in postcolonial territories. In this context, the concept of articulation gained currency for historical transformations with reference to contradictions and struggle. For example, the idea behind Rey's use of the term 'articulation of modes of production' is that one or more subordinate modes of production can exist alongside capitalism in the long term. The three stages outlined in 'Class Alliances', then, can be conceived of as eras rather more than moments: exchange and

interaction between two modes of production may continue for quite some time before one mode becomes subordinated and transition to another takes place. The defeat of the initial mode too is not an event but a phase. In Rey's work, each of these stages of articulation has a corresponding set of class alliances. These involve situational specifics and flesh-and-blood people, so the outcome of the struggle is not guaranteed in advance.

IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR HEGEMONY

Formerly Althusserian sociologists Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, counted as Althusser's main critics, argued that notions such as 'mode of production' and 'structural causality' should be abandoned in favour of the post-Marxist discourse-theory approach. With their criticism of the articulation of the modes of production, Hindess and Hirst (1977) reasoned that it considers structural causality as an effect of the whole in its parts—that is, in a manner similar to that in which the idealists used the term 'expressive causality', for which Althusser himself had criticised both Marxist humanists and economists. In place of the allegedly teleological and essentialist explanations wherein, with a focus on the mode of production, society is conceived of as a totality of the economic and class contradictions, they embraced an alternative in which this complexity boils down to 'a single structure of social relations', a social formation as an object of discourse. What is at stake in this argument is an attempt to contest the effort to appropriate the whole structure of society for a model that construes the social relations and various instances of the social formations on the foundation of the mode(s) of production, not as discursive formations. This contestation points to a shift toward a conceptual metaphor of social action that spotlights language and its structures (e.g., discourses). These scholars sought an alternative to the metaphors related to the articulation of modes of production.

Either the articulation of 'relations' and 'forces' of production is conceived in terms of the connection between social relations and the forms in which their conditions of existence are realised *or* it must be conceived in terms of some kind of necessity in which the character of one object of discourse, the 'relations' or the 'forces', is deducible from the concept of the other. (Hindess and Hirst 1977, 55)

Thus, armed with critique that rejects models of articulating different instances within the social formation, sociologists took issue with Althusserians' claim that the social relations of production determine any social formation in the last instance through assignment of the dominant role to the mode of production. For Laclau, as one political theoretician of articulation who took issue with Althusser's views, the latter's most important contribution was to consider ideology in practice as an interpellation of the subjects (Laclau 1977, 101–102). Decisively, this part of the Althusserian paradigm ended up adapted to the agenda of discourse theory. It has prevailed, while the concept of the mode of production has been excised from social-scientific discussion.⁶

Although Althusserianism was a 'dead end' for many, it sparked a paradigm shift in cultural studies.⁷ Spawned via the structural-Marxist paradigm, the institutionalisation of cultural studies in Britain was set in political and intellectual conditions impelled by the 'New Left', with which activists, educators, and literary critics alike were associated. Among the key names associated with the New Left are Hall, Williams, and Richard Hoggart, in addition to Thompson, who was among Althusser's

⁶A major line of critique of Althusserianism involves abstract theory that builds on the distinction between Marxist science and philosophy. Here, the philosopher's central task is to prevent ideology from penetrating the scientific practice. Formally, the distinction is the same as in dialectical materialism ('Diamat'), which was an orthodox Marxist doctrine in the communist movement. An illustrative example is the polemic work *The Poverty of Theory* (1978/1995), in which historian E.P. Thompson criticises Althusserians (such as a younger Hindess and Hirst) by way of a vulgarism from Marx and Engels's characterisation of anarchists—'all of them are *Geschichtenscheissenschlopf*, unhistorical shit' (p. 145). The criticism was levelled at structural-Marxist theory. Indeed, Althusser himself would retrospectively admit, in his *Essays in Self-Criticism* (1974/1976, 127) that in the mid-1960s 'our "flirt" with structuralist terminology obviously went beyond acceptable limits'. Even though Althusser's political and theoretical concern lay with ideological practices and class struggle, which were highly topical in the mid-1970s, Althusserianism went out of fashion. Even his most zealous disciples rejected him. For example, Rancière dubbed the Althusserian philosophy elitist.

⁷Althusser suffered from mental-health problems and was hospitalised numerous times. In addition, several of his disciples, among them Poulantzas and Michel Pêcheux, committed suicide. Eventually, in 1980, Althusser strangled his wife, Héléne Rytman-Althusser, receiving compulsory treatment for psychosis after her death and thereby avoiding a jail sentence. His writing continued in the next decade, with these pieces seeing the light of day after his death, in 1990. The attention to aleatory materialism (*alea* refers to the rolling of dice) is characteristic of Althusser's posthumously published works (see Lahtinen 1997/2009).

main critics (see Dworkin 1997; Hall 1980a, 1980b).⁸ While Marxist humanists conceived of culture as an expressive totality, wherein each part expresses the essence of the whole (i.e., idealism), Althusser conceptualised the structure of society as a social formation of specific practices articulated in relation to one another. From a structuralist viewpoint, people live and make sense of their conditions of existence by means of the categories through which their experience has affected the unconscious structures. Althusser considered subjects of ideology and their interpellation, class struggle, and relations of production in relation to the capitalist mode of production.

In the 1970s, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) applied the Althusserian paradigm alongside the notions of hegemony and resistance, in addition to semiology and psychoanalysis, in an attempt to bridge the gap between the structural-Marxist categories and the linguistic paradigm, wherein the subjects are constituted through language and ideology. A problem with this constellation and others, such as ‘screen theory’, was the notion of the universal subject (Hall 1980a, 69–70). In the mid-1970s, one of the groups at CCCS, who focused on theories of language and ideology, turned to Foucault’s work insisting on historical specificity pertaining to language and subjectivity (see Hall et al. 1980, 186–209). In this respect, in their studies of popular culture they recognised that abstract theories of ideology and language lie across a gulf from the subjectivities of individuals. After the pioneering work done at CCCS, cultural studies and the discourse theory of the 1990s saw the concept of discourse eclipsing the notions of culture and ideology, in addition to that of language as a system of differences. Consequently, the catch-all term ‘discourse’ entered the vocabulary of the social sciences and humanities in a manner that disavowed its roots in structural linguistics, Marxist political philosophy, and psychoanalysis. All three were downgraded to nearly inconsequential components that reside outside social theory (see Sawyer 2002).

⁸Hall (1932–2014) was the first editor-in-chief of *New Left Review* (with tenure from 1960), an academic journal for the Left’s contemporary theoretical and political debate. Hall became one of the leading Marxist intellectuals in Britain’s New Left movement. In 1969, he started serving as acting director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. A decade later, Hall took up a chair as a professor of sociology without holding a doctorate. He taught Open University courses until his retirement, in 1998. Hall is famous for his interdisciplinary cultural-studies work, in areas such as youth, postcolonial, and media and communication research.

By the 1990s, a focus on pluralism, relativism, and individualism had entirely unseated the causal relations, class struggle, and alleged economic determinism. The ‘culturalist’ paradigm took off at the turn of the 1960s, when the New Left began a renewal of socialism in Britain, with a strong tradition in literary criticism and social history (Dworkin 1997). They defined ‘culture’ as meanings and values that have arisen from the historical conditions and social relations through which people relate to the conditions of their existence, along with the cultural traditions and practices wherein their ways of seeing have been expressed and materialised (Hall et al. 1980, 63, 66). These thinkers referred to the ideas and cultural practices that organise individuals’ thoughts and action as composing ‘a whole way of life’. From this perspective, their emphasis was on people’s cultural activities that make their history. Culturalists analysed the long-term social and cultural changes in post-war British society in terms of the history of the working class, the Industrial Revolution, and consumer capitalism, in addition to the mass media and popular culture, which had become the main tools for communication in the era of advanced consumer capitalism.

Strivings for theory-informed political practice in Marxism had already stepped forth from the economic realm upon publication of the cultural- and political-hegemony-related transcripts in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, written in 1929–35 and released in 1948–51 (the first edition in English was printed in 1971).⁹ Lenin was among the politicians from whose thinking Gramsci drew in his practical endeavours. He employed Lenin’s idea of hegemony specifically when taking part in a debate on the workers’ movement (with which he became involved in city-level politics in Turin). Likewise, in ‘Some Aspects of the Southern Question’, from 1926, Gramsci (1978, 443) uses the notion of hegemony as applied by Lenin to examine

the question of the hegemony of the proletariat: i.e. of the social basis of the proletarian dictatorship and of the workers’ State. The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State [...], this means to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses.

⁹Antonio Gramsci, born in 1891, was a linguist, political journalist, and incarcerated leader of the Communist Party in Italy who maintained opposition to Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime until his death, in 1937.

In this respect, hegemony refers to the domination of one class over another—that is, ‘the proletariat hegemony over the bourgeoisie’. In the context of this passage, the task for the progressive Italian working class is to organise a revolutionary mass movement against the state in a country with uneven division of the masses between the agricultural ‘peasant’ south and the industrialised ‘bourgeois’ north. For the hegemony of the bourgeoisie to be contested, a class alliance with the peasants is necessary if the working class are to be able to overcome the state apparatus. At this point, Gramsci relies on an idea of political action according to which it is possible to influence the course of history in relation to the prevailing circumstances of the day.

With the passage from *Selections from the Political Writings (1921–1926)* (1978), Gramsci was not yet able to proceed beyond dialectical materialism, wherein antagonistic production relations constitute the categories for all social actors, not least the classes. In other words, the actors’ identity articulates in a fixed manner such that the classes derive their politics and ideology strictly from the economic foundation. With the material in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, hegemony had become a concrete and historically specific moment (Gramsci 1971/1999, 204–205). Hegemony is constituted in accordance with the prevailing ‘relation of forces’ at the level of the material forces of production and in relation to the social and political organisation of social actors as classes. Before a class can become hegemonic, however, the people must be aware of their unity. Their awareness can lead to a sense of solidarity extending beyond the narrow ‘economic-corporative’ interests within, for example, the confines of a labour union. Therefore, no social relation or law of the economic guarantees a ‘collective will’ as opposed to individuals’ will and class consciousness.

Prison Notebooks presents hegemony that arises in a ‘war of position’. It emerges at the fronts of civil society by way of prolonged sieges to articulate the subordinate groups into a dominant historical bloc. This strategy pointed the way to a new lesson for the workers’ movement. It also deviated sharply from the more traditional orientation toward a revolutionary ‘war of manoeuvre’ against the ‘bourgeois’ state and its ideological apparatus (prosecuted through *blitzkrieg* to occupy the latter’s territory). The struggle for hegemony opens a space for intellectual and moral reforms that enable articulating a wide range of contradictions to alter power relations. In this manner, the creation of hegemony builds on actors’ ability to articulate their worldview such that it contains elements that would appear to be real in the people’s day-to-day life. This commonly shared

understanding is ‘common sense’ (i.e., *senso commune*), by means of which the dispersed and fragmented ideological elements can articulate into unity with no a priori attachment to classes.

In this Gramscian expression of historical materialism, the term ‘practice’ refers to the social and political action through which Marxist philosophy emerges from a practical social activity as a theoretical practice and self-reflective political action—a ‘philosophy of praxis’. In Gramsci’s (1971/1999, 190–195) account, the aim for hegemony is to build consent constituted via the ‘ethico-political’ cultural sphere through the agency of ‘organic intellectuals’ doing epistemic work in educating the people, organising them, and leading them to form a ‘historical bloc’ (*en bloc*, a whole) by considering political action with respect to the social whole. He wrote of a conservative Italy in which ideological forces such as Catholicism organised the ‘national-popular’ cultural sphere in a way that left no space for its political rearticulation until the rise of Fascism. Only then did the contradictions of this social formation fuse in a revolutionary rupture. Accordingly, ideologies offer material for hegemonic struggles, which inform political articulations for purposes of achieving consent. A thoroughly Gramscian emphasis on political action is evident in the associated theoretical developments of political articulation.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Althusser and his colleagues drew an analytical distinction between ‘mode of production’ and ‘social formation’, where the former is a theoretical abstraction and the latter is a ‘complexly structured totality’ with multiple levels—the economic, the political, and the ideological—which overdetermine one another. Instead of foregrounding the capitalist mode of

¹⁰ In the 1920s, as at the time of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, it seemed plausible that the socialist revolution of the proletariat would bring hegemony on behalf of which Gramsci was fighting. However, such a proletarian hegemony never arrived. In its stead, Gramsci had to face a historical conjuncture wherein right-wing populism gained its moment in the form of Fascism. The lesson to be learnt from this disillusionment was that history does not follow theory of class struggle. Instead, the outcomes of such struggles are rather unpredictable and contingent on other historical events. Gramsci saw this first-hand, experiencing it in both theory and practice. He developed the political role of an organic intellectual (i.e., the communist party), from which he exerted a profound influence on Marxist philosophy, its critique, and the politics of the New Left. Among the latter political theorists, it was Laclau who drew on Gramsci’s work to take another look at a Marxist theory of ideology and class struggle in terms of discourse theory.

production as determining all relations or, alternatively, reducing ideologies and politics to superstructure, their articulation leans toward a process of creating the relations in practice at the level of empirically ascertainable social formation in the fashion presented in new economic anthropology. In the literature on the articulation of modes of production, new economic anthropologists such as Terray, Meillassoux, Rey, and Balibar argued that the capitalist mode of production does not evolve mechanistically or evolutionarily from the pre-capitalist forms, nor does it necessarily dissolve or transcend them. Instead, they gain structure in relation to each other, with the concept of articulation coming in here to signify their relationality.

A century after Marx's *Capital*, the return to Marx directed discussion toward the framework within which the notion of articulation is to be applied. Althusserian social science focused initially on the articulation of modes of production and their economic mechanisms and then on social action as language related to ideology, politics, and the struggle for hegemony. This move also marked a departure from a conception of society as a fully articulated whole that gives meaning to its every instance by means of a 'necessary correspondence' with the economic. It simultaneously entailed greater attention to other concerns—not least gender, 'race', and ethnicity issues—with structures similar to those found in language, all considered via the notion of discourse. In a fully articulated system of differences, there would be no open discursive field for political articulations of 'the social'. Structures do not come out of nowhere, though; people not only appropriate and adopt them, becoming their subjects, but act in multiple ways, including opposition and resistance.

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