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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL REALITY: SARTRE,  
MARX AND LEVI-STRAUSS

by Geraldine M. Finn

Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA  
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## Introduction

The subject of this thesis is Sartre's Critique de la raison dialectique,<sup>1</sup> and its attempt to reconcile existentialism and Marxism within a single anthropology.<sup>2</sup> Sartre's project in the Critique seems to me to be both desirable and feasible for the following reasons:

1. Existentialism and Marxism share the same aspiration: to make social reality intelligible in terms of being rather than thought, existence rather than essence, and action rather than contemplation. It is an aspiration shared by the writer and one which motivates this particular work.

2. Both existentialism and Marxism can be regarded as "practical" philosophies, in that the theoretical imperative to understand social reality is in both cases secondary to the practical imperative to intervene in it, to act in order to change and transcend that reality. Again, this is a perspective shared by the writer.

3. Finally, both existentialism and Marxism can be regarded as specific responses to Hegel, at the theoretical level; and to the alienating conditions of existence specific to nineteenth century capitalism, at the practical level. The persistence of existentialism and Marxism, as theories and practices, into the late twentieth century

(perhaps best exemplified by the life and work of Sartre himself) testifies to the continuing persistence of those social conditions and their contradictions, and our continuing and pressing need to more thoroughly understand them in order to transcend them. This work itself can be seen as situated within those conditions and as a response to them.

Despite their common origin and aspiration however, or perhaps because of it, since contradiction is endemic to capitalism, Marxism and existentialism often stand opposed to each other: each denouncing the other as traitor to its own most cherished theoretical and practical principles. Thus Marxists reject existentialism as "bourgeois" and counter-revolutionary; and existentialists reject Marxism as a determinism and an example of "bad faith." I believe that there is truth on both sides, and that these truths can serve to complement both Marxism and existentialism if they are mutually applied to each other, to demystify the respective extremes to which the two approaches are vulnerable. This, in fact, is what I set out to do through my examination of the Critique.

In the chapters that follow, therefore, I shall be speaking with two voices: that of Marxism when appraising Sartre's existential analyses and syntheses, for example, and that of existential-phenomenology when appraising Marx and Marxism. In fact, I shall be using not two, but three

voices, for I shall be appealing to Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, which shares neither the theoretical origin in Hegel, nor the practical aspiration to intervene in social reality, of existentialism and Marxism, and therefore offers a radically different perspective from which the mystifying excesses of both Marxism and existentialism may be revealed. Thus structuralism will be my third voice. All three approaches to social reality will be subjected to a final critical appraisal in the last three chapters of the thesis.

My own voice will emerge in the course of my inquiry into the Critique. It will be heard most clearly, however, in the later chapters and will represent an integration and refinement of the three distinct approaches under consideration, Marxism, existentialism and structuralism; each one now tempered by the truths and insights specific to the other two and by the specifically feminist critique which emerges throughout the thesis and is more fully developed in these later chapters.

My point of departure in this examination of Sartre's Critique is the final chapter of Lévi-Strauss's The Savage Mind,<sup>3</sup> called "History and Dialectic," where Lévi-Strauss criticizes Sartre's interpretation of these two concepts in the Critique, and at the same time presents his own ideas on the same issues. Certain philosophical problems are raised explicitly in these texts, concerning history,

dialectical reason, the nature of human nature, and materialism. I shall examine the ideas of both thinkers on these subjects, with a view to formulating a comprehensive (though not complete) theory of culture and consciousness which does justice to them both, and to the respective insights of existentialism, Marxism, and structuralism, while at the same time overcoming some of their respective weaknesses, limitations, and excesses.

The scope of the problem--the intelligibility of social reality as defined by existentialism, Marxism, and structuralism--takes me beyond the two works which originally motivated the research. It entails a familiarity with the other writings of Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, as well as a knowledge of Marxist, existentialist, and structuralist thinking from other sources.

However, my attention is focused on the Critique and its efforts to reconcile Marxism and existentialism within a single anthropology. Before proceeding to a more detailed examination of the issues raised by that effort, I shall present a brief summary of the main thesis of this work.

#### Sartre's Critique de la raison dialectique

In this work Sartre attempts to establish a method for rendering intelligible the behaviour of "practical ensembles,"<sup>4</sup> and by so doing, to lay the foundations of a "structural and historical anthropology."<sup>5</sup> More precisely,

he aims to restore to Marxism an intelligibility which he believes it has lost, and will continue to lack, as long as the fundamental role of the concrete, existing human individual (the true source of the dialectic in history, in his opinion) is ignored or denied in the interests of "economism" or "vulgar materialism."<sup>6</sup>

Sartre maintains that human behaviour, even the behaviour of groups; for example the storming of the Bastille, is intelligible only if it can be seen to issue from individual human praxis.<sup>7</sup> This dialectical movement of surpassing while retaining belongs to the individual man (and to nothing else), and constitutes his very being as man. Thus, for Sartre, the individual existence is the very motor and origin of history.

It is this fundamental commitment to existential man, as self-creating project, surpassing present conditions and objectifications towards an undetermined and open future, which grounds everything Sartre has to say about history and human groups in the Critique. Here, as in Being and Nothingness, Sartre makes no concessions to chance or contingency, or to the "merely" material determination of events.<sup>8</sup> The later, like the earlier, work remains a defense of man's uniqueness and freedom, with respect to nature and the material and social world within which he is situated.<sup>9</sup>

However, there is, in the Critique, a significant modification of the "absolute freedom" which was the argument of the earlier work--consistent with the explicit commitment to historical materialism which was made only after the writing of Being and Nothingness. Sartre now agrees that external conditions, like genetic endowment and childhood experiences, social structures, and political and economic conditions, are real determinants of character and behaviour. They are conceded as determinants, however, only to the extent that they can be shown to be "internalized" by the individual in the ongoing dialectical process of human existence, of human self-creation.<sup>10</sup> His biographical work The Words, and his recent work on Flaubert have attempted to reveal and recreate that process of determination, whereby the external conditions of a particular existence are internalized, and then re-externalized by the individual in the dialectical process of self-creation.

To understand history, therefore, which in Sartre's opinion ultimately consists of individual actions, rather than social processes (changes in relations of production, for example), more than analysis is required. Analysis, in his opinion, can reveal only a series of facts, or conditions, which remain unintelligible as long as we do not understand how they are "lived"; that is, how they are internalized by the individual to issue in specific actions.<sup>11</sup> In the Questions de méthode, therefore, which precedes

the Critique proper but was written after the larger work had been completed, as an introduction to it, Sartre outlines the appropriate "progressive-regressive method" for anthropology, whereby analysis constitutes only the first, though necessary, regressive stage of a two-stage process of understanding.<sup>12</sup> Having discovered the material conditions of possibility of a particular event or action by way of analysis, the real task of "comprehension" begins: that of reconstructing the dialectical movement by means of which these prior conditions issued in particular individual, or more interestingly, group actions.<sup>13</sup>

In the main body of the Critique Sartre applies this method to a variety of human behaviours, ranging from the storming of the Bastille, listening to the radio, waiting for a bus, playing in a football game, to racism and class conflict--always to reveal the foundational dialectical movement of individuals which alone, in his opinion, can render such collective behaviour intelligible. In particular, he addresses himself to the class struggle and to that between the colonized and the colonizer. Through a critical analysis of the "dialectical experience" of the individual, the Critique establishes the necessity and inevitability of violent action for oppressed groups, by demonstrating that genuine, individual, and "sovereign" freedom and praxis are possible only during the revolutionary moment. In this respect, Sartre would appear to have

successfully married existentialism, the philosophy of the individual, with Marxism, the philosophy of social revolution.

In the following chapters I examine in greater detail specific areas of difficulty which Sartre encounters in this attempt to unite into one theory of intelligibility the fundamental theses of existentialism and Marxism: In each case I first test his ideas on his own terms, that is according to criteria suggested by the philosophical tradition within which he situates himself. Then I test his position in the light of the criticisms and alternatives offered by Lévi-Strauss. This will entail a more fundamental and radical treatment of the larger philosophical tradition to which Sartre belongs and which Lévi-Strauss has renounced. My conclusions here, with respect to both thinkers, will be of greater scope than those offered within the first perspective. As such they will provide the foundation for the constructive comments by which I hope to conclude this examination.

In my critique of Sartre I shall present Lévi-Strauss's ideas as forcefully and persuasively as possible, as constitutive parts of an alternative and systematic approach to social reality--i.e. structuralism, which can be fruitfully opposed to both existential-phenomenology and Marxism to reveal their respective and shared weaknesses and limitations. Although I am careful to express doubts

about Lévi-Strauss's structuralism where this is appropriate (for example, with respect to its assumption of patriarchy as a cultural given, and to its aspiration to scientificity and objectivity), I do not offer a detailed criticism of its assumptions, implications, and arguments until the final chapter of the thesis. I present the structuralist alternative as forcefully as possible before then, not because I believe it provides the correct or true perspective on social reality, but because it provides a plausible and significant complementary alternative to Marxism and existential-phenomenology, which must be attended to and somehow accommodated by any systematic attempt to combine the two into a truly structural and historical anthropology, such as Sartre's in the Critique.

## Chapter I Alienation

The extent to which Sartre succeeds in his attempt to reconcile Marxism and existentialism can, perhaps, be best measured by considering his treatment of alienation; since here we have an experience and a concept which is foundational to both philosophical systems. Furthermore, it could be argued that it was the discovery of Marx's description and analysis of alienation in the Paris Manuscripts of 1844 that made possible Sartre's personal and philosophical commitment to political Marxism.

I shall assume for the purposes of this chapter, though the assumption will be challenged later, that Sartre and Marx mean the same thing by "alienation"; although they disagree about its foundation or source, and even about the possibility of its eventual elimination, as we shall see below. Given this rather significant qualification, then, what is common to their understanding of alienation is a mere skeleton of the original Hegelian notion which is their common root. In the interest of clarity however, I suggest that the following definition of alienation, taken from Pietro Chiodi's Sartre and Marxism, be accepted as one which might be shared by all of the fore-mentioned.

Minimally then, for Sartre and Marx, as for Hegel, alienation refers to that:

. . . negative process by which a subject makes himself other than himself by virtue of a constraint which is capable of being removed on the initiative of the subject himself.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, this is very ambiguous and they would each interpret it differently.

In the first place, the claim that man can make himself other than himself suggests that there is in some sense an essential human nature from which the human subject can be alienated. Whether this is the case or not, and in what that essential human nature might consist is a point of controversy between the three thinkers and their commentators. Sartre ostensibly aligns himself with Marx in this respect. He assumes that there is in some (non-metaphysical) sense an essentially "human" nature, from which man can be estranged, and identifies this, not with an Hegelian subjective consciousness, but with the concrete, embodied, natural species-being of Marx. The alienation of this subject is historically, and not ontologically, conditioned; a matter of fact, therefore, and not necessity; and contingent upon specific historical conditions, the removal of which should make possible the elimination of alienation and the restoration of man to free species-being.

This agreement with Marx, however, with respect to the nature of the human nature which is alienated from itself, is only apparent. One of the major weaknesses of the Critique is precisely here; in that it ultimately establishes the insurpassability of alienation, after all--contrary to the whole thrust of Marxism and indeed to the political purpose of Sartre himself. Indeed, in his very attempt to strengthen the Marxist position Sartre reveals a more fundamental commitment to an Hegelian view of alienation in the Critique, which implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) assumes disembodied, pure consciousness as the "essential" human nature, which, in realizing itself in its object, is alienated from itself as an essentially pure subject and absolutely free activity.

In this respect, Sartre fails to unite the fundamental theses of existentialism and Marxism. At the same time, he prompts us to question the very postulate of "human nature" upon which the various descriptions of alienation--Hegelian, Marxist, and existentialist--depend. And while the assumption of a human nature is itself suspect (and thus any inquiry into "man" as such), the respective characterizations of that human nature are perhaps more so. Hegel, Marx, and Sartre share a view of man, which with varying degrees of emphasis, asserts (a) the primacy of the human subject (logical, chronological, ontological, phenomenological, teleological, epistemological, ethical,

or whatever), and (b) its ontological need for objectification. The first position owes much to Descartes. The second, though Hegelian in origin, is Cartesian nevertheless, in that it suggests a dichotomy between the (human) subject and the (world) object, and identifies subjectivity with that which is, to varying degrees, not (yet) part of the world of things. As we shall see, Sartre remains entrenched within this essentially Cartesian dualistic framework, and enchanted by the Cartesian ideal of the absolutely free acting subject. It is an enchantment which mystifies Sartre and prohibits his projected integration of existentialism with historical materialism.

In contrast to the Hegelian tradition indicated above, Lévi-Strauss provides us with an account of alienation which owes little to Descartes; which, furthermore, starting from positive, anthropological knowledge, does not seem to require any a priori postulate of an essential human nature. In addition, he provides a new framework for the discussion of alienation, by distinguishing "culture" from "society." The former refers to the relationship of men with things, and the latter to their relationships with each other. On this account, alienation is associated with those civilizations, like our own, which have emphasized cultural achievements at the expense of societal ones. Sartre does not acknowledge this distinction; while that between "culture" and "nature" is central to the

Critique and the concept of alienation it contains:

"What we call freedom," he said in Questions, "is the irreducibility of the cultural order to the natural order."<sup>2</sup>

But this is a metaphysical thesis which is asserted and assumed, rather than demonstrated or revealed by phenomenological description. Again, Lévi-Strauss accounts for that distinction without appealing to basic, ontological categories and without privileging the human subject in any way. And once more Sartre's existential-phenomenology is challenged by positive anthropology.

#### Alienation in the Critique

In the Critique, Sartre appears to be arguing against the Hegelian position according to which the objectification of consciousness is necessarily alienating, since the pure subject realizes itself in something other than itself, in the object, and thus makes itself an object to itself, negating its own nature as pure absolute activity--in favour of Marxism, according to which alienation is contingent and surpassable through revolutionary social change.

Sartre claims that, like Marx, he retains from Hegel a belief in the necessity of the relationship of objectification for human existence, but rejects the view that alienation is an equally necessary moment of that objectification. For, in the Critique that which is subject

to alienation is not abstract, pure consciousness contemplating itself in its object (and alienated from its own translucent nature in so doing), but concrete, embodied, natural man, creating and maintaining himself through his relationship with others and with the material world. Men, being natural, material, and living creatures need to interact with the natural and material world and with others simply in order to be, to survive at all. And there is nothing essentially alienating about this necessary relationship, which is the primary and foundational way in which objectification is necessary for man.

We must assume, however, although Sartre does not make this explicit that he follows Marx in considering objectification as more than simply "materially" necessary, in this basic survival sense. As the self-mediating self-creation of man, objectification, i.e. human productive activity, assumes an ontological significance:<sup>3</sup> it is that which makes man, man; the essentially human quality of being human. This must be assumed as an ontological premise if the alienation in question really occurs, whereby the human subject "makes himself other than himself" in a profoundly significant way. On this view, any activity which renders this self-creation impossible is considered "alienating," and man alienates himself from himself in engaging in such activity, since he produces himself in so acting as other than his essential self-producing self.

In other words, he negates his freedom to be human in the exercise of that very freedom. Hence; for Marx and Sartre the alienation contingent upon capitalism, whereby man alienates from himself that which is most essential to his being human, and sells it to others--his productive activity.

We must also assume, though again this is not made explicit in the Critique, that Sartre shares Marx's belief that man is in some necessary sense a species-being; that it is in some sense an essential part of human nature to be species-conscious; that each person creates or realizes him or herself as a member of a community and a species, and not as an isolated and independent individual. And that, furthermore, the realization of each person's individual freedom and essentially human existence depends upon just such a species-life.<sup>4</sup> This must be assumed by Sartre, since he considers the separation and serialization of human beings to be essentially alienating structures of existence.

For Marx, it is alienated labour which is the root cause of the whole complex of alienations with which we are familiar: the alienation of man from nature, from his own activity and its products, from other men. Existentialists, on the other hand, have traditionally documented these alienations as if they were part of a universal human condition, and not the effects of specific historical conditions. In the Critique, Sartre tries to

revise that tradition so that it is consistent with and complementary to Marxism, by revealing an historical origin for existential angst. The historical conditions with which Sartre associates alienation are not however those of Marx, though they would include them. His thesis in the Critique is not intended as a rejection of Marxism, but as an enrichment of it. He does not, therefore deny the facts of alienated labour and the total alienation which results from it, and he agrees that the capitalist system of production generates and maintains this situation of alienation and must be overthrown if de-alienation is to be achieved. But he considers alienated labour as in some sense secondary, and not therefore foundational.<sup>5</sup> In his opinion it is need or scarcity which provide the ultimate foundation of the possibility (though not the necessity, he claims), of alienation.<sup>6</sup> Thus, according to Sartre, alienation will not be overcome until conditions of scarcity are overcome.<sup>7</sup>

It is in his development (in fact, his lack of development) of this concept of scarcity and its relation to alienation, that we shall discover one of the principal weaknesses of Sartre's argument. Scarcity, or need, is not only considered to be the locus of alienation by Sartre, but as basic, biological need it is presented as the primary interior spring of action and the motivator or foundation of that dialectical activity which, according to Sartre,

defines man and makes history both possible and intelligible.<sup>8</sup> But if man is defined as the dialectical surpassing of successive objectifications, and if this dialectical movement is ultimately motivated by need or scarcity, resulting in every objectification being an alienation,<sup>9</sup> then the removal of conditions of scarcity, while suppressing alienation, will also suppress man as we know him.<sup>10</sup> Since, the very scarcity which alienates, also, on this account, makes man and history possible. Sartre leaves us with an uncomfortable choice: either alienated man, or no man at all. In effect, therefore, Sartre remains closer to Hegel than Marx; in that the equally necessary moments of objectification and alienation are ultimately identified as one.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, we are deprived of the corresponding Hegelian consolation: Sartre projects no future in which the synthesis of subject and object (man and his product) will eliminate both the need for objectification and the inevitable alienation; one in which subjective freedom and authenticity are real possibilities for human existence.

I will now explore Sartre's theory of alienation in greater detail.

In the above critical and necessarily schematic summary of Sartre's treatment of alienation in the Critique, the two concepts of "need" and "scarcity" were used more or less interchangeably. This reflects a confusion, not in this writer, but one which occurs in the Critique

itself.<sup>12</sup> This, in turn, reflects a fundamental ambivalence, already indicated, in Sartre's own attitude towards alienation and the possibility of its elimination, and towards the specific nature of that which is subject to it, i.e. man. Sartre is divided between Hegelian idealism and Marxist materialism: he aspires to the latter, but was formed by and is unable to transcend the former. This ambivalence is more evident in the Critique, which is an essentially philosophical (if not a metaphysical) work, than it is in his shorter more specific and particular, concrete analyses of social and historical phenomena published elsewhere as essentially Marxist-existentialist interpretations. It undermines and in fact vitiates his projected theoretical fusion of existentialism and Marxism in the Critique, though not its practical application in rendering intelligible specific social realities (May 1968, for example). That (general) theory should trail behind (particular) practice in this way is only consistent with our own theoretical principle indicated in our introductory remarks: that consciousness, thought, and ideas are secondary to being, action, and existence, and not vice-versa; a view, we suggested, shared by both existentialism and Marxism. The split between theory and practice in Sartre's own work therefore should be regarded as an exemplification of the truth of this principle rather than as evidence of a failed project; it testifies to the continuing need

for struggle at the theoretical level for the adequate expression of those contradictions which are in the first and last instance encountered, mediated, and transcended only in practice. It is to Sartre's credit that, like Marx himself, he never ceased in this struggle to give adequate theoretical expression to an existence riddled with contradictions.

Overtly, of course, in the Critique, Sartre aligns himself with Marxist, historical materialism, purporting to strengthen the Marxist position by providing it with an adequate anthropology, and at the same time additional theoretical support for the proclaimed historical inevitability of revolutionary activity. He presents his arguments in recognizably Marxist terms: the "practical organism" and "praxis," for example, replace the pure consciousness and the "pour-soi" of Being and Nothingness; and real, material, physical need replaces the abstract, existential "lack" or "nothingness," as the foundation of the human project. But despite all this, and despite his own better judgement, Sartre remains a captive of Cartesian rationalism even in the Critique (the title itself is something of a give-away). There, as in the earlier work, his thought is dominated by and continues to emphasize the subject, as an essentially thinking, contemplative subject (an understandable prejudice in a middle-class intellectual); and the basic dualisms and oppositions of Descartes

continue to determine the direction of his inquiry: mind/matter, active/passive, freedom/necessity, self/other, internal/external, nature/culture, etc. Likewise, his argument remains haunted by the Cartesian ideal of the perfect instant: that perfect moment of coincidence of self-consciousness, action, and absolute freedom which can characterize a cogito (or a God), but not an embodied, natural, concretely living human being. But he seems unaware of these remnants of idealism and rationalism which vitiate the projected integration of existentialism and Marxism from the outset.<sup>13</sup>

For example, he argues the clearly materialistic position that as long as man continues to live within conditions of scarcity (rareté) his existence will be an alienated one:

. . . as long as the reign of scarcity continues, each and every man will contain an inert structure of non-humanity, which is in fact no more than material negation which has been interiorised.<sup>14</sup>

While suggesting elsewhere that alienation will continue as long as man's life is dominated by need (besoin), since:

Negation is there in these fundamental relations of need and labour . . . . It comes to matter in praxis and through the development of this praxis, it turns its back against the individual in so far as it becomes a double negation solidified by inertia.<sup>15</sup>

All the time proceeding as if "need" and "scarcity" were

synonymous, and, of course, they are not: Scarcity, perhaps, depending on how it is specified, can be overcome. (This issue will be taken up later.) But basic biological need which motivates man to act, and to appropriate his environment cannot; except by the destruction of life itself. So if this need, as Sartre seems to suggest, is the foundation of negation and thus alienation, alienation itself must be inevitable. If, on the other hand, Sartre means by "need" only those which are consequent upon conditions of scarcity, or secondary needs produced by capitalism, for example, he does not say so. He suggests in places the more clearly Marxist view, that alienation will continue so long as man works from "necessity"; but again what is meant by this "necessity" is taken for granted and never specified. What emerges is the view that necessity is not itself necessary, but opposed to choice--and not to abundance, as the analysis of alienation in terms of scarcity might suggest. But then this kind of necessity cannot be conflated with the biological need which is said to found the dialectic and to which Sartre is obliged to appeal in his defense of the alienating effects of scarcity, as we shall see below. The inadequacy of these concepts, "scarcity," and "need" to account for alienation in the Critique, reflect a corresponding weakness in the Marxist tradition which inspired the effort in the first place; this point will be returned to in our chapter on Marx.

Meanwhile, my argument is as follows: if Sartre shows that scarcity is the ultimate ground of alienation, it is only upon the implicit assumption of a Cartesian perspective which takes pure consciousness as its point of departure, and not concrete embodied existence as he claims. And secondly, even if we accept these terms, his demonstration does not succeed.

I have already indicated the inadequacies of the concepts of need and scarcity as they appear in the Critique; in addition, they are constantly conflated in Sartre, just as the Hegelian and Marxist perspectives are. They can be separated as follows, however:

Position I. Sartre, the Marxist, considers scarcity to be that upon which alienation is founded: the removal of scarcity would permit the surpassing of alienation. This position is clearly and explicitly asserted throughout the Critique.

Position II. Sartre, still Marxist, but now attempting to integrate some of the insights of existentialism into position I, regards need, as basic individual and animal need, as the original motivator of dialectical activity and hence the ultimate ground of historical intelligibility. This need is not the same thing as the scarcity which grounds alienation. It makes little sense to talk about the suppression of biological need, which would be tantamount to the suppression of both man and

history. This position is also clearly and explicitly maintained in the Critique.

Position III. Sartre, the Hegelian, however, clearly does regard the same basic, animal need as essentially alienating, in that it constrains the individual to objectify himself in that which is other than himself--in inert matter. This is not explicitly asserted in the Critique, but is implicit and clearly so, in its demonstration and explication of the first two positions as we shall now see.

Primary alienation and man's relationship to the external world: materiality

In the first place, Sartre frequently speaks of a "primary alienation," which would appear to accompany any human action regardless of the historical conditions and the relative abundance or scarcity of material goods.

It would indeed be inconceivable that human activity should be alienated or that human relations should be capable of being reified if there were no such thing as alienation and reification in the practical relation of the agent to the objects of his act and to other agents. Neither the un-situated freedom of certain idealists, nor the Hegelian relation of consciousness to itself, nor the mechanistic determinism of certain pseudo-Marxists can account for it. It is in the concrete and synthetic relation of the agent to the other through the mediation of the thing, and to the thing through the mediation of the other, that we shall be able to discover the foundations of all possible alienations.<sup>16</sup>

He suggests that two conditions are required for this

primary alienation, materiality, and seriality (i.e. living amongst others as isolated individuals rather than as a community). But materiality alone would seem to be sufficient. And since it clearly characterizes the human condition generally and is independent of specific historical contingencies, it would follow that alienation too is an a-historical given of human existence. The sufficiency of materiality for alienation can be seen as follows.

Sartre appeals to the reality of human needs in his elucidation of primary alienation. In this context, need is clearly not the equivalent of scarcity, but of basic biological need, which provides the motor of the original dialectical movement of the human organism (see position II above):

. . . praxis is inconceivable without need, transcendence, and the project . . . . Need, negativity, surpassing, project, transcendence, form a synthetic totality in which each one of the moments designated contains all the others.<sup>17</sup>

Everything is to be explained through need (le besoin); need is the first totalising relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is a part. This relation is univocal, and of interiority. Indeed it is through need that the first negation of the negation and the first totalisation appear in matter. Need is a negation of the negation in so far as it expresses itself as a lack within the organism; and need is a positivity in so far as the organic totality tends to preserve itself as such through it.<sup>18</sup>

However, in establishing the first negation, this same need,

says Sartre, at the same time establishes a primary and foundational alienation:

This initial totalisation is transcendent to the extent that the being of the organism lies outside it, immediately or mediately, in inanimate being; need sets up the initial contradiction because the organism, in its being, depends directly (oxygen) or indirectly (food), on unorganised being and because, conversely, the control of its reactions imposes a biological 'statute' on the inorganic . . . . But while Nature appears, through the mediation of need, as a false organism, the organism exteriorises itself in Nature as pure materiality . . . if it is to find its being within Nature or to protect itself against destruction, the organic totality must transform itself into inert matter, for it is only as a mechanical system that it can modify the material environment. The man of need is an organic totality perpetually making itself into its own tool in the milieu of exteriority.<sup>19</sup>

These passages show, how, despite the shift in emphases and philosophical language, Sartre is documenting in the Critique the same Hegelian drama (between subject and object) as he did in Being and Nothingness. An essentially isolated subject is taken as the point of departure. In its necessary relationship with the world, it is returned to itself as other than itself, burdened with the inert and with materiality. New terminology replaces the old: the organic and the inorganic replace the pour-soi and the en-soi, and much of the idealistic language of the earlier work has been purged. But the concepts themselves have not really changed; irreconcilable opposites remain: freedom and facticity, the active and the inert (or passive),

interiority and exteriority, subject and object, and so forth.<sup>20</sup> These are (ideal) Cartesian and Hegelian oppositions and they continue to haunt and determine Sartre's thinking; enabling him to establish a primitive alienation, prior to and foundational of any processes of alienation associated with historical conditions--with seriality, scarcity, or capitalism.

. . . what has never been attempted is a study of the type of passive action which materiality as such exerts on man and his History in returning a stolen praxis to man in the form of a counter-finality. The point must be emphasised: History is more complex than some kinds of simplistic Marxism suppose; man has to struggle not only against nature, and against the social environment which has produced him, and against other men, but also against his own action as it becomes other. This primitive type of alienation occurs within other forms of alienation, but it is independent of them, and, in fact is their foundation. . . we shall reveal through it, that a permanent anti-praxis is a new and necessary moment of praxis. If we do not try to define this moment, historical intelligibility--that is, certainty within the complexity of temporal development--loses one of its essential moments and is transformed into unintelligibility.<sup>21</sup>

This primitive alienation of man, established by his own praxis, by way of his own productive activity, that is, by that which defines him as man, and conditioned only by materiality, is characterized according to Sartre, by reification and counter-finality (contre-finalité). Man is made into a thing (reification) and his intentions are betrayed through the very action which constitutes his humanity, which as part of the material world, confronts

him as other and as opposed to him (counter-finality). These structures occur as follows.

In order to be at all, man must act--a biological if not an ontological imperative. In order to act in the concrete material world he must "reduce" himself, according to Sartre, to a material object--to a tool. This being-an-object is reflected back to the individual, in the product of his action, as his own realization, definition, or being. Thus man realizes himself as an object, as matter, as inorganic and inert i.e. reified; and does not recognize himself--the organic, the free, and the active--in his product. This is what Sartre means by reification.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of counter-finality includes that of reification and is interchangeable with the practico-inert (pratico-inerte) once we admit the praxes of others into the dialectical reconstruction. Both terms denote the passive-action (action-passive) by which the material world negates and contradicts human intentions. The actions generated by human need reverberate beyond the control and the intent of the agent. Thus, they are perpetuated in the material world as inhuman, or even anti-human. The individual's praxis is "stolen" from him, according to Sartre, taken over by material events to become "anti-praxis."<sup>23</sup> Sartre illustrates this with the example of deforestation in China: the need for timber generated praxes which themselves initiated a series of physical events, which

resulted in the emergence of a new negation--the shortage of water. Thus praxis becomes anti-praxis. A more topical example is that of pollution, which can be regarded as the passive action, or anti-praxis, of the material environment, in response to industrialization which itself originated in human praxis, motivated by need.

When to this primitive and apparently insuperable alienation characterized by reification and counter-finality, and conditioned only by materiality and basic biological need, we add the real presence of others, new and more formidable structures of alienation appear.

Primary alienation and man's relationship with others: seriality

Sartre assumes that our primary relationship with others is as members of a "collectivity" or multiplicity of individuals "qui s'ignorent." Thus, being-with-others is primarily a separation, a co-existence in series of isolated individuals, apparently alienated from each other from the very onset. The only unity between individuals is that which comes from "worked matter," i.e. from the practico-inert. According to Sartre, this first reciprocity between individuals is an essentially inhuman one because it is mediated by matter. We are united, but only falsely, he maintains, by the material environment within which we each work separately to fulfil our separate needs. Again, materiality alone would appear to be sufficient condition

of the alienation of man from others.

. . . we have discovered . . . that men unwittingly realise their own unity in the form of antagonistic alterity through the material field in which they are dispersed and through the multiplicity of unifying actions which they perform upon this field . . .

This is apparent in the most everyday objectivity: from my window I can see men who do not know each other walking across a square to jobs which, at least at the present level of the investigation, isolate them from one another . . . In this state of semi-isolation, it is obvious that they are united by the street, the square, the paving-stones and the asphalt, the pedestrian crossing, and the bus, that is to say by the material underside of a passivised praxis. But this unity is itself that of a material system, and in this sense it is highly ambiguous.<sup>24</sup>

The queue at the bus stop at Saint Germain de Près provides Sartre with a (now classic) example of this false reciprocity, this first way of being with others in the series. Only the material object, the bus, unites these individuals at the bus stop, each one of whom is engaged in an essentially individual and separate project. In addition, since their action takes place in conditions of scarcity--there is a limited number of places on the bus--the reciprocity between them is not only false (i.e. an index of separation rather than community), but also "negative," i.e. antagonistic. Each person is competing with the other for a limited resource. Each perceives the other, therefore, as the one whose praxis could rob him of the ends of his own; not by virtue of his being a particular and distinctive individual with a personal history and character, but simply by his

being an "other" in the series. Thus, each affirms the other as "exis," and denies his specific "existence." And so objectification, reification, alteration, and alienation arise inseparably and simultaneously, according to Sartre, within the same fundamental moment of being-with-others. The historical condition of scarcity adds antagonism to these structures of interpersonal alienation.<sup>25</sup>

There are places in the Critique where Sartre seems to suggest that a non-antagonistic, or at least neutral, reciprocity between individuals is possible, where conditions of scarcity do not prevail. Such a collection of individuals would have no History, on his account, however since history is grounded in conflict<sup>26</sup> and contradiction, and these in scarcity.<sup>27</sup> Individuals in such communities would exist as either "biological" or "primitive" societies.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, even individuals in these cyclical, non-historical societies, uninterrupted by scarcity, would exist in series, as solitary individuals, isolated from each other, and united only by a false reciprocity, i.e. by the field of the practico-inert. Since, for Sartre: ". . . the inert gathering with its structure of seriality is the basic type of sociality . . . groups constitute themselves as determinations and negations of collectives."<sup>29</sup> If this is so, then even societies characterized by "positive," or neutral (though nevertheless "false") reciprocity, remain mere collectivities or series, lacking

any authentic communion of interests or activity. There would seem to be no escape, on Sartre's account, from the fundamental alienation of man, from himself in inert matter, and from his species-being in the collectivity.<sup>30</sup>

Alienation overcome:  
the group in fusion

This multiplicity of isolated, powerless, and alienated individuals can be unified, according to Sartre, only by a common fear of destruction by an external threat. Genuine, positive reciprocity and authentic free activity become possible only in these circumstances; when there is a spontaneous recognition by each and all (i) of the intolerability of a situation, the impossibility of its being "lived," and (ii) of the freedom and life of each being dependent on the freedom and life of all. Such moments give rise to the group-in-fusion, which forms spontaneously to combat the communal threat. Apparently, individuals can share a common project when it is that of combatting the "enemy" outside: in these rare circumstances each individual affirms rather than negates the praxis of the other through his own praxis. The multiplicity is internalized and is constitutive of each individual praxis; together we can negate the negation. The storming of the Bastille, and by inference any other revolutionary uprising, the events in May 1968, for example, illustrate such group action, which by its very action overcomes the atomization,

serialization, and alienation characteristic of the collectivity.

Very quickly however, this group originally formed to act against an external threat of destruction, experiences an internal threat--that of its own disintegration.<sup>31</sup> At this moment, according to Sartre, the members of the group, who at first came together spontaneously and freely, bind themselves together by an oath, to ensure their survival as a group.<sup>32</sup> This oath is freely undertaken. Each person freely sacrifices his freedom to leave or oppose the group, in order to maintain the freedom from alienation in the series which the formation of the group made possible--and which was its condition of possibility.

However, this non-alienated moment of genuine community is short-lived, if not "instantaneous";<sup>33</sup> for it is soon surpassed by the necessary return of seriality, consequent upon the oath, which introduces organization, authority, bureaucracy, and institutionalization into the collectivity. Alienation reappears, with new structures of alterity, objectification, and powerlessness. And it is a more intense and fundamental alienation, for it has, in a sense, been freely chosen by each individual through the swearing of the oath.<sup>34</sup> Once more the Critique would seem to have established the historical inevitability of alienation.<sup>35</sup>

### Recapitulation and Criticism

I am making two major points against Sartre's theory of alienation as described above:

1. The first is that he does not succeed in his project: he does not show that alienation is grounded in the contingent condition of scarcity. Quite the contrary is true; and his basic position is more Hegelian than it is Marxist, in this respect. He associates alienation with materiality and plurality; or, to use the language of Being and Nothingness, with Facticity and the Other. He speaks as if primary alienation were grounded in scarcity, to the extent that it is the consciousness of a lack or a need in the practical organism which is man, which prompts the first totalization, the first project, the first objectification. But there is an obvious confusion of terms here, of scarcity and need. If Sartre is arguing that alienation is an historical, and not an ontological, feature of human existence, made possible by conditions of scarcity; and if these conditions are contingent and not necessary, then it should be possible to remove them and thus overcome alienation. But, if scarcity is something which can be overcome, then it cannot be the same thing as biological need, the experience of which, according to Sartre, motivates essentially human activity. The suppression of this kind of need or lack would be equivalent to the suppression

of life and humanity itself. But, if scarcity is not the same as animal need, as it is not, then, as I have shown, it has nothing to do with the foundation of primary alienation, and its elimination will not have the effect of surpassing it.

2. My second point is, that, even if we grant Sartre some success in grounding at least the structures of alienation associated with seriality, with being with others, in scarcity, that success relies on the concealed first premise of the Cartesian cogito, or pour-soi, as the point of departure, and the Hegelian notion of alienation associated with it. This second point will now be more fully developed.

At times Sartre suggests that the "original" reciprocity between individuals was/is neutral; and that it ~~is~~ was the contingent condition of scarcity that disturbs, from the outside, the original peaceful exchange which characterizes biological and primitive collectives, introducing into the series the dimension of antagonism. The following passage makes this clear.

Whatever men and events are, they certainly appear within the compass of scarcity; that is in a society still incapable of emancipating itself from its needs--hence from nature--a society which is thereby defined according to its techniques and its tools. The split in a collectivity crushed by its needs and dominated by a mode of production raises up antagonisms among the individuals who compose it. The abstract relations of things with each other, of merchandise and

money, etc., mask and condition the direct relations of men with one another . . . . Without those principles there is no historical rationality. But without living men, there is no history.<sup>36</sup>

(This passage also illustrates Sartre's tendency to conflate the two notions of scarcity and need, which allows him to maintain a covertly Hegelian position with respect to alienation, beneath the appearances of an overt Marxist commitment.)

According to Sartre, each man experiences the other as a "contre homme" in this world of scarcity, in that the very presence of the other in his field of activity is a threat to him. For the existence of the other could deprive him of his own, by depriving him of the resources necessary for survival. In addition, each experiences himself as "contre homme" for each of the others. Thus every member of the series is alienated from himself and others; isolated and separated from the rest, as well as reified by the presence of the others by way of their respective praxes.

Thus, in conditions of scarcity, individual praxis is doubly-alienated. Once in being returned to the agent as inert matter; twice, in being stolen from him by the others, who incorporate it into their own praxes and totalizations as an object; and thus transform the original praxis into anti-praxis.

Furthermore, this collectivity of alienated individuals, is fundamentally violent, according to Sartre. Since it is founded upon scarcity, and since its members are only falsely and negatively united by the practico-inert, the collectivity is haunted by destruction. Each man defines and is, in turn, objectively defined by the Other, as inhuman or anti-human, for each is the source of the other's alienation and possible annihilation. As a consequence, the Other is identified with Evil, because he threatens the existence of the self in every sense.

Nothing--not even wild beasts or microbes--could be more terrifying for man than a species which is intelligent, carnivorous and cruel, and which can understand and outwit human intelligence, and whose aim is precisely the destruction of man. This, however, is obviously our own species as perceived in others by each of its members in the context of scarcity.<sup>37</sup>

It is clear that Sartre's choice of seriality as the foundational structure of being-with-others--false, antagonistic, and alienating--is made possible only by assumption of a Cartesian point of departure, which identifies pure consciousness as the essential subject of human experience and activity. Why otherwise would the first moment of being with others be experienced as one of isolation and separation? Surely it is only a characteristically Cartesian consciousness, or pour-soi, that experiences itself as irrevocably and primordially separated from other

consciousnesses? By comparison, a concrete embodied human subject, in his lived experience of the world, which is existentially prior to any procedure of Cartesian doubt, does not experience a primary separation and solitude, but rather a sense of participation and belonging with others, on the lines of Heidegger's "mitsein" and "dasein." This point is well made by other phenomenologists, by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, for example, and urged against Sartre by Marjorie Grene in her latest book on Sartre. Being-with is primary and the lonely consciousness is a philosopher's abstraction.<sup>38</sup> This theme is more fully developed in chapter IV.

Likewise, if the material unity between individuals, provided by the world within which everyone projects and maintains himself, is regarded as a false and inhuman, and "exterior," reciprocity, this can only be because the essentially human is pre-conceived as non-material, ontologically "interior," and aspiring to some fundamentally non-material union with others. If the necessity to mingle with the material world is seen as a negation of oneself and one's freedom, and as such as the foundation of alienation, then that self and that freedom must be pre-conceived as aspiring to the infinite and absolute freedom of immaterial "spirit," to the freedom of Descartes's God, in fact.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, just as there is no a priori reason why material unity should be a false unity, so there is no

a priori reason why human relationships should be antagonistic even within a context of scarcity. Could not scarcity just as well unite as separate men and be the material basis of genuine communal action and positive reciprocal relations of exchange?<sup>40</sup> It is my belief that the necessity of this antagonism between members of a series owes its explanation more to the dialectic of Being and Nothingness, than it does to the dialectic of a history conditioned by scarcity. The Critique merely translates the ontologically necessary conflict between two consciousnesses, resulting in sadistic or masochistic relationships only, into Marxian language; it does not transcend that conflict. "Praxis" replaces freedom, and the "practico-inert" replaces "facticity," but the all-or-nothing struggle between two essentially ideal subjects remains; and authentic being-with-others is still unavailable to Sartrean man. Sartre remains, therefore, much more an existentialist (if not a liberal),<sup>41</sup> than a Marxist in this respect: his fundamental commitment is to the primacy of the individual, as above all else a free, independent, and separate consciousness and will. To this extent he fails to accommodate existentialism to Marxism.

In fact, in demonstrating the virtual insuppressibility of alienation, Sartre becomes eligible for the same critique which Marx made of other Hegelian thinkers. Sartre as himself an alienated man, describes, with great precision

and accuracy the structures of that alienation which he experiences in common with everyone else in his society and historical period. But he forgets that he is speaking from within specific historical conditions and describes these structures as if they were a-historical and universal features of human existence. As such, his philosophy is " . . . equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of human alienation";<sup>42</sup> his " . . . philosophical mind is nothing but the alienated world-mind thinking within the bounds of its self-alienation"; and the philosopher himself " . . . an abstract form of alienated man sets himself up as the measure of the alienated world."<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, Sartre is ambivalent and inconsistent as regards the historicity of his own thought. He acknowledges it explicitly in the Questions (and elsewhere, in interviews etc.) when he comments that existentialism is the "ideology" of Marxism,<sup>44</sup> and will be its truth only for so long as Marxism is the truth of human existence--in his view, as long as scarcity prevails. When scarcity is overcome the "reign of freedom" will be possible, he says; and adds that we have no way of anticipating now what that freedom will be like, nor what philosophy will be appropriate to it.<sup>45</sup>

But as we have seen, such professions of historicity are undermined by the actuality of his theory of primary alienation in the Critique, which is not grounded in scarcity, an historically conditioned and therefore

surpassable condition, but in need, an a-historical and ontologically necessary condition of human being.

Furthermore, the very concept of man as an individual--even as an embodied individual--isolated from and over-against others, lacking species-consciousness, is rejected by Marx as an abstraction, itself made possible as a point of departure only upon the prior adoption of the bourgeois standpoint of modern political economy. Like Hegel, Sartre could equally be accused of having taken as his point of departure " . . . man as bourgeois and not man as a citizen who is considered the true and authentic man."<sup>46</sup> This bourgeois individual is not primordial as Sartre would have him, but the product of the particular economic and political conditions of capitalism, which estrange man from his own essential nature as sensuous, self-creating species-being.<sup>47</sup> By presenting this historically specific individual as primary and his alienation as a necessary structure of praxis, Sartre's " . . . frozen, metaphysical, antihistorical, 'phenomenological' pseudo-ontology"<sup>48</sup> reifies and mystifies social reality, and thus neutralizes the political impact of the Marxist critique of capitalism. Indeed, if consciousness is the product of society as Marx asserts, then any phenomenology of conscious experience will reveal only historically relative, and not universally valid, descriptions of social reality. Sartre speaks as if phenomenology were not thus limited; presenting the fundamental

structures of (his own) alienation as determinants of human existence as such, independent of specific historical conditions. Furthermore, he describes this alienation from within the society which maintains it, and in its own terms; forgetting Marx's injunction that an individual or an historical epoch cannot be judged by the consciousness it has of itself. This, combined with a tendency to overlook the historicity of human experience, means that Sartre's account of history and alienation is more "ideological" than it is "scientific"; it confirms the truth of historical materialism by disclosing and clarifying it at the level of lived experience, but it cannot be said to have established its anthropological foundation as Sartre intended.

This, in fact, is precisely the charge which Lévi-Strauss levels against Sartre in the final chapter of The Savage Mind, where he is not specifically concerned with alienation, but with the inadequacies of Sartre's notions of "history" and "dialectic" as they are developed in the Critique.<sup>49</sup> The specifics of these confrontations will be the subject of later chapters. But some of the more general criticisms made against Sartre may be usefully reviewed here.

#### Lévi-Strauss's Critique of Sartre

Lévi-Strauss's main point is that Sartre's weaknesses are a direct consequence of his chosen philosophical

standpoint--that of phenomenology, whose traditional point of departure is the Cogito--arguing that:

He who begins by steeping himself in the allegedly self-evident truths of introspection never emerges from them. Knowledge of men sometimes seems easier to those who allow themselves to be caught up in the snare of personal identity. But they thus shut the door on the knowledge of man: written or avowed 'confessions' form the basis of all ethnographic research. Sartre in fact becomes the prisoner of his Cogito: Descartes made it possible to attain universality, but conditionally on remaining psychological and individual; by sociologizing the Cogito, Sartre merely exchanges one prison for another. Each subject's group and period now take the place of timeless consciousness. Moreover, Sartre's view of the world and man has the narrowness which has been traditionally credited to closed societies. His insistence on tracing a distinction between the primitive and the civilized with the aid of gratuitous contrasts reflects, in a scarcely more subtle form the fundamental opposition he postulates between myself and others. Yet there is little difference between the way in which this opposition is formulated in Sartre's work and the way it would have been formulated by a Melanesian savage, while the analysis of the practico-inert quite simply revives the language of animism.<sup>50</sup>

He comments, in a note to this paragraph, that Sartre is in no position to judge the operations of the primitive mind (as he does in the Critique, to his discredit, as we shall see presently), because he operates at precisely the same socially and historically constrained level as they do. As such, his philosophy, like all philosophy in Lévi-Strauss's opinion, is more like myth than science, and, as such " . . . affords a first-class ethnographic document, the study of which is essential to an

understanding of the mythology of our own time."<sup>51</sup> It is to the purported mythological character of Sartre's thinking that I will now turn my attention.

Sartre's Marxism as  
mythological thought

Lévi-Strauss describes mythological thought in his chapter on "The Science of the Concrete" as a kind of intellectual "bricolage."<sup>52</sup> The constituent elements of myths are "signs," and like the instruments of the bricoleur they are already "at hand": They are part of a "closed" system or universe and they are already laden with significance, suggesting certain meanings or uses and excluding others. They are therefore, "preconstrained," in that their possible combinations ". . ." are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre."<sup>53</sup> While admitting that the modern scientist is also very much a bricoleur in some respects, Lévi-Strauss contrasts his "concepts" with the "signs" which are the tools of mythology: the basic difference being that concepts open up the set being worked on, while signs can only reorganize it. In other words, by way of concepts the scientist strives to go beyond the constraints imposed by his civilization and language; the bricoleur, by necessity always remains within them: "Whereas concepts aim to be wholly transparent with respect to

reality, signs allow and even require the interposing of a certain amount of human culture and reality."<sup>54</sup> Thus, mythological thought builds up structures out of the "debris of events," while remaining firmly imprisoned within those events. The scientist, by comparison, distinguishes the contingency of events from the necessity of structure and aspires to the discovery of "objectively necessary" structures, i.e. to systems which owe nothing to lived experience or events. (To what extent this is possible is considered in a later chapter.) Lévi-Strauss, of course, aligns himself with the scientists and claims to have revealed objective universal truths through the method of structural anthropology.

Although Lévi-Strauss does not make this connection explicitly, it is clear that Sartre's work fits perfectly this description of mythological thought. He can be seen as an intellectual bricoleur, confined within the events he describes, building "ideological castles out of the debris of what was once a social discourse."<sup>55</sup> Thus only historical and non-objective truth is available to him; he furnishes us with myths about social reality, and not social reality itself.

#### Man, primitive man, and History

It is possible that Lévi-Strauss was incited to his critique of Sartre in The Savage Mind by the latter's insensitive and ethnocentric treatment of primitive men

in the work in question. It is as if he sloughed off all the lacunae and loose-ends of his theory onto the unfortunate shoulders of the primitive. In the first place he assumes a distinction almost of kind between civilized and primitive man, consisting in the former's having and the latter's not having a History, and ultimately reducing the primitive to the "inhuman" or "less than human" as follows.<sup>56</sup>

For Sartre, man, the dialectic and history are inter-definable: he defines man in terms of the dialectic and the dialectic in terms of history; history in terms of man and man in terms of the dialectic. Thus, history, man, and the dialectic are inseparable moments of the same (human) experience. What then is to be made of those people who, as Sartre claims, are without history? If they lack history, do they then lack dialectical comprehension which constitutes history on his account? But if they lack dialectical reason then they are not men, since man is defined by it. At times in the Critique Sartre seems to be aware of this dilemma, and therefore adds (in a footnote) that he is not actually defining man by historicity, but rather by:

. . . the permanent possibility of living historically the breakdowns which sometimes overthrow societies of repetition. This definition is necessarily a posteriori; that is, it arises at the heart of a historical society, and it is in itself the result of social transformations. But it goes back to apply itself to societies without history in the same way that history itself

returns to them to transform them--first externally and then in and through the internalization of the external.<sup>57</sup>

But this disclaimer does not tally well with the basic premise of the Critique: that man is fundamentally self-creating, and that in creating himself by surpassing present conditions towards the future, man makes history. The question remains, how it can be that the primitive, although dialectical and human, nevertheless lacks history?

That Sartre considers primitive people as marginal to the real human enterprise of making history<sup>58</sup> is clear from other references in the Critique, most notably where he characterizes the existence of primitive man as being closer to the biological and natural mode of being than to the cultural or human mode. This is not per se denigrating to the primitive; but in the context of Sartre's thought it is--man being essentially cultural and other, in a fundamental ontological sense, than the natural world; and this otherness being the very foundation of the possibility of freedom.<sup>59</sup> This distinction, between nature and culture is problematic and one to which we will return several times in this thesis: but it is a dichotomy to which Sartre is committed. It is undermined, however, by his own conception of the primitive, whereby the primitive is closer to nature (and yet still man?) than he is to culture because he lacks history. For example, Sartre contrasts " . . . la temporalité synthétique primitive et le temps de la

praxis élémentaire."<sup>60</sup> The former is cyclical and characteristic of both biological and primitive societies; and it is disrupted by scarcity which institutes the first negation and is the foundation of History in that it motivates the first praxis, the first dialectical movement.<sup>61</sup> The inadequacy of this description of the dialectic as founded in scarcity and need has been discussed above, and it will be returned to in our next chapter on History. My present purpose is merely to show how, in addition to this, Sartre's account would seem to deprive primitive men, not only of history, but also of the necessarily human, and humanly necessary praxis.

It is tempting to argue in support of Sartre, that this primitive man, existing prior to conditions of scarcity is not intended to refer to any real moment in History; that Sartre is not suggesting that such men do, did, or ever could exist; and that therefore he does not mean by "primitive" what Lévi-Strauss means, for example, i.e. real existing primitive communities. In fact, Sartre does say in the Critique that all known societies exist in conditions of scarcity, and that because of this we cannot even imagine any other kind of man, or human association. So this primitive man of the Critique who exists in cyclical time and prior to scarcity, should be taken simply as an abstraction, an heuristic device to ease our understanding of the dialectic and the proposed connection between

scarcity, history, and alienation.

But this will not do, for several reasons. In the first place, Sartre explicitly denounces as absurd the "robinsonnades" of others, of Duhring for example, who tried to base property and exploitation on violence:

Engels did not see that his idealist and romantic ideas and all their follies required the presence of the negative in History. . . . the historical process cannot be understood without a permanent element of negativity, both exterior and interior to man. This is the perpetual possibility in man's very existence of being the one who sends Others to their deaths or whom Others send to his--in other words of scarcity.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, such a strategy on the part of Sartre would have paradoxical consequences. The heuristic device "primitive" man, challenges the very principle it is designed to support: the distinction between nature and culture, the being of physis and the being of man--since Sartre situates the existence of this primitive man closer to biology and nature than man and culture. And thirdly, Sartre is not consistent in his use of the epithet "primitive." Sometimes it seems to denote a hypothetical primitive community of men existing prior to the disruption of scarcity, and at others, to real communities, already disturbed by scarcity, but not (yet?) historical. If he sometimes means by "primitive" an hypothetical community, and there is some evidence for this, he more clearly means by it what we would normally expect it to mean: real existing communities of the kind studied

by Lévi-Strauss. He claims, for example, that scarcity establishes only the possibility of History and not its necessity, and thus acknowledges the possibility of the real existence of societies founded upon repetition, which survive scarcity without making History--and he uses "primitive" to describe these societies.

He assumes a linear connection between these primitive societies and our own, that we have developed from an earlier historical situation comparable to theirs, and implicit in this assumption is an evaluation of that historical development as progressive. The human nature which characterizes repetitive societies, he describes as follows, for example:

If a state of equilibrium is established within a given mode of production, and preserved from one generation to the next, it is preserved as exis--that is to say, both as a physiological and social determination of human organisms and as a practical project of keeping institutions and physical corporate development at the same level. This corresponds ideologically to a decision about 'human nature'. Man is a stunted misshapen being, hardened to suffering, and he lives in order to work from dawn till dusk with these (primitive) technical means, on a thankless threatening earth.<sup>63</sup>

Adding, that though dialectically speaking there is no logical absurdity in the notion of "une terre sans Histoire," it is nevertheless a place where: ". . . human groups would vegetate and never break out of a cycle of repetition, producing their lives with primitive techniques

and instruments and knowing absolutely nothing of one another.<sup>64</sup>

Lévi-Strauss's extensive writings and research on primitive cultures reveal the absurdity and ethnocentricity of Sartre's conception of human existence in primitive, non-historical societies indicated above. The Savage Mind, for example, presents us with an image of primitive culture rich in meaning and intellectual and aesthetic "dialectical" activity. While The Elementary Structures of Kinship demonstrates, in opposition to Sartre's thesis in the Critique, the absolute priority of the group over the individual in primitive social reality, and the universality of "exchange" as a means of establishing at one and the same time culture and reciprocity. The life of primitive peoples is far from the "nasty, brutish and short" existence it is assumed to be by Sartre: on the contrary, the harmony, predictability, and solidarity of social relations in such societies are much more striking and determining than is their relentless struggle with the antagonistic forces of a brutal and insufficient nature (Sartre's characterization). Furthermore, these societies which have no History, would also appear to be blessed with an absence of "alienation" and "serialization" according to the descriptions of anthropologists (though

not of exploitation and oppression we hasten to add).

It might be argued that Lévi-Strauss errs in the opposite direction to Sartre and idealizes primitive cultures, and this will be considered in later chapters. But to his credit, we must emphasize that his conclusions are at least based on extensive empirical research--observation, experiment, and analysis, and not on arm-chair speculation. In addition his work has an internal consistency which Sartre's lacks. For these reasons alone, his descriptions of the life of primitive peoples commands more credibility than do Sartre's, who further confuses the issue when he considers the emergence and effects of social structures and functions in the ongoing historical dialectic of human self-creation.

Structure and function characterize the "sworn" group, according to Sartre, that is the group whose continuing existence is maintained by the oath. He illustrates such a group with an example of primitive kinship structures taken from The Elementary Structures of Kinship--thus conceding an element of historical development to those societies to whom he had previously denied it. He further contradicts himself by arguing that a genuine reciprocity characterizes the group at this stage (when he had previously suggested that individuals in primitive societies are "ignorant" of each other, and exist separately in series etc.). Here, however, he maintains that social

structures and functions are "not yet" alienating; that, in fact, they provide the foundation of a genuine human praxis, individual and communal, and of genuine reciprocity between subjects:

Is this really alienation? Obviously not: the free choice of a wife, in the first generation, effectively involves, as a freely accepted condition, the inert negation of certain possibilities . . . and this negation is itself based on the free production of particular kind of mediated reciprocity . . . . Thus these are genuinely free human relations (undertakings, pledges, powers, rights, duties etc.).<sup>65</sup>

Clearly these are not the same "primitive" people described so disparagingly above. In what sense do they ignore each other? In what sense do they lack History--since being a sworn group follows from having once been a genuine group in fusion? What has enabled them to remain at this "stage" of development, and avoid the fall into seriality and alienation, the dialectical necessity of which is subsequently demonstrated by Sartre in the Critique? To these questions, and more, Sartre provides no answers.

One of the sections of the Critique which particularly provoked Lévi-Strauss occurs within this discussion of the institutionalized group, which, we are now led to believe, is represented by "primitive" societies. Commenting upon the complex theoretical knowledge displayed to ethnographers and sociologists by "des sociétés sous-développées": of their rules of marriage or residence, for example,

Sartre claims that these demonstrations should not be considered as examples of abstract thought, but rather as "des structures pratiques elle-mêmes vécues dans l'intériorité d'une action commune":

In other words, we should avoid putting the cart before the horse by claiming that primitive people understand the abstract relations which constitute the organization of their group because they are capable of abstract thought; on the contrary, we should say that their capacity for abstract thought is determined by the abstract relations which structure their society, that it is simply these relations themselves in so far as every common individual has to live them all in order practically to realise his relation to all in the unity of a common objective.<sup>66</sup>

Likewise, of the diagrams drawn in the sand by the Ambryam natives, to illustrate the complexities of their marriage rules, Sartre comments: "It is obvious that this construction is not a thought: it is a piece of manual work controlled by a synthetic knowledge which it does not express."<sup>67</sup>

Of course, Lévi-Strauss finds nothing wrong with this description: it confirms his own thesis that unconscious structures determine thought. But, as he points out, this reduction of abstract thought to social practice is equally applicable to all cases of so-called abstract thought; to Sartre's own demonstration of the dialectic in the Critique, for example; and to the "professor at the Ecole Polytechnique demonstrating a proof on the blackboard": ". . . the situation is the same in both cases."<sup>68</sup>

Scarcity, being-with-others  
and primary alienation

Lévi-Strauss's anthropology also suggests additional reasons for rejecting Sartre's grounding of primary alienation in scarcity and the false reciprocity resulting from it.

"Reciprocity" is a central theme of The Elementary Structures of Kinship, where Lévi-Strauss argues that the distinction between nature and culture and the institution of culture itself coincide precisely with the establishment of reciprocity by way of the incest rule: culture (i.e. humanity) and reciprocity occur together (or not at all), and they are founded in the rule prohibiting incest, which is the: ". . . fundamental step because of which, by which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished."<sup>69</sup> The rule prohibits marriage with women who are considered to be members of the same kinship group; and, Lévi-Strauss maintains, such a rule characterizes all human societies and distinguishes them as specifically human. The universality of the rule links it with nature, and its being a rule makes it just as certainly a social phenomenon.

The prohibition is more a prescription than a restriction in that it prescribes the exchange of women between groups, thus establishing reciprocity and alliance at the very foundation of culture:

The prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity. The woman whom one does not take, and whom one may not take, is for that very reason offered up . . . . The content of the prohibition is not exhausted by the fact of the prohibition; the latter is instituted only in order to guarantee and establish directly or indirectly, immediately or mediately, an exchange.<sup>70</sup>

On this account, therefore, the species "man" emerges already grouped as it were, and united with other groups by reciprocal systems of exchange. Such an analysis challenges and contradicts Sartre's thesis that men existed in the primary collectivity as a multiplicity of individuals, in series, alienated from and (in conditions of scarcity) antagonistic towards each other and reveals it to be the truth, not so much of primitive or historically primary communities, but of Sartre's own "civilized" historical society at a particular stage in its development.

Indeed, if Lévi-Strauss is to be believed, and he is certainly supported by other ethnologists in this respect, primitive societies do not even have a concept of the individual in anything like the Sartrian sense, to whom, for example, proper names can be ascribed. The Savage Mind demonstrates that in primitive cultures proper names "signify": they classify the individual rather than isolate him as a discrete entity.<sup>71</sup> Since ideas articulate social structures and not vice-versa,<sup>72</sup> this suggests that human being in primitive societies must be lived as being-in as being-with, and not as some

variation of the Sartrean pour-soi.<sup>73</sup> This point will be developed later in the thesis in the discussion of consciousness. It is mentioned here, because, if it is true that the individual is not primary but secondary, then Sartre's theory of alienation in the Critique is deprived of its foundation. Its development in terms of scarcity is also challenged, as follows.

According to Lévi-Strauss the prime function of culture is to ensure the survival of the group by replacing chance by organization wherever survival is threatened. Intervention therefore: ". . . is raised and resolved in the affirmative everytime the group is faced with the insufficiency of the risky distribution of a valuable of fundamental importance."<sup>74</sup> In other words, the community organizes the distribution of scarce resources and does not leave it to individuals to compete for them. Food and women are prime examples of such valuables and their "consumption" in any society is always organized in conformity to particular sets of rules. The group cannot afford to leave their distribution to chance since both are vital for survival--food for the survival of the individuals and the group, women for the survival of the group and indeed of the species itself.

The obvious sexism of this interpretation of social life, however (and of the demonstrations which follow) must not be overlooked. It seriously undermines the

credibility of Lévi-Strauss's system of ideas on human origins and social reality, since it constitutes its very foundation. Why are women and not men exchanged? Why are women the primordial cultural objects and commodities and men the subjects and agents of social exchange? Such fundamental questions are not even posed by Lévi-Strauss, let alone answered. The implications of this phallogocentric prejudice in Lévi-Strauss's anthropology are explored in greater detail in our final chapter. In the meantime, however, it should be borne in mind by the reader that perhaps Lévi-Strauss's discovery of "objective" structures of social life is at least in this respect less "scientific" and more "mythological"\* than he realizes, or would care to admit. In spite of this, the more general insight, of which the exchange of women could perhaps be regarded as an unfortunate and misguided example, may well remain true: that is, that scarcity, contrary to Sartre's assumption, promotes rather than disrupts reciprocity in primitive communities and is the foundation rather than the blight of both culture and humanity itself.

Thus, according to Lévi-Strauss, it is the scarcity of women which motivates the institution of the incest

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\* The more blatant examples of male mystification will be indicated in the demonstration which follows with an asterisk (\*) lest they be overlooked by those readers who inadvertently share Lévi-Strauss's assumption of the male point of view and its characteristic presumption of neutrality.

rule and together with it culture, i.e. humanity itself: scarcity is the material basis of reciprocity and not of antagonism, alliance and seriality. The rule applies to other scarce "commodities"\* besides women, to food, for example; both of which are shared rather than competed for or consumed alone:

The action of the person, who like the woman in the Maori proverb Kai Kino ana Te Arahe, would secretly eat the ceremonial food, without offering any of it, would provoke from his or her near relatives, irony, mockery, disgust and even anger, according to the circumstances and persons . . . . It seems that the group confusedly see a sort of social incest in the individual accomplishment of an act which normally requires collective participation.<sup>75</sup>

In the same way, wealth is for giving away and not for keeping to oneself: the function of the potlatch,<sup>76</sup> like that of the exchange of women, is ". . . to gain security and to guard oneself against risks brought about by alliances and rivals."<sup>77</sup> Exchanges are not conducted for profit or individual gratification; they are rather "total social facts," whose significance is at once "social and religious, magic and economic, utilitarian and sentimental, jurat and moral"<sup>78</sup>--political and personal, etc.

However, this scarcity of women, which is said to institute the incest rule and at the same time establish reciprocal exchanges and culture itself, is perhaps not self-evident to the reader and requires some justification. Lévi-Strauss anticipates this objection: ". . . is it

possible," he asks, "to speak of women as a scarce commodity requiring collective intervention for its distribution?"<sup>79</sup> And he offers in support of his thesis ". . . less a demonstration than a brief indication" of how it might be so.

He argues first that the commodity value of the wife\* cannot be disputed as long as we (we men?) remember that her function is primarily economic and not erotic;\* that a man needs a wife, not so much for sexual gratification as for survival, since the economy of the primitive group is based on the family (i.e. on the conjugal society) and the division of labour between the sexes.<sup>80</sup> In these communities a bachelor is regarded as an object of pity and an outcast. The scarcity of the commodity--women, is indicated as follows.

Lévi-Strauss offers two explanations for the presumed "scarcity" of women. His first consists in the suggestion that all men are basically polygamous;\* and that monogamy, therefore, wherever it occurs, represents only a limitation of that natural tendency, and not a denial of it.<sup>81</sup> The limitation can be the result of any number of cultural and environmental conditions which produce the situation of economic and sexual competition. Though institutionalized monogamy may rule, polygamy remains as the natural\* tendency; and where men are polygamous, there are never enough women.\* His second point is that not all women are equally

desirable\* to these naturally polygamous men: ". . . the most desirable women must form a minority. Hence the demand for women is in actual fact, or to all intents and purposes, always in a state of disequilibrium and tension."<sup>82</sup>

Such an account of scarcity would seem to completely undermine Sartre's and the theory of History and alienation which it is made to support. For, according to Lévi-Strauss:

1. The suppression of scarcity is impossible in at least one of its manifestations, the scarcity of women, which he believes to be universal and fundamental to the human condition as such. It therefore makes no sense to speak of a human society without scarcity, which is something Sartre looks forward to in the Critique as the only solution to the problem of alienation.

2. This scarcity unites men\* rather than opposes them; the scarcity of women being the very foundation of culture and reciprocity<sup>83</sup> between men.\*

Although the full force of these first two objections is much weakened by their implicit assumption of patriarchal social relations as given (see notes), their "formal" truth remains plausible, and challenging to Sartre: that scarcity may actually found culture and unite men rather than disturb some more primordial equilibrium of interests prevailing before the appearance of scarcity. The remaining objections (3 and 4 below) require no such qualifications.

3. There is no apparent connection between scarcity and History. Primitive peoples live in very real conditions of scarcity--apart from the supposedly fundamental one of women, and yet they have no History in the required sense: not because they ignore scarcity, but because they transcend it in a way which, if Sartre is correct, has not been our (Western European) way.

4. Likewise, there appears to be no necessary connection between the facts of scarcity and those of alienation. Primitive people, at least prima facie, do not complain of, nor do they appear to suffer from alienation. Indeed, they are rather afflicted with it only after the intrusion of the so-called "civilized" historical societies into their own.<sup>84</sup> The experience of deprivation, exploitation, and subordination better explain that alienation, than does the experience (perhaps primordial) of scarcity. Deprivation is not an absolute; not a primordial given, but a socially and historically determined condition which is dialectical: consisting always of the deprived, and those by whom and on whose behalf they have been deprived.

Thus, Lévi-Strauss's anthropology supports, albeit implicitly, a theory of alienation, which in its historicity, is more consistent with Marxist principles than is Sartre's. Like Sartre, however, Lévi-Strauss describes the conditions of possibility of alienated labour somewhat differently than Marx, purporting, again like Sartre, to complement and

extend the traditional Marxist analysis rather than deny or reject it. But unlike Sartre, Lévi-Strauss does this without betraying its essential historical requirement.

Clocks, steam engines, and  
the process of dehumanization

Lévi-Strauss rarely mentions alienation in his writings. He clearly does not perceive himself as a philosopher, least of all a philosopher of his own age, and claims to be neither qualified nor inclined to make pronouncements on cultures other than those of which he is not a member;<sup>85</sup> this being the only way, he maintains, to preserve objectivity and avoid mystification--two requirements of science which are necessarily sacrificed by the philosopher whose thoughts on man are circumscribed and distorted by the society of which he is a part and a product.

However, on those occasions when he has been persuaded to speak about contemporary Western civilization, he has described it as an essentially "dehumanizing" one.<sup>86</sup> I believe that his description of its dehumanizing structures is directly relevant to the question of alienation.

According to Lévi-Strauss, the major differences between modern and primitive societies can be reduced to two: differences of size and structure. These are not independent variables: the size of our Western civilization, its internationalism, for example, is a function of, and at the same time a determinant of, its structure which is

geared to an ideal of cultural and economic "progress." Both size and structure contribute to the dehumanization which is characteristic of our culture. I will consider the effects of structure first.

In his Conversations with George Charbonnier, Lévi-Strauss compares primitive societies and our own to clocks and steam-engines, i.e. to mechanical and thermo-dynamic machines respectively.<sup>87</sup> The former use energy with which they are supplied at the outset and could carry on indefinitely if they were well constructed and controlled for heating and friction: The latter consume energy. In addition they require a difference of potential between the component parts, as well as access to new sources of energy. They can do much more work, but they create greater disorder, or entropy, in so doing.

Structurally, primitive societies are like mechanical machines; they remain in a steady-state throughout time and create the minimum of entropy at the level of human relations. Modern societies are more like thermo-dynamic machines, working on the basis of "... a difference in potential which finds concrete expression in different forms of social hierarchy."<sup>88</sup> They do vast amounts of work at the level of culture, creating order in the world of things, at the expense of greater entropy and disequilibrium at the level of society, i.e. in the world of men. Their need to consume more energy to maintain output correlates with

the need of the industrialized capitalist civilization to spread itself, first to its "colonies" and now globally, and into space.

The historical origin of the "thermo-dynamic machine," i.e. of Western civilization, defining and judging itself in terms of History and progress, is connected, by Lévi-Strauss, with the acquisition of writing, which, he maintains, provided ". . . the precondition of knowledge and utilization of past experience that we feel, more or less intuitively, to have been the source of our civilization."<sup>89</sup> Writing permitted the accumulation of knowledge; its "capitalization or totalization" which made progress and history possible. According to Lévi-Strauss, its appearance was linked everywhere with the establishment of hierarchical societies, consisting of masters and slaves. It was from the first connected with power: with keeping check over possessions and people, by way of catalogues, inventories, laws, consensu, instructions etc.

. . . at all times and all places, the only social reality accompanying writing was the appearance of divisions and cleavages corresponding to caste or class systems, since writing in its early phase, seems to have been a means of governing men and gaining possession of material things.<sup>90</sup>

It is this exploitation of man by man, the treatment of some men as objects by and for others, that Lévi-Strauss considers to be the real source of the dehumanizing effect

of our civilization. Dehumanization is the reverse side of the coin whose uppermost face is progress. In this sense, dehumanization is like alienation: it indicates the reification of man, and his estrangement from others and from himself as subject and species-being. For Lévi-Strauss, the process of dehumanization will continue as long as the system of exploitation continues, i.e. as long as some men (and all women, we might want to add?) are treated as objects by and for others.<sup>91</sup>

In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts Marx pointed out that the more we value things, the less we value men.<sup>92</sup> Lévi-Strauss expresses the same tension in terms of culture and society. By "culture" he means the relationship of men with the external world of things; and by "society" their relationships with each other. An increase of order in one sphere, he suggests, produces disorder in the other. Our own civilization, for example, has emphasized cultural achievements (i.e. progress) to the detriment of societal values. We have built pyramids and cathedrals, sent men to the moon, and created life in the laboratory--but we have neglected persons and only increased entropy in society (disease, death, disorder, psychosis, conflict, violence, crime etc.).<sup>93</sup> Differentials have to be maintained to keep the steam-engine of our culture at work; this has been achieved by means of "slavery, serfdom and lastly the creation of the proletariat."<sup>94</sup> We

have created great order amongst things at the expense of an ever-increasing disorder amongst persons--overvalued things and undervalued human beings.

Primitive societies, by contrast, have reversed this emphasis. They have "sacrificed," so to speak, great cultural achievements, in the interest of greater social cohesion and equilibrium. Evaluating them according to our own cultural values, we call them "undeveloped":

"But they produce very little entropy in their societies. On the whole, these societies are egalitarian, mechanical in type, and governed by the law of unanimity."<sup>95</sup> As organizations of men, that is, as societies, it would perhaps be more appropriate to describe them as more highly developed than ourselves.

Elsewhere, Lévi-Strauss suggests that the rise of "humanism" as an ideology in our civilization actually facilitated the very process of dehumanization by which it is distinguished from primitive societies. He argues that the distinction which man made between himself and the rest of nature enabled him to adopt a utilitarian and exploitive attitude towards nature. Once the initial identification with all living things had been thus disrupted it became easier to differentiate between members of one's own species--selecting some as "other" and therefore as worthy objects of exploitation and subjection; in the interests of a greater "humanism" of course.

For is it not the myth of the exclusive dignity of human nature, which subjected nature itself to a first mutilation, one from which other mutilations were inevitably to ensue? . . . The one boundary constantly pushed back, would be used to separate men from other men and to claim--to the profit of ever smaller minorities--the privilege of a humanism, corrupted at birth by taking self-interest as its principle and its notion.<sup>96</sup>

Thus Lévi-Strauss enriches the Marxist critique of "humanism"--as an essentially bourgeois ideological stance, by extending it to the whole of Western history, perhaps even to Marxism itself, as we shall see in chapter IV and V below. In many of its politically active forms Marxism looks to increasing cultural and technological control (i.e., control of nature) for the conditions of possibility of man's eventual emancipation from alienated social relations; while Lévi-Strauss cautions us against this view, maintaining that these two developments correlate negatively rather than positively: that increased order in man's relationship to things correlates with increasing disorder in his relationship with other men.

In another essay, in Structural Anthropology II<sup>97</sup> Lévi-Strauss distinguishes three different humanisms: ". . . the Aristocratic humanism of the Renaissance," the "bourgeois humanism" of the nineteenth century, and the "universal humanism" of ethnology. The beneficiaries of the first were the privileged class; the second was closely tied to industrial and commercial interests. The third

alone, he claims, holds out the possibility of a truly "democratic" humanism; taking its inspiration, as it does, from ". . . the most humble and despised societies," it proclaims that nothing can be strange to man, and calls for ". . . the reconciliation of man and nature in a generalized humanism."<sup>98</sup>

Once more, Lévi-Strauss's thought both accepts and extends Marx's critique of bourgeois humanism. According to the latter, there will be a resolution of the antagonism between man and nature under communism, which will establish science for the first time, as at once "a fully developed humanism" and "a fully developed naturalism." But for Marx this reconciliation will be achieved by the domination of nature by man; not at all the same thing as the dialectical mediation and transcendence of that (artificial) opposition between man and nature espoused by Lévi-Strauss. Man who has conquered nature remains estranged from nature, and therefore from his own essential human nature, according to him--and therefore the domination and control of nature will not announce the de-alienation of man but rather its consolidation and perpetuation. We return to these questions in our chapter on Marx.

At the beginning of this discussion of Lévi-Strauss's treatment of alienation, I suggested two contributing factors to the alienation characteristic of our civilization: size and structure. The alienating structures have been

described above in terms of the thermo-dynamic machine, and contrasted with the non-alienating structures of primitive communities considered on the model of the clock. I will now consider the effects of size on the quality of human societal relationships.

According to Lévi-Strauss, the increasing powerlessness and estrangement of individuals and communities with respect to the organization and determination of their own lives, is due not only to their being objects or tools in someone else's larger cultural project, which is an effect of structure, but also to demographic factors of size and density which characterize the societies to which they belong.<sup>99</sup> Our society functions with what Lévi-Strauss calls "low levels of authenticity," while in primitive communities levels of authenticity are high. What he is referring to is the quantity and quality of inter-personal relationships in the respective groups. The communication between members of the primitive society is said to be "authentic" because it is direct and concrete. Because of its smallness, everyone knows everyone else. In societies of up to five hundred persons, ". . . the concrete apprehension of one person by another is possible."<sup>100</sup> As a community grows, and indirect methods of communication between members increases, levels of authenticity drop. Individuals know of the existence of others, only in an abstract, a priori, and impersonal way; they do not know each other in the

concrete, immediate, and direct sense characterized as "authentic" by Lévi-Strauss. For example, members of our own society generally do not know in any authentic sense, their elected representatives of government, their children's teachers, their bureaucrats and administrators, their bus-drivers or grocers, lawyers or doctors, etc. In large societies the relationship between the members is mediated, by a mass media. In the language of cybernetics, to which Lévi-Strauss increasingly appeals, there is, understandably, a "loss of information" in such systems. The main communication is not actually between persons: rather ". . . the social reality of 'senders' and 'receivers' . . . is hidden behind the complex system of 'codes' and 'relays.'"<sup>101</sup> Individuals in such societies, characterized by indirect communication, experience a loss of control, a powerlessness, and an estrangement which amounts to "alienation."

Once more Lévi-Strauss extends the insights of Marx; for according to his analysis, changing the mode of production, from capitalist to socialist, will not be a sufficient condition for the elimination of an alienation which is the consequence of community size; unless, that is, that alienating structure is addressed specifically. Again, this will be returned to in our discussion of Marx in chapter V.

The experience of this specific structure of alienation, contingent upon size as much as mode of production or social organization, is very well documented by Sartre in the Critique, in terms of atomization, alterity, serialization, etc. His analysis of collective objects, for example--money, the market, public opinion, which take on a life of their own, beyond the control of, and controlling the individual members and the relationships between them, can be interpreted as a description of inauthentic modes of communication and interaction:

. . . once the "collective" is established, it has the effect of de-realizing these relations and of reifying them . . . collective objects originate in social recurrence: they represent totalizations of impracticable operations . . . above all they are realities which we are subjected to and which we live, and we learn them, in their objectivity, through acts which we have to do.  
 . . . The collective object is an index of separation . . . the collapse of the assignat in 1792 was a collective process which could not be stopped; its objectivity was complete and everyone suffered it as a destiny.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, in large societies like our own each feels that history, even his own history is being made for him by others and elsewhere: it is an external history, imposed from outside; a destiny, as Sartre says, to which a man can only submit. In such circumstances each man, and thus "humanity" itself is defined and determined by the Other--and is thus fundamentally alienated.

## Conclusion

I have suggested that Sartre and Lévi-Strauss agree on the fundamental constitutive structures of alienation: reification, serialization, alterity, inauthenticity, and powerlessness. And while they both purport to have been inspired by Marx, neither of them agrees with his analysis of the fundamental origins and conditions of alienation and the appropriate means of its elimination; nor do they agree with each other on this. Lévi-Strauss suggests a real historical origin, to which one could, at least in principle, attach a date: the primary structures of reification and human alienation coincided with the emergence of writing, hierarchical societies, exploitation, and the treatment of some men as objects by others. He believes that this occurred immediately after what is called the "neolithic revolution."<sup>103</sup> Writing enabled some men to control both men and goods, and permitted the accumulation of knowledge (as well as wealth); a necessary condition of the cultural progress which distinguishes our society from primitive societies. This progress and the social structures which make it possible (the thermo-dynamic machine), require continual expansion if they are to be maintained: hence the ever-increasing size of Western civilization and the additional structures of alienation consequent upon it--serialization, alteration, powerlessness, and inauthenticity. On this view, therefore, the suppression of

alienation would require the following:

1. The abolition of all exploitation. A necessary but not a sufficient condition.
2. The dissolution of our global, national, and regional societies into smaller communities of up to five hundred or so people--to avoid the alienation resulting from the loss of authenticity.

Not surprisingly, Lévi-Strauss provides no blueprint for this transformation of society. Whether we accept his view or not seems to me to depend in the first place, more on historical and hard anthropological considerations than it does on philosophical issues. Can we trace the emergence of exploitation and alienation to an historical moment as Lévi-Strauss suggests? If we can, can we then determine the historical conditions of their appearance, so that these factors can be controlled? What kind of organizational and power structures characterize non-literate and non-historical societies? Are they non-exploitive and therefore, non-alienating?

There remains a major theoretical difficulty with his account however: his phallogocentric assumption, that culture is grounded in an incest rule which is essentially non-reciprocal; requiring as it does, that men exchange women as scarce, though necessary commodities. Since he considers this rule to be both natural and cultural, i.e. both universal and necessary, he establishes as the condition

of possibility of the "humanization" of relations between men, the systematic dehumanization (according to his own criteria) of social relations between men and women. In response to the cultural imperative (requiring reciprocity between men only, it seems), women are reified by men, who must possess, control and pass them around as objects of exchange, if they are to be men at all. Thus, on this account, some structures of alienation (those associated with the objectification of women) must characterize all human societies as human societies regardless of size, structure, and historical contingencies.

If we accept Lévi-Strauss's account, that the incest rule, under his description of it, institutes human culture, we must also accept the cultural inevitability of patriarchy and the oppression and objectification of women; since men, it seems, must exchange "their" women if men are to be men at all (and not "mere" animals). In other words, we must accept the dehumanization of women as the condition of possibility of the humanization of men, and their subsequent dehumanization of each other under capitalism, for example. Thus, we are pushed to look for the foundations of alienation in a more universal and historically distant structure of social reality: to seek them, not in capitalist relations of production (Marx), nor in the establishment of social hierarchies facilitated by the invention of writing (Lévi-Strauss), but in the primordial relations between

the sexes. In fact, we believe that this is indeed the place to look: that the relations between the sexes is the locus of significant alienating structures of human social reality, and possibly the more fundamental (possibly primordial?) historical origin of those less primordial structures documented by Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, and Marx alike. Our analysis will draw on the insights of the latter, while demystifying them of their phallogentric bias, and complementing and extending and enriching them by a specifically feminist critique of their respective interpretations of social and historical reality. (See especially chapters V and following.)

Lévi-Strauss's account raises further philosophical questions, some of which will be taken up in the course of this thesis. Is progress, understood as cultural advance in science and technology, for example, necessarily conditional upon exploitation as Lévi-Strauss suggests? Is this a logical or historical necessity? Is the nature/culture distinction a valid, or useful one and do we want to characterize it as Lévi-Strauss has done, in terms of the incest rule? Or is this more male mystification? (We should not forget that women have been traditionally aligned with the natural, non-cultural, and usually non-"human" pole of this opposition.)

Sartre too suggests an historical origin for alienation: according to him, it appeared at the moment when

scarcity disrupted the primordial equilibrium and reciprocity between men (and women?). For him the suppression of alienation is contingent upon the suppression of scarcity. The inadequacies of this historical attempt have been exposed in this chapter. We saw how the removal of scarcity would not have the effect of suppressing alienation as Sartre suggests, because on his own account it is basic material need, and not scarcity, which is at the root of man's alienation.<sup>104</sup> We also saw how Sartre's appeal to scarcity as a foundational condition of human History, the History of alienation and objectification, is ambiguous and unspecified; sometimes appearing to refer to the artificially created scarcity and needs of capitalism; more often to the objective and universal scarcity of material resources of survival. We have argued that it is difficult to even consider scarcity as an historical phenomenon at all; it is not like writing. We know what we are looking for when we look for literacy, but scarcity must be operationally defined before it can be recognized. Lacking such concrete, observable determinations, scarcity would seem to be more a necessary than a contingent condition of the human, and likewise any living, organism. As Raymond Aron suggests in his critique of Sartre:

Je crois qu'elle est nécessaire au sens que toute espèce vivante--en un milieu naturel auquel elle emprunte ce dont elle a besoin pour vivre--se heurte à certaines limites. Une espèce qui doit travailler pour survivre--chasser, cueillir, cultiver le sol, élever les animaux--est soumise à la loi de rareté--rareté du temps, de l'espace au même de ressources non renouvelables. 105

In the final analysis, therefore, alienation in the Critique appears as a necessary and non-historical structure of the human condition: the necessary consequence of man's necessary objectification in the material world. Sartre, thus, fails in his bid to integrate Marxism and existentialism: producing a "metaphysical," i.e. ideal, and therefore, reactionary account of alienation, where a "scientific," i.e. material and revolutionary one is called for.

## Chapter II

### History

We have already had occasion in the previous chapter on Alienation, to anticipate some of the problems associated with Sartre's concept of "History";<sup>1</sup> with respect first to scarcity, as the historically conditioned foundation of a supposedly contingent alienation, and then with respect to the ambiguous anthropological status of "primitive" peoples, who, in some sense, can be said not to have a history.

In this chapter we will give a more complete account of Sartre's notion of History and of the significance of History for anthropology, with a view, once more, of establishing to what extent it facilitates or obstructs the proposed reconciliation of Marxism and existentialism. We shall proceed as before; first examining Sartre's theory on its own terms and according to the criteria of the tradition within which it is situated; then, in the light of Lévi-Strauss's criticisms and alternative view of the meaning and significance of History.

We will see that Sartre's phenomenological account of History fails in precisely the same way (and for the same reasons), as does his account of Alienation: in describing the fundamental structures and conditions

of possibility of History, Sartre forgets his own situatedness and the very historicity of the phenomenon he is examining. For example, he speaks without qualification of the "Truth" of man, and man's "History";<sup>2</sup> capitalizing the terms as if the concepts they refer to were universals whose meaning and significance transcend time and place. As a result, his work suggests a metaphysics, and an ontology, which completely betray the original Marxist inspiration, and reveal, once again, a more tenacious Hegelian influence. Sartre's account of History, therefore, like his theory of Alienation, invites dismissal even on its own terms as "myth," or "ideology."<sup>3</sup>

The argument between Lévi-Strauss and Sartre concerns the absolute priority which Sartre gives to History--(as opposed to structure, for example)--with respect to the establishment of an adequate science of man. Lévi-Strauss regards Sartre's emphasis on History as itself historically conditioned and very much symptomatic of the mythology of Sartre's own society. History, according to Lévi-Strauss, is "superstructure," which, far from being able to found anthropological understanding, rather demands it, in terms of deeper, material substructures, which alone will explain that same historical consciousness.

It is interesting to note, and this will be considered in more detail in subsequent chapters, that both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss perceive each other's theoretical contribution to the "science" of man as limited and partial,

and related to his own as is the part to the whole, or the object to the subject. Lévi-Strauss regards philosophical anthropology as a necessary but not a sufficient condition of true scientific explanation: it constitutes the object upon which the structural anthropologist must exercise his analytic skills to reveal more fundamental structural determinants.<sup>4</sup> While Sartre makes a similar point against structural anthropology; regarding the information it gathers as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the true scientific comprehension of man. According to Sartre, the anthropologist is himself an object of History " . . . a temporary moment of the historical totalisation";<sup>5</sup> and as such, he constitutes the object upon which existential-Márxism will exercise its dialectical skills, to render that social reality intelligible.

#### Historical Materialism: Its Foundation in Praxis

According to Sartre, an adequate science of man must be able to account for History; that is, to render the whole historical process intelligible in terms of a logical structure which conditions its very possibility. In Sartre's view, the Marxist doctrine of historical materialism, whereby the determining forces of historical development are the material productive forces, comes close to establishing the intelligibility.<sup>6</sup> The best known outline

of the theory is provided by Marx in the preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy; it is summarized below following the model provided by James Gregor, in A Survey of Marxism:

- (1) In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will . . . .
- (2) (These) relations of production . . . correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.
- (3) The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society
- (4) (This is) the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (This) mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.
- (5) At a certain stage in their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . . From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, then, according to historical materialism, the productive forces are the foundation of history, and only through their development is world history intelligible.

We will first consider why Sartre might be attracted by this theory of History.

1. It rests upon an understanding of human nature, which rooted as it is in Hegel's philosophy, appears (superficially at least), to be assimilable to Sartre's

own existentialist view. Man is regarded as an essentially self-creative being: through this movement of self-creation he necessarily encounters and enters into relationships with others. He does not entirely control these relationships however, since, they are, as it were "predetermined."<sup>8</sup> This predetermination of human relationships, as we have just seen in our discussion of Alienation, is a function of the essential materiality and plurality of the human condition as such.

2. Furthermore, historical materialism retains from Hegel the view of History as progress--a view which Sartre also endorses. History is thought to represent the progressive "humanization" or emancipation of man, by man. By this account, there is only one meaning to History: there is one Truth and one History--it is the History of the realization of human freedom.<sup>9</sup>

3. This commitment to human freedom does not entail, in Marx, an idealism, as it does in Hegel, but rather a strict materialism. It is not, for example, abstract consciousness which is realized in and through an interaction with the material world, but real human beings, i.e., concrete, living, natural men. It is this concreteness of the Marxist interpretation of History which ostensibly engages Sartre's support.<sup>10</sup> His own theory of "extéro-conditionnement," for example, which will be presented below, attempts to make intelligible (in terms

of 'praxis') the fundamental materialist principle, that social being determines consciousness, and not vice-versa.

4.. Finally, historical materialism is a dialectical theory of history and not causal-mechanical. On this account, History is as much the product of man, as man is the product of History.<sup>11</sup> The theory can, therefore, accommodate an appeal to human freedom, initiative and responsibility; for, as a theory, it does not simply reflect a process, but rather participates in an activity--the activity which is History itself, becoming conscious of itself. As such, it represents a commitment to a value and a future--that of man, and makes the call for social revolution both logically and historically feasible.

However, historical materialism is only partially satisfactory as a theory of History, because, in Sartre's view, it lacks an intelligible foundation. It cannot, for example, account for either its own truth, or its own dynamic.

The supreme paradox of historical materialism is that it is, at one and the same time, the only Truth of History and a total indetermination of the Truth. The totalising thought of historical materialism has established everything except its own existence. Or, to put it another way, contaminated by the historical relativism which it has always opposed, it has not exhibited the truth of History as it defines itself, or shown how this determines its nature and validity in the historical process, in the dialectical development of praxis and of human experience. In other words, we do not know what it means for a Marxist historian to speak the truth. Not

that his statements are false--far from it; but he does not have the concept of Truth at his disposal. In this way Marxism presents itself to us, as ideologists, as an unveiling of being, and at the same time as an unanswered question as to the validity of this unveiling.<sup>12</sup>

Historical materialism fails to make intelligible the movement by which material forces, for example, develop and determine social relations and superstructures; and cannot therefore account for the dynamics of the historical process itself. It is to this lacuna in historical materialism that Sartre directs his attention in the remainder of the Critique; maintaining that existentialism brings to Marxism the intelligibility it lacks in its failure to account for the dynamics of History.

The missing principle of intelligibility is, of course, individual human praxis; in Sartre's view, the only possible source of dialectical movement, and the only possible foundation of the totalization "en cours" which is History. He calls his theory "dialectical nominalism" and means by this that the ultimate reality, beyond which there can be no further intelligible reduction, is the individual acting human being: ". . . il n'y a que des individus et des relations singulières entre eux . . ." (there are only individuals and the particular relations among them).<sup>13</sup> Individual praxis is thus the foundation and the limit of intelligibility. If all human History hitherto has been the history of class conflict generated by the material

forces of production--then, that conflict, as a necessary structural component of History, must be made intelligible in terms of individual praxis. This, in fact, is the task which Sartre sets himself in the Critique: to discover the conditions of possibility of our History, and of the knowledge we have of it (i.e. historical materialism) in individual praxis. He is looking for formal structural principles which will reveal: why it is that man has a History at all and why Marxism is the truth of that History; the extent to which historical relationships are necessary; and the conditions and foundation of the dialectical movement which constitute History:

. . . our critical investigation aims to re-compose the intelligibility of the historical movement within which the different ensembles are defined by their conflicts. On the basis of synchronic structures and their contradictions, it seeks the diachronic intelligibility of historical transformations, the order of their conditionings and the intelligible reason for the irreversibility of History, that is to say, for its direction. . . . In this sense it could be said that the aim of the critical investigation is to establish a structural and historical anthropology.<sup>14</sup>

Marxism has traditionally answered these questions of foundation in terms of dialectical materialism, and we should first consider Sartre's rejection of this account before examining the details of his own.

Dialectical Materialism:  
Incapable of Founding Human History

Sartre criticizes dialectical materialism most particularly in the second chapter of the Questions, where he considers the "Problem of Mediations," and in the first chapter of the Critique, where he contrasts the "dialectique dogmatique" of dialectical materialism, with his own "dialectique critique." He refuses the dialectics of nature as a foundation of the historical dialectic because he thinks (like other "praxis" theorists, Lukacs, for example), that it entails an historical determinism: a determination of man "from the outside," and therefore a denial of human freedom and of the specificity of human action.

It is not obvious to this writer that a specifically dialectical materialism does entail a determinism of History--while, what Marx called "idealistic," i.e. mechanical, materialism clearly could. And I think that it is because Sartre (following Descartes) perceives nature as essentially mechanical in its movements that he sees a dialectics of nature as essentially deterministic. We saw in the previous chapter that Sartre is basically committed to a metaphysical dualism whereby being is irreducibly divided into two classes: the inert, material being of "things," and the active, creative being of "men" (or, more precisely, of consciousness). We demonstrated how Sartre's theory of alienation, in particular of the

"primary alienation" which precedes, logically if not chronologically, the alienation grounded in scarcity, depends on precisely this assumption of bifurcated being. And we commented upon Sartre's Cartesian view of matter as inert, inactive, and moved only from the outside and according to a mechanical cause-and-effect determinism. This same dualism, which separates man from the rest of nature and from the "material" world in general, conditions his rejection of dialectical materialism.

The doctrine of a dialectics of nature does indeed pose problems; these will be the subject of the following chapter, which is specifically concerned with the Dialectic. At this point, we wish only to suggest that Sartre's reasons for rejecting dialectical materialism are themselves questionable in principle, based as they appear to be, on a fundamental misunderstanding of the theory they purport to refute. We will now consider some of these objections.

In the Questions, Sartre argues that History cannot be made intelligible by an appeal to material conditions alone; that between man and the material substructure of his existence, there is a hierarchy of mediations, which must be taken into consideration if human behaviour--and thus, human History--is to be adequately understood. According to Sartre, the crucial question concerns how individuals "internalize" their material conditions such

that those conditions issue in particular projects. An adequate understanding of any event, therefore, demands two methodologically distinct kinds of inquiry: the first, a regressive-analytic examination of the phenomenon, to determine the material conditions of its possibility; then, a progressive-synthetic creative procedure, to show how those material conditions were "lived" by particular individuals, such that they resulted in specific human actions--actions, which constitute the on-going "totalization," which is History. In Sartre's opinion, the "vulgar" Marxists do not move beyond the first analytic step in their interpretation of History; they, therefore, cannot and do not account for specific actions and events.<sup>15</sup> According to Sartre, such theoreticians operate with an a priori formula into which historical events are fitted: they start from the abstract, i.e. from theory, and interpret the concrete, historical event, so that it conforms to the idea.<sup>16</sup> Whereas the "true" Marxist inspiration is to start with concrete living men and their conditions of existence, and then arrive at theory:<sup>17</sup> you will not explain Valéry he warns us by describing him as a petit-bourgeois intellectual:

Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry. The heuristic inadequacy of contemporary Marxism is contained in these two sentences.<sup>18</sup>

History, after all, is made by men, not "avalanches":<sup>19</sup> it is what men do with their material conditions which makes History, not the material conditions per se. ". . . it is men whom we judge and not physical forces."<sup>20</sup>

These are certainly appropriate arguments to direct against a "vulgar," "idealistic," and deterministic materialism, as dialectical materialism is sometimes interpreted.<sup>21</sup> But Sartre's recommendations for anthropological science represent no challenge to its less "vulgar" interpretations; this point will be pursued in the next chapter, since our present interest is in History, and in Sartre's foundational theory of it.

In the Critique, Sartre is more precise in his criticism of dialectical materialism, which, he claims, explains human History "du dehors": that is, with reference to the non-human--which, for Sartre, just does not qualify as an "intelligible" explanation of human behaviour. It must be remembered that for him, material just "is"; it has no meaning and no significance until it becomes part of a human project and is "worked" on. It is also entirely "contingent." How then, asks Sartre, can something fundamentally meaningless and non-necessary, provide the ground for understanding human History which is both meaningful and necessary? From Sartre's point of view, it is unintelligible, to ground the intelligible (History) in the unintelligible (Nature). Since man alone is the

source of all meaning, the meaning of History must, therefore, be grounded in human action. Even if that History is not the History intentionally made by men, that meaning itself must be seen, nevertheless, to have its foundation in men.

The point of departure for this argument is clearly, once more, Cartesian. Matter and men are considered to be fundamentally distinct kinds of beings; the former essentially inert and therefore incapable of providing the ground of any kind of movement. Sartre's appeal to "praxis" as the only intelligible foundation of History, derives directly from this original dualistic starting point. In the discussions of "Dialectic" and "Consciousness," which follow, this bifurcation of nature and culture will be examined in greater detail. In the meantime we will proceed more directly to Sartre's theory of History, considering it first on its own terms, and from the point of view of the tradition within which it situates itself; then from the broader perspective of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism.

History: Totalization "en cours," Founded on Scarcity

Sartre's first point is that History is not a "totalité" but a "totalisation en cours"; in other words, History is not a fait accompli, an objective whole, which is available for examination from the outside, but rather a

continuing dialectical movement within which the historian and the philosopher of History are necessarily situated, and to which they necessarily contribute by their very existence and practice. This view, whilst in our opinion basically correct, does raise some problems for Sartre, however. For example, if History is a "totalisation" in Sartre's sense, then it must also be a project, with its own teleology and praxis. How is this possible, this totalization of totalizations "sans totalisateur"? How can there be one History and one Truth of History when in reality there is only a multiplicity of singular projects, singular totalizations, and singular meanings? And how can Sartre make the Marxist view intelligible--that all History is the History of class conflict, when the only agency he will recognize is that of the individual subject?

If there is to be any such thing as the Truth of History (rather than several truths, even if they are organised into a system), our investigation must show that the kind of intelligibility which we have described above applies to the process of human history as a whole, or, in other words, that there is a totalising temporalisation of our practical multiplicity and that it is intelligible, even though this totalisation does not involve a grand totaliser . . . . Our critical investigation may also show us how the practical multiplicity (which may be called 'men' or 'Humanity' according to taste) realises, in its very dispersal, its interiorisation. In addition, we must exhibit the dialectical necessity of this totalising process.<sup>22</sup>

Sartre's goal, in the Critique, is, therefore, to discover the formal conditions of possibility of History,

and of the meaning we attribute to it;<sup>23</sup> of the only History we know, which, consisting as it does of specific actions of specific groups of men in conflict with each other, is nevertheless motivated in some fundamental sense, by material conditions which alone will account for the necessity of that History, and of the contradictions and conflicts which constitute it.

We saw in the last chapter, how, according to Sartre, the original reciprocity between men is necessarily negative and antagonistic, because up to and including the present moment in History, men have always interacted within conditions of scarcity. The "negative" moment of History, which provides the intelligible ground for the conflicts and contradictions which are History's motor, is present, therefore, in the very first totalization: the individual, in his fundamentally human project of self-production, totalizes his world as a world of scarcity, and the other as an antagonist in the competition for scarce material goods. In this way, Sartre provides an intelligible foundation for the essentially negative reciprocity which constitutes History. The negativity derives from the original material condition of scarcity, interiorized by the individual in his project of self-production. And the movement is grounded in individual human praxis: the ongoing process of self-creation; the successive overcoming of successive alienations grounded in scarcity.

We saw also in the last chapter how Sartre considers the original human praxis to be an essentially alienating one--ostensibly because it occurs within conditions of scarcity. History thus consists of the ongoing attempts of individual men to regain the freedom, which they lose through praxis, as long as they live within conditions of scarcity. Since in Sartre's view, scarcity is a contingent condition, it is therefore possible to conceive of and work towards its future suppression. If this could be achieved, it would permit the restoration of freedom to man--so bringing to an end alienation and the History (our History) associated with it.

Our critique of Sartre's attempt to ground alienation in the fundamentally contingent material condition of scarcity, is equally applicable to his efforts at foundation with respect to History. Scarcity is both the cornerstone of his theory of History and its principal materialist and Marxist component. But we have seen that the concept, at least in Sartre's hands, is just not adequate to the job required of it. Just as his notion of scarcity flounders, so then does his account of History, which rests on it; and therefore his attempt to reconcile existentialism and Marxism. Some of the limitations of Sartre's notion of scarcity will be reviewed below. These were elucidated in greater detail in the previous chapter and are recalled here only to emphasize their particular relevance to the

problem of History.

1. Sartre never defines his notion of scarcity, so we do not know what actually would count as a condition of scarcity, or of its absence. For example, he applies the epithet equally to the "developed" and "under-developed" countries and considers the whole of human History to have taken place within conditions of scarcity.

2. In the absence of a precise definition, several distinct senses of "scarcity" suggest that it is perhaps much more a necessary than a contingent fact of the human condition, as Sartre supposes. For example:

(i) As Raymond Aron argues, any living creature which has to survive will always have to contend against scarcity: scarcity of time and place, if not of resources.<sup>24</sup>

(ii) Furthermore, "scarcity" is not a term of absolute value. It is socially and historically determined and has meaning only in relation to the "abundance" of someone or something else, or of oneself in another time and place. It is arguable that there will always be "scarcity" in this sense, because different items will always be available to different people, in different places, at different times, in varying quantities. This is one logical point about "scarcity," which

adds support to Aron's suggestion above.

(iii) Finally, Lévi-Strauss offers an example of scarcity which is fundamental and universal to the human condition as such: the scarcity of women, which gives rise to the incest rule, which actually institutes culture. A society without scarcity, which Sartre maintains should be our goal, would be a contradiction in terms, on this view, since the scarcity of women is the fundamental and indispensable basis of society.

3. There is no a priori reason for assuming (as Sartre does) that men will relate to each other in fundamentally negative or antagonistic ways because of conditions of scarcity. In fact, there is abundant anthropological evidence to suggest the contrary: that scarce resources, like food and women, provide the occasion for alliance rather than confrontation, for co-operation rather than competition.

4. Sartre's notion of scarcity does not account for the existence of societies which do not have a History: i.e. primitive societies, which are "repetitive" rather than historical. They are societies of men, and therefore characterized by praxis; and there is an obvious sense in which they could be said to exist in conditions of scarcity. Why then do they lack History, when the

supposedly necessary and sufficient (?) conditions are present: praxis and scarcity?

Sartre's only solution to this problem is, as far as I can see, to consider primitive societies as "on the way" so to speak; as slower in their "progress" than the developed countries, but nevertheless engaged in the same essential project of emancipation--and, therefore, to be understood according to the same formal structures: series, praxis, anti-praxis, the practico-inert, the group-in-fusion etc.; and Sartre sometimes seems to regard them in that way. But he does not actually present any coherent or consistent account of primitive societies in the Critique, as we pointed out in the last chapter. At times he speaks of them as having "no history," and as being "inferior" on that account (see page 50 above); at other times he sees them as having the status of an institutionalized group. But he offers no explanation in terms of his own theory of History as to why their historical progress is so slow, if not at a halt; or why that of our own civilization has been so fast in comparison. In which case, we can hardly concede that he has provided an adequate account of History, or its conditions of possibility.

5. Finally, Sartre fails to demonstrate that scarcity is the contingent ground of a contingent alienation, and thus of History. We saw in the last chapter how he speaks of a primary alienation which is conditioned by materiality

and seriality alone, and has nothing to do with scarcity. This primary alienation is related to need, the natural need of natural man to maintain himself by interacting with the world around him. But this basic biological need is not the same as scarcity (though Sartre does not recognize this), and it certainly is not contingent. It cannot, therefore, be considered as the contingent condition of alienation, or History.

Sartre thus fails in his efforts to establish scarcity as the fundamental "principle of negativity" and motor of History. This is serious, because it represents a failure of the Marxist, materialist element of his anthropology, i.e., his commitment to material conditions and mode of production as the ultimate determinants of History. In fact, what Sartre's Critique demonstrates is the antithesis of Marxism: i.e. that the real limitation of man's freedom (i.e. the primary alienation), is a necessary, and not a contingent fact of the human condition; it is inherent in his existence as a material creature living amongst others (i.e. it is grounded in materiality and plurality), and owes nothing to scarcity. As we saw in the last chapter, anti-praxis, objectification, alterity, and alienation are fundamental structures of praxis as such--and inescapable consequences of being human, and not of scarcity.

Sartre does explain the dynamics of History, as he set out to do in the Critique, in terms of individual human praxis continuously surpassing successive alienating objectifications. But his explanation is much more Hegelian than it is Marxist. It assumes, for example, the fundamental (ontological) otherness of human being, and its primacy and priority in the order of things and in History. It is unhistorical, since it ultimately grounds that History in the essential nature of man. The suppression of particular historical conditions, for example of scarcity, will make no difference to the fundamental structures of History as depicted by Sartre: the continuing opposition and antagonism of man towards nature and towards his fellow man, as a consequence of materiality and plurality.

History and Class Struggle: "praxis constituée" and "praxis constituante"<sup>25</sup>

The second major problem to which Sartre addresses himself in the Critique (the first being that of the "dynamic" of History), concerns the intelligibility of the Marxist view, shared by Sartre, that History is the history of class conflict. How can we justify the claim that History is made by groups of men, when praxis, the only source of History's dialectical dynamic, is, according to Sartre, attributable only to individuals? The Critique purports to present a theory of such "practical ensembles,"

and to have illustrated:

. . . the minimum meaning which must be given to class struggle, if it is to be described as the motive-force of History (rather than simply saying that this motive-force lies in the economic process and its objective conditions).<sup>26</sup>

In reconstructing the dialectical experience of group praxis, Sartre, characteristically, begins with the "travailleur isolé" (the isolated worker), related to other workers only by a negative and antagonistic reciprocity (as described in chapter I). Although this individual, being human, is characterized by praxis, his singular totalizations do not amount to Historical events. History is not constituted by a series of individual praxes ("dialectiques constituantes"), which presumably can only establish a repetitive temporality: but by group praxis ("dialectique constituée"), which alone can introduce radical and transformative change into the human condition. The Critique describes the essential structures of group praxis; showing how it is constituted by the praxes of individuals who internalize their multiplicity and use it as a means to achieve a personal and collective goal, i.e., human emancipation from alienation.<sup>27</sup>

This original moment, consisting of the isolated worker co-existing in series with other equally isolated workers, is referred to several times in the Critique as an "abstract" moment of the dialectical experience, while

the specific import of this particular "abstractness" is never clarified. It is possible to assume that it indicates that the moment of individual praxis does not correspond to any real moment in human History, since the latter is constituted by concrete group praxis. Whatever is implied, however, the structures of that first individual praxis are constitutive of group praxis itself. It provides the first totalization of man's "unfreedom," conditioned by materiality and plurality, and thus motivates the first project aiming at emancipation. The first contradiction appears here: between the individual and an antagonistic material and social environment. At this moment, the original violence of nature, which confronts man with a scarcity of material resources and therefore with the possibility of his own non-existence, is internalized, through labour, by the individual; such that he himself is essentially characterized by violence in his relationships with others. For each other, every man is "inhuman," because every man totalizes the material world, which is the only source of their unity, as "anti-human": it does not supply enough resources for every man's survival, and some will live only because others will die. Thus, ab initio, men are divided against each other on the basis of the material conditions within which they are obliged to produce and reproduce their own existence.

History is made when conditions become so bad that the impossibility of change is revealed, simultaneously to each and all, as the impossibility of living. Historical change occurs, when each man, by working in his own interest, works also, and at the same time, in the interests of the others, because in fact they share the same project: there is a totalization in each individual of present conditions as intolerable, and of multiplicity as a means towards the suppression of those conditions and the establishment of freedom.<sup>28</sup>

This results in revolution: in an "Apocalypse" or "bouleversement," which has the effect of transforming the participants from isolated individuals into a genuine group or community of social individuals.<sup>29</sup> The significance of this new phenomenon, the group-in-fusion, should not be underestimated: it represents not only "une nouveauté absolue"<sup>30</sup> (an absolute novelty); but also "la brusque résurrection de la liberté"<sup>31</sup> (the sudden resurrection of freedom); as well as "la forme la plus simple . . . de la totalisation"<sup>32</sup> (the most simple form of totalization). It institutes, in fact, the birth of History,<sup>33</sup> by breaking the previous repetitious pattern of (abstract) isolated individual praxes. It also institutes humanity, Sartre tell us.

This spontaneous moment of the group-in-fusion is necessarily brief, as we have already seen; its existence

is limited to the duration of the revolutionary moment. Even with the most generous interpretation, this could only be a matter of a few days. Then the group is threatened with its own disintegration. This is threatening, because it means a return to serial existence with all its alienating structures. Since the group is essentially practical, i.e. it owes its existence and its unity to a common project, once that project has been fulfilled--that is the intolerable situation has been overcome--it loses its *raison d'être*. The members of the group, however, want to hang on to their newly discovered freedom from alienation in the series, which has been achieved by the group's formation. No one wants to return to the state of the original collectivity where each person is isolated and powerless and separated from the others; where they are united only by the negative and false reciprocity of the practico-inert.

So the group unites against this second threat, the internal one of its own dissolution, by transforming itself into an institutionalized group, through the swearing of the oath. However, by ensuring its survival in this way, the group establishes contradiction at the very heart of its being, according to Sartre. This contradiction, which is internal to and inherent in the sworn group, permits the continuing movement of History, i.e. the ongoing formation of revolutionary groups which create change. The

contradiction reveals itself and can be expressed as follows.

Contradiction: The Structure  
of the Sworn Group

1. According to Sartre, only two kinds of permanency are possible: "... the first being the inert synthesis of the inorganic, the second, biological integration,"<sup>34</sup> and neither of these is available to the group. With respect to the first kind of unity, the group, as a practical phenomenon, is always a "totalisation en cours" and never a totality; it can, therefore, never have the unity and permanence characteristic of an inorganic object or thing. With respect to the second possibility, since it is spontaneously constituted by a multitude of individual praxes directed towards a common goal, and is the means rather than the agency for the attainment of that goal, the group cannot aspire to the biological unity and permanence of a "hyper-organism." Thus, in aspiring to permanence the group aspires to the impossible and the swearing of the oath introduces a contradiction at its very core: its successful unification and permanence would constitute its very demise as a group (-in-fusion), i.e. as a genuine unified and non-alienating "we-subject."

2. In addition, any unity and permanence which is available to the sworn group will always be mediated from

the outside, from the other, so to speak: either through the medium of worked matter, or through the outsider, the "non-groupé." In either case the group is returned to itself reified, objectified, inert, and thus very much other than how it wishes to maintain itself, i.e. as communal praxis, as "dialectique constituée." And once again, the aspiration of the group to unity and permanence is revealed as a self-contradictory.

3. There is a further contradiction at the level of the existence of the individual members of the group. By taking the oath of allegiance to the group, the individual renounces his freedom (to leave the group), in order to preserve his freedom (from the inertia and alienation of the serial collectivity). He, therefore, freely chooses to sacrifice his freedom in order to guarantee that same freedom: thus instituting a "négation de la dialectique au coeur de la dialectique"<sup>35</sup> (a negation of the dialectic at the heart of the dialectic).

4. Thus, the situation of the individual within the sworn, surviving group is necessarily ambiguous and paradoxical. Through immanence (membership of the unified group) he aims at transcendence (the preservation of freedom), and succeeds in neither: existing as neither wholly one nor the other, but as a tension between the two: "Thus I am neither totally integrated into the group, which has been revealed and actualised through praxis, nor .

totally transcendent."<sup>36</sup> This tension at the very foundation of the relationship between the individual and society permits the dialectical development of History to continue--through the successive appearance of groups-in-fusion, institutionalized groups, and collectivities: groups collapsing into collectivities, which in turn generate new groups . . . and so forth (ad infinitum?).

According to Sartre, humanity begins with revolt, i.e. with the formation of the group; presumably, because here, for the first time, man, both as individual and species, self-consciously acts in the interests of his freedom--the freedom of each, being dependent upon the freedom of all. History and Humanity are, therefore, instituted together--and it is the formation of the group which is the foundation of both. In this way Sartre provides the missing foundational structure--in terms of individual praxis--of the Marxist thesis, that it is conflict between classes (rather than individuals), which is History's motor.

As the group is transformed, by way of the oath, from a group-in-fusion to a "constrained group" (groupe de contrainte), so also is the individual. From an "individu commun" spontaneously united with others in a common project, he gradually acquires the status of "l'individu organique," once more isolated from others, but nevertheless united with the group by way of his predetermined function.

Alterity, which was suppressed as a Natural and pre-historical

condition by the group-in-fusion, is reintroduced by the institutionalized, organized group, as a Cultural condition. But, we are not yet, on that account, returned to a situation of alienation, according to the Critique. At first the structures of institutional society include within them a considerable degree of indetermination, leaving room for genuine human praxis and reciprocity-- actually made possible by the same constraining structures. (See the reference to kinship groups in chapter I.)

New structures of alienation appear only with the institution of a "sovereign" power to provide the unity, the identity, the agency, and the subjectivity which will always, necessarily, elude the sworn group, but which, nevertheless, were its principal motivation and end.

#### The Emergence of the Sovereign

Sartre maintains that the sovereign (or State) can never be legitimately considered as the "expression" of the people, or of the majority, because there exists no such organic group as the "people" or the "majority" to be expressed or represented. To talk as if there were is to indulge in mystification. For, in every case, the people exist as isolated individuals in series. Any sovereign, therefore, derives its power, not from the mystical will of the people, but from their fragmentation and powerlessness; and they obey because they cannot do

otherwise. The sovereign, by contrast, is extremely powerful; whether an individual or an élite, the sovereign is not a member of a series, nor of a hierarchy, and therefore is not subject to the reification and inertia intrinsic to them: In addition, the sovereign has the power to manipulate the series, and does so. And thus, Sartre brings us to the necessary structures of class conflict: a ruling class with all the power, and a powerless collectivity of divided individuals manipulated by it.

Communication between the individuals in the institutionalized group is difficult because of their isolation and separation in series. They thus become vulnerable to the mystifying power of the "mass media"; which in perpetuating the illusion of social unity (i.e. of the group as a totality, rather than a totalization "en cours"), intensifies and deepens the experienced inertia, anomie, and powerlessness of the individual; and presents him, at the same time, with a History made always elsewhere and always by others. Sartre uses the example of the hit-parade (of popular music) as an illustration of this process of "exterior-conditioning" in the sworn group. "One" is told that certain discs are best-sellers, and this has the effect of motivating people to buy those discs; which, of course, has the effect of increasing sales even further and realizing the historical truth of the original claim. "One" buys what "they" say "they" are buying: the first

"they" referring to the "experts" (the restricted group with the power to manipulate the series); the second, equally as anonymous, "they," referring to those in the series. As a matter of fact, the purchase of the disc (because of this process of exterio-conditioning) is nowhere praxis, i.e. the act of a free subject, but everywhere process, i.e. the act of the Other. Most commodity consumption can be subjected to the same analysis, as a process rather than a praxis: fashion, literature, art, travel, learning, culture, etc., are not freely chosen, but imposed on the alienated individual of the series, by a process of exterio-conditioning; that is, by:

. . . the mediating action of the group which conditions every other through all the Others, and everyone's practical fixation on the illusion of totalised seriality.<sup>38</sup>

According to this view then, human society is fundamentally volatile,<sup>39</sup> since a contradiction between the individual and the social group lies at its very heart. It is because the individual is neither completely immanent, not completely transcendent, that he can totalize the conditions of his existence as intolerable, and snatch himself (and therefore Humanity) from one historical moment, and thrust them into a truly new one.

Sartre's reconstruction of the emergence of groups and their mode of survival; of the relationship between the individual and the group; and of the necessity of

the group in the making of History; is certainly more successful than his efforts to ground that History and alienation in scarcity. It has a coherence and a consistency which the latter lacks; and, more importantly, as an analysis and interpretation of the structures of social life under modern capitalism, it is often extremely accurate, incisive, and illuminating. Nevertheless, it does not, and cannot, constitute a scientific or foundational theory of History in general.

This is because, in his account of alienation, it depends on a notion of scarcity which is hopelessly inadequate as a foundational concept. And secondly, and more significantly, because, as a theory of History, and a foundational theory of historical materialism as the Truth of History, it is itself unhistorical; forgetful of its own roots in a specific social and historical situation.

Sartre purports to ground the first Historical totalization in the contingent condition of scarcity. But, as we have demonstrated above, scarcity plays no part at all in the first totalization upon which History is based. Negativity, objectification, and reification, belong to praxis per se, regardless of contingent material conditions. While primary alienation, and thus History itself as the successive attempts of individuals to overcome that alienation, is grounded in basic biological need, which is a necessary and not a contingent condition of being

human. Far from establishing the contingency of our History, and its Truth in historical materialism, Sartre actually demonstrates its necessity and inevitability, grounded as it appears to be in the human condition as such, and its essential constitution as material and plural. On Sartre's account, as long as there are men, and whether there be scarcity or not, there will be no end to the circular dialectic which constitutes History: alienation in the material world and submission within the series, eventually overcome through revolt and the formation of a group-in-fusion; this promptly transformed into an organization and institution which generates its own inertia, alienation, alterity, and Terror; and thus its own counter-revolution . . . and so forth, ad infinitum.

Even without scarcity, it seems, the necessary circularity of History--swinging between serial existence and revolt--has been established. For Sartre's analysis demonstrates that, once a collectivity of individuals has been instituted, as it has, it can only be momentarily and temporarily transcended: the unified group cannot sustain itself as a genuine we-subject beyond the revolutionary moment, and is destined to return to alienating modes of survival once the external threat has been surpassed.

These conclusions and implications clearly belie Sartre's aspirations in the Critique: to ground History

and its Truth (historical materialism) in contingent and therefore surpassable material conditions. They just as clearly reveal his more fundamental commitment to an existentialism which is incompatible with Marxism: i.e. one which asserts the absolute primacy and freedom of the individual, which, in the final analysis is thought of in terms of "consciousness." From a Marxist point of view, this particular kind of existential commitment is itself an historical phenomenon; a product of the particular material conditions which characterize the more recent developments of capitalism, which have intensified and extended the individual's powerlessness and lack of control over his own life, his alienation (from self, others, the objectified world), and therefore his corresponding yearning for autonomy and freedom all of which have been so expertly documented by Sartre in this work and others.

Sartre, however, constantly overlooks the essential historicity of his own existentialism, and his own experience—and reifies and mystifies it, by making it foundational to scientific anthropology as such. While realizing and acknowledging the ideological and historically specific status of philosophies,<sup>40</sup> he nevertheless proceeds as if acknowledgement of the limitations and dangers guaranteed immunity from them, and fails to apply his own critique to his own thought. The unquestioned adoption of the "travailleur isolé" as the point of departure in the

dialectical reconstruction of History, is so clearly conditioned by the contemporary experience of alienation, that one wonders why it was not taken as the point of arrival, and thus the object of dialectical comprehension, instead of assumed its point of departure and its subject. Likewise, the choice of History itself, as the fundamental structure of Humanity, is clearly an historically specific and conditioned choice; one symptomatic of our own cultural preoccupations, which is unlikely to cast any light on the significant structures and determinants of societies thus preoccupied or on those which do not have a history in the given sense.

We therefore find ourselves very much inclined towards Lévi-Strauss's estimation of Sartre's work: that it provides additional ethnological material for scientific anthropology, but does not itself constitute such an anthropology. Sartre assumes the cultural self-consciousness of the culture into whose self-consciousness (historical materialism, alienation, freedom, etc.) he is inquiring; and his investigation of the conditions of its possibility is conducted entirely within the confines of that same self-consciousness. His conclusions are illuminating, incisive, original, and of real practical value and significance for the society in question and those who are struggling to understand it and their own situation within it-- and this must not be underestimated (the positive

contributions of the Critique are considered in a later chapter). But these cannot be considered scientific or anthropological in the required foundational sense, as contributing to an "objective" (trans-cultural, trans-historical) understanding of Man. In fact, on the contrary, Sartre does not resolve the crucial question: why do some societies, like our own, understand and define themselves in terms of History, while others, what we call primitive societies do not? I.e., the question of the historical and material conditions of historical consciousness itself.

In pursuit of an answer to this more foundational question, we move therefore to a consideration of Lévi-Strauss's critique of History, which comes at the problem from the other side, so to speak, that is, from the perspective of the non-historical society.

#### Lévi-Strauss's Critique of Sartre

In the last chapter of The Savage Mind, Lévi-Strauss attacks Sartre's identification of History with Humanity, and Historical understanding with anthropological understanding.

In the first place, Sartre cannot make the identification work. He relies on a notion of History which effectively excludes primitive people from the class of Humanity, since they do not have a History in the required sense. Sartre therefore has difficulty situating these

so-called non-historical societies within his formal reconstruction of the dialectical experience of Humanity. If anything, they are attributed the status of institutionalized, sworn groups, which, for an unspecified reason, have not been overtaken by those social revolutions, which we are told constitute History. Sartre clearly considers them "underdeveloped" by comparison with our own civilization, and he is ambivalent about the quality of life within such groups. For the most part, however, as we saw in chapter I, he considers life in non-historical societies to be nasty, brutish, and short, and closer to patterns of biological than cultural (i.e. human) existence.

Thus, by considering History as the clue to Humanity (and vice-versa), Sartre does a great disservice to primitive cultures. But, it is not so much Sartre's elaboration of the historical point of view which is the object of Lévi-Strauss's criticism (and our own), as the point of departure itself. Sartre's choice of History as the defining characteristic of man reveals an uncritical and ethnocentric absorption in the ideological superstructures of his own society, which militates against any aspiration he may have to anthropological science as such.<sup>41</sup>

History is not anthropology

1. Anthropology is objective

According to Lévi-Strauss, scientific anthropology should be a theoretical enterprise, which studies diverse

human societies with the goal of discovering general laws of formation by which all societies might be understood. To guarantee a certain kind of "objectivity," the anthropologist must take up a position outside the society he is observing, and have no personal i.e. "subjective" or practical interest which would necessarily distort, or interfere with the truths to be discovered about the society in question.<sup>42</sup> Sartre studies his own society, from the inside and he is very much interested and implicated in the truths to be discovered in the inquiry. His explicit objective is to provide an existential foundation for Marxism: that is, a theoretical foundation in human freedom, for a philosophical interpretation of society which regards revolutionary change as both necessary and inevitable. His motivation is clearly practical: he wants to change the society whose conditions of possibility he is investigating. That very commitment to change is part of the ideological baggage of that same society's self-consciousness, as an historical consciousness. According to Lévi-Strauss, Sartre may "recover meaning" this way, but he cannot achieve scientific objectivity, according to his specification of it.

2. Anthropology: the study of systems of representation, not of concrete men

For Lévi-Strauss the appropriate object of scientific anthropology is not the concrete individual and his

internalization/externalization of social reality, but rather the symbolic representation of that process, in what he calls "objectified thought": in the case of primitive societies, their rules of marriage, residence, and exchange; their religions, rites, rituals, and taboos; their magic and myths, etc. Following Freud and Marx, he maintains (unlike Sartre) that the fundamental determinants of consciousness (and therefore of objectified thought--superstructures, if you would) are not to be found at the level of consciousness itself, but at the level of the unconscious. And it is unconscious laws of thought, which remain constant throughout all the variations in conscious content, that he is seeking to discover through his studies of objectified thought and the methods of structural anthropology. He perceives his contribution to the science of man as complementary to that of Marx:

Without questioning the undoubted primacy of infrastructure, I believe that there is always a mediator between praxis and practices, namely the conceptual scheme by the operation of which matter and form, neither with any independent existence, are realized as structures, that is entities which are both empirical and intelligible.. It is to this theory of superstructures, scarcely touched on by Marx, that I hope to make a contribution.<sup>43</sup>

He accepts the dialectic between (material) infrastructure and (conscious) superstructure, and between praxis and process; and addresses himself to the problem, neglected by Marx (and subsequent Marxists before the very recent

emergence of "ideological" studies, most notably those associated with Althusser and the re-discovery of Gramsci), of explaining the movement and development within superstructure, and between it and social practice.<sup>44</sup>

Accordingly, therefore, the anthropologist must take a position outside the consciousness of the society he is examining, in order to be able to observe that consciousness and achieve any scientific understanding of it. Otherwise he will be seduced by the very thought he is inquiring into and consequently, perpetuate, rather than explain or explode society's myths about itself. In Lévi-Strauss's opinion, which we share, Sartre does just this by defining man, from the outset, in terms of History: without realizing or acknowledging it, he contributes to the current mythology of Western thought about society, which defines and evaluates itself historically, in terms of progress, change, and individual freedom and action, for example. It is not so much that his conclusions in this respect are false, in the sense of untrue; but rather that they cannot be considered to be constitutive of science.

And so we end up in the paradox of a system which invokes the criterion of historical consciousness to distinguish the 'primitive' from the 'civilised' but--contrary to its claim--is itself ahistorical.<sup>45</sup>

Superstructures are " . . . faulty acts which have made it socially"<sup>46</sup> according to Lévi-Strauss; they should

therefore be the objects of anthropological study and not its medium.

Lévi-Strauss does not reject the significance of History for anthropology, but the reduction of one to the other which Sartre effects in the Critique. History and philosophy, he says, interrogate meaning from the inside and are extremely important for a society's self-definition and self-understanding: but they can never transcend their historical and subjective position as a constitutive part of the consciousness they are examining--and, therefore, they can never arrive at objective scientific truth.<sup>47</sup> It is Sartre's weakness not to acknowledge this limitation, and to imagine that in doing phenomenology he is doing scientific anthropology:

The question is to know whether what we are trying to attain is what is true in and of the consciousness we have of it or outside this consciousness. I believe it is perfectly legitimate to look inside by a recovery of meaning, except that this recovery, this interpretation philosophers or historians give of their own mythology, I treat simply as a variant of that mythology itself. In my analysis it becomes matter, objectified thought once again.<sup>48</sup>

As Lévi-Strauss points out, the situations from which Sartre extracts the formal conditions of social reality in general--bus queues, football matches, the pop-parade, boxing matches, etc.--are culture bound "secondary incidents of life in society"; ". . . they cannot therefore serve to disclose its foundation."<sup>49</sup>

The ambiguity of "History"

In fact, as Lévi-Strauss rightly maintains, the very notion of History itself is ambiguous, and amenable to several distinct meanings; and Sartre does not indicate to which of these he is appealing when he invokes History in the Critique:

. . . one is hard put to it to see whether it is meant to be the history men make unconsciously, history of men consciously made by historians, the philosopher's interpretation of the history of men or his interpretation of the history of historians.<sup>50</sup>

If by History is meant the history men make unconsciously (which is a perfectly legitimate use, though perhaps not the one advocated by Sartre, while it is that endorsed by Marx), then it makes no sense to talk about some societies as having no history. All societies have a history, even the most "primitive"; their past extends as far back as our own, and they too have undergone all sorts of transformations, crises, migrations, wars, and adventures.<sup>51</sup> When we describe them as being without history, in this sense, we can only mean:

. . . that their history is and will always be unknown to us, not that they actually have no history. For tens and even hundreds of millenarities, men there have hated, suffered, invented and fought as others did. In actual fact, there are no peoples still in their childhood; all are adult, even those who have not kept a diary of their childhood and adolescence.<sup>52</sup>

It is their attitude to the history which they make unconsciously which distinguishes primitive societies from our own, and not the purported lack of History. Primitive peoples do not define themselves in terms of progress and change, as we do, but in terms of their enduring social structure, their timelessness. They endure in "primordial" time, as it were, defining the "real" as that which has always been the case since the original creation of the society by the ancestors. So the present is constantly interpreted in terms of the past; and only as such is it made real and incorporated into the continuing structures of thought and practice.<sup>53</sup> Thus the real tension between diachrony and synchrony, between contingent and shifting events and necessary and unchanging structures, which is faced and resolved by all societies, is resolved in primitive societies by subordinating the former (events) to the latter (structure), i.e. History to system. While our own cultural consciousness reverses this subordination. Thus primitive societies endure unchanged throughout time.

Lévi-Strauss suggests therefore that we should replace the "clumsy distinction" we make between peoples "without a history" and others, by the distinction between "cold" and "hot" societies:

. . . the former seeking, by the institutions they give themselves, to annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity in a quasi-automatic fashion; the

latter resolutely internalizing the historical process and making it the moving power of their development.<sup>54</sup>

Hot societies would be characterized by "cumulative" History, and cold ones by "stationary" History; the former being a ". . . progressive, acquisitive type in which inventions are accumulated to build up great civilizations"; and the latter ". . . equally active and calling for the utilization of as much talent," but absorbing innovations ". . . into a sort of undulating tide, which once in motion, could never be canalized into a permanent direction."<sup>55</sup>

Lévi-Strauss warns, however, that this same distinction between cumulative and stationary history may itself be spurious, and derive more from our own ethnocentric point of view than from anything intrinsic to the cultures in question. He points out that any culture developing in a similar direction to our own would be perceived as "cumulative" and others would seem "stationary."

. . . not necessarily because they are so in fact, but because the line of their development has no meaning for us, and cannot be measured in terms of the criteria we employ.<sup>56</sup>

So, "eventfulness" like "speed" may depend upon the position of the observer. Just as for the traveller in a moving train, the perceived speed and length of other trains varies, according to which direction they are moving in; so from the position of our own culture, we can observe others

only through the lens of our own cultural system, and if they are moving in a different direction from our own, it will be that much harder for us to get them in any kind of focus. Sartre's failure to situate primitive societies in his own system illustrates the truth of this ethnocentric limitation.

#### The historical origin of historical consciousness

Since, according to Lévi-Strauss, societies change and develop through the action of "external" factors (i.e. external to consciousness and social structure), e.g. biological, geographical, economic, demographic factors, an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of cumulative History (i.e. of historical consciousness) would not be the task of the structural anthropologist, but of the Historian; since it would be an inquiry into infrastructure, that is into the material conditions of social change. Nevertheless, he does hazard a few comments on this question; again in his conversation with Charbonnier, identifying writing as the necessary pre-condition of historical consciousness, in the Sartrian sense, and of the accumulation of knowledge which it assumes:

. . . a people can only take advantage of previous acquisitions in so far as these have been made permanent in writing . . . Writing had to be invented so that the knowledge of experiments, the happy or unhappy experiences of each generation could accumulate so that, working on the basis

of this capital, succeeding generations would be able, not only to repeat the same endeavour, but also turn all previous ones to good account in order to improve techniques and achieve fresh progress.<sup>57</sup>

Since writing emerged at a fixed time and place--in the Eastern Mediterranean, three or four thousand years B.C.-- it provides us with an historical focus for an inquiry into History. In addition, according to Lévi-Strauss, the establishment of hierarchical societies coincided with this appearance of writing, which was first and foremost connected with power (inventories, catalogues, laws, censuses, instructions), and exercised by some men over others and over possessions.

Sartre's efforts to ground the possibility of History in the individual praxis of the "travailleur isolé" within conditions of scarcity appears doubly mystified on the basis of this account. In the first place, the isolated individual is not primordial (neither logically nor chronologically), but emerges along with the rise of Historical consciousness itself, and the institution of "privacy" (as in property), and "specificity" and "novelty" (as of events). It cannot therefore be considered as the foundational ground of that same History. Secondly, it is surplus rather than scarcity, which is History's motor, i.e. the accumulation of knowledge, goods and energy, of capital itself, in the hands of the privileged few.

However, Lévi-Strauss's account of History is insufficient as it stands, and requires the specification of a further condition to account for the simultaneous emergence of and the necessary connection between writing and power, exploitation and progress; conditions which he provides, elsewhere, in his discussion of the culturally determining contingencies of size and diversity. What follows is my own elaboration of what Lévi-Strauss might want to argue here.

In a small society, the development of writing need not coincide with the emergence of hierarchies since the population size would be small enough to maintain high levels of authenticity. I.e. there would be direct, personal communication between the members, and all would have equal access to all the information in the system. There would, therefore, be no exploited class; and likewise, in a small society, the power associated with writing and the accumulation of knowledge would be available to all and would not be concentrated in the hands of the few. As societies increase in size, however, the levels of authenticity decrease and the information in the system is no longer accessible to all. Thus it becomes possible for some men to assume power over others. If writing is to be associated with hierarchical societies, therefore, it must have developed in societies which were already large (as it seems to have been the case), and already, at least to some extent,

stratified into classes, i.e. characterized by a division of labour.

Turning now to the condition of diversity: since historical change is to be explained as the effect of external factors on a social system, those societies which are historical must at some time have encountered other societies with significantly different structures of thought and practice, and have been obliged, by such an encounter, to modify their own "universal" representations of reality to accommodate the new differences. Existing in primordial time becomes increasingly difficult for a society once the belief in "celestial archetypes," in which humanity is thought to participate, is challenged by the reality of the very different cosmos and social organization of a different society.<sup>58</sup> What were thought of as unchanging, primordial structures of social life can no longer be considered as such, and the notion of History takes its place.

Such an hypothesis is certainly consistent with the facts as we know them and with the continuing existence of primitive societies (as Sartre's theory of History is not). Primitive societies are small and well-integrated and therefore have not developed class systems of organization and production<sup>59</sup> by which energy differentials can be maintained, surplus accumulated, and progress (thus History) achieved. They are isolated, and until the

intrusion of Western civilization did not encounter alternative social systems which would have obliged them to diversify: i.e. to abandon their primordial temporality in favour of an irreversible time scheme geared to making sense of, as well as to making possible, cultural change and differences. These societies are also non-literate and thus lack one of the essential means for accumulating knowledge, possessions, and power; a necessary condition of both History and historical consciousness.

Thus, Lévi-Strauss accounts for History in terms of material conditions, consistent with and supportive of historical materialism; a task in which Sartre failed.

History--one kind of  
knowledge amongst others

He argues, in addition, that the History which concerns Sartre is not, in fact, real History, i.e. the ~~History~~ which men make unconsciously as a result of factors which are not within their conscious control, but rather symbolic History, Historical representation i.e. reflective consciously constituted History. It is the:

. . . history of men consciously made by historians, the philosopher's interpretation of the history of men or his interpretation of the history of historians.<sup>60</sup>

As such it is only one kind of knowledge amongst others, and can claim no monopoly on the truth of mankind as a whole. In Lévi-Strauss's view, this History, as an academic

or theoretical discipline is both complementary and symmetrical to anthropology. For both are concerned with societies other than the one in which we live; and both deal with " . . . systems of representation which differ for each member of the group and which, on the whole, differ from the representations of the investigator."<sup>61</sup>

. . . all that we can expect from either of them, is to enlarge a specific experience to the dimensions of a more general one, which thereby becomes accessible, as experience to men of another country or another epoch.<sup>62</sup>

History and anthropology share the same subject-matter, social life; the same goal, a better understanding of man; and to a large extent, the same method, the collection of testimony. They differ only:

. . . in their choice of complementary perspectives: History organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of social life, while anthropology proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations.<sup>63</sup>

But the difference is paramount: it means, for Lévi-Strauss, that History serves anthropology and not vice-versa:

. . . by showing institutions in the process of transformation, history alone makes it possible to abstract the structure which underlies the many manifestations and remains permanent throughout a succession of events.<sup>64</sup>

At the same time anthropology needs History and cannot be indifferent to historical processes and interpretations, which are perhaps "the most highly conscious expression of social phenomena"; though its interest in them will be far from historical. For the goal of anthropology, according to Lévi-Strauss, is to eliminate from historical phenomena everything they owe to the historical process and conscious thought, in order to grasp "the complete range of unconscious possibilities"<sup>65</sup> beyond the conscious representation.

It is not, therefore, History itself which is the butt of Lévi-Strauss's critique in "History and Dialectic," neither History unconsciously made, nor that made consciously, but rather the privileged status claimed for the latter by thinkers like Sartre. Lévi-Strauss challenges this claim to priority by demystifying the notion itself; i.e. by revealing the ambiguities, contradictions, and limitations of the very "History" upon which the claim is based.

He argues, for example, that the History in question ". . . corresponds to no kind of reality,"<sup>66</sup> for neither of its constituent elements, neither historical "continuity," nor historical "facts" are given in experience: both are constituted by the historian himself in the process of representation. History is therefore, always history-for, i.e. selective, partial, and incomplete, and never History-in-itself. ✓

Furthermore, the constitutive structures of History, historical continuity, and historical facts, are contradictory notions and mutually exclude each other: the existence of an identifiable historical event requires that it be discontinuous from the confusion surrounding it. While the assumption of historical continuity is inconsistent with the existence of isolable historical facts.<sup>67</sup>

Sartre's History, therefore, does not denote the concrete, i.e. a set of events, but rather the abstract, i.e. a system of representation. Like all knowledge it should be regarded as a species of "superstructure" and subjected to analysis to determine its structural and material conditions of possibility. Lévi-Strauss gives some indication as to how the structural analysis of History as a representative system might proceed.

Like all systems of representation (myth for example), History requires a code to interpret its object. This code is chronology and it consists of dates:

Dates may not be the whole of history, nor what is most interesting about it, but they are its 'sine qua non', for history's entire originality and distinctive nature lie in apprehending the relation between 'before' and 'after', which would perforce dissolve if its terms could not, at least in principle, be dated.<sup>68</sup>

The coding does not consist of dates in linear series, however. Dates have three features: (i) they function as ordinal numbers and denote a moment in succession;

(ii) they function as cardinal numbers and express a distance in relation to other numbers; (iii) they are members of a class. For example, the date 1685 belongs to the same class as 1610, 1715, 1805 etc., and only has significance and meaning by virtue of this class position. In relation to another class, for example that containing January 1st., September 20th., July 10th., etc., or that containing the first, second, and third millenium, 1685 means nothing. In itself a date has no meaning. The code for history, therefore, consists of classes of dates, the dates in each class being " . . . irrational in relation to all those of other classes."<sup>69</sup> The discontinuous and classificatory nature of History is revealed:

History is a discontinuous set, composed of domains of history, each of which is defined by a characteristic frequency and by a differential coding of "before" and "after".<sup>70</sup>

Each class, taken as a whole, always refers back to another class which alone contains its principle of intelligibility. The history of the Seventeenth Century, for example, is annual, but the Seventeenth Century itself belongs to another class which operates in terms of centuries. These in turn refer to another class, of "eras," which contains Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Modern Period, and so forth.

The various domains correspond to histories of "differing powers." Biographical and anecdotal history

is considered low-powered and is at the bottom of the scale: it is the least explanatory, since it deals with particulars, but the richest in information for the same reason. Histories of progressively greater power are increasingly comprehensive and explanatory, but decreasingly informative since there is a loss of particular detail. According to Lévi-Strauss, the historian is obliged to choose, therefore, between: ". . . history which teaches us more but explains less, and history which explains more and teaches less."<sup>71</sup> Or, he can move outside history. If he moves in the direction of greater information he will study the individual and the "infra-historical" domains of psychology and physiology. If the direction is towards greater explanation, then the study will be one of "pre-history," biology, geology, ultimately cosmology. It is to Sartre's credit that he realized this need to move outside History in his actual practice of anthropological inquiry: in his studies of Beaudelaire, Genet, and Flaubert for example, he covers both domains--the infra- and the pre-historical, to maximize intelligibility, i.e. both the informational and the explanatory power of his historical reconstructions of individuals and their creative work.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, for Lévi-Strauss, these reconstructions remain symbolic. They are representations of social reality and as such can serve only as points of departure in the search for a truly scientific understanding of man

(though not necessarily of men, a distinction we will return to).<sup>73</sup> As an indispensable source of material, History can claim to be only an "auxiliary" science at best; but it can never escape "superstructure," and must always be subordinated to the truly scientific study of man, i.e. structural anthropology.

In a later chapter we will consider the contribution of other structuralist thinkers (Althusser and Foucault), to the discussion of History as superstructure, and to the dispute between phenomenology and structural anthropology with respect to the appropriate constitution of a "Science" of man. We return now to the Critique however, to turn our attention to the dialectic, a category fundamental to both Marxism and existentialism and their respective interpretations of History and social relations.

Chapter III  
The Dialectic

For Sartre, as for Hegel and Marx, the movement of History is dialectical, and not, for example, causal-mechanical; and linear or progressive, i.e. cumulative, as opposed to repetitive or circular. It consists in the successive overcoming of contradictions and progresses towards an historical moment when all contradictions will have been finally transcended and a reign of freedom made possible for all men.

I argued in the preceding chapter, agreeing with Lévi-Strauss, that this view of History is very much an historical and ethnocentric one, part of the superstructure of Western European civilization. History in the sense indicated does not define man (as Sartre's argument in the Critique suggests), and an inquiry into its foundation, intelligibility, and conditions of possibility cannot therefore be identified with Anthropology, as a general science of man.

Sartre's declared purpose, of establishing a structural and historical anthropology grounded in existential-Marxism, is defeated at its very inception, therefore, for it is inspired by the ahistorical assumption that History is the fundamental structure of being human. While, in fact,

the History in question characterizes a particular historically conditioned representation of man only, and not man as such. As objectified thought, it itself stands in need of further historical and anthropological explanation and foundation.

We have already paid tribute to the excellence and accuracy of Sartre's descriptions of contemporary existence and of the structures of alienation, alteration, violence, powerlessness and inertia which characterize it. The validity of these descriptions is not in question. Their truth is limited, however, to a particular historical period (our own), and cannot therefore be held to constitute the ground of universal anthropological conclusions (about man in general) as Sartre attempts to do in the Critique.

We saw in the first two chapters how this tendency to generalize from historical particulars to anthropological universals failed with respect to Alienation and History, and how this failure at the same time undermined the more particular and specific relevance of Sartre's analyses. Is he any more successful in his inquiry into the dialectic?

Once more, I will examine Sartre's thought in terms of the tradition within which it is situated, and then in the light of Lévi-Strauss's ideas. We will see that there are two major areas of dispute between the two thinkers: the first concerns the ultimate foundation of the dialectic, the second the respective merits of dialectical and

analytical reason for anthropological understanding.

Lévi-Strauss maintains a consistently materialist view: that ultimately and in the last analysis, it is the structure of the brain which constrains man to think dialectically. In this sense, he adopts a position which is much closer to the Marxism of dialectical materialism than does Sartre, who consistently rejects the notion of a dialectic of Nature as irrational. In his view, reason ceases to be rational once its intelligibility is seen as deriving from something other than itself--i.e. from Nature. His view owes more to Descartes and Hegel than it does to Marx, relying as it does on an understanding of being as essentially bifurcated (see below)--into the natural and cultural. Accordingly, cultural phenomena, in this case the dialectical movement of History, cannot be explained by reference to the natural, but only by reference to the specifically cultural and human.

With regard to the respective merits of analytical and dialectical reason, Sartre is uncompromising: only dialectical reason can yield genuine anthropological understanding, and the intelligibility of analytical reason is always subordinate to it. Thus, it is the synthetic moment alone of the regressive-progressive inquiry into human action, which renders that action intelligible.

By contrast, Lévi-Strauss gives priority to analytical reason. Since the ultimate determinants of human action

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are, in his opinion, unconscious, the regressive-progressive movement outlined by Sartre must be followed by a further analytic inquiry aimed at discovering the unconscious determinants of the conscious synthesis.

I will now examine these two areas of conflict in greater detail.

#### The Dogmatic and the Critical Dialectic Distinguished

In the Critique Sartre sets out to avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of Hegelian idealism, on the one hand, and what he calls "transcendental" Marxist materialism or "materialist idealism," on the other--by locating the original dialectical movement which constitutes History in human praxis, i.e. in the concrete, practical actions of individual man. He claims that the truth of Marxism--that "Men make their own History . . . but under circumstances . . . given and transmitted from the past"--can only be made intelligible if it is seen to be grounded in individual praxis. Hegelian idealism, for example, which locates the original dialectical movement in consciousness, does not make intelligible our experience of necessity, i.e. the independent determination of matter. While the transcendental materialism of dogmatic Marxism, which locates the dialectic in Nature, cannot account for our experience of freedom, i.e. of agency and the emergency of real novelty through human action.

An interpretation of the dialectic of History in terms of praxis, however, will disclose the truth and mutual intelligibility of both freedom and necessity, as the equally necessary constituents of History as described (and produced) by historical materialism.

As we have already observed, Sartre accepts the truth of historical materialism: that economic relations determine social relations, and that the contradiction between the material forces of production and existing relations of production constitute History's motor, generating conflict which is ultimately resolved through social revolution. Nevertheless, he does not believe that the dialectical and dynamic component of the theory is intelligible without the foundation in praxis which he seeks to provide for it in the Critique. According to his analysis of History and historical intelligibility, the dialectical rationality of historical materialism must itself be rationally grounded if the theory itself is to qualify as rational. An historical materialism which is grounded, theoretically, in Nature (i.e. dialectical materialism), and not in praxis, is unintelligible, according to Sartre. Like positivist science, it cannot justify its own claim to truth and is therefore irrational. The very materialist principle of dialectical materialism militates against historical materialism's claim to rationality, in Sartre's view, for the truth of the theory cannot be verified or revealed

in terms of the theory itself. In fact, from Sartre's point of view, both Knowledge and Truth as intended values and achievements disappear from intelligible discourse once historical materialism seeks its ground and foundation in the dialectics of Nature.

The supreme paradox of historical materialism is that it is, at one and the same time, the only truth of History and a total indetermination of the Truth. The totalising thought of historical materialism has established everything except its own existence. Or, to put it another way, contaminated by the historical relativism which it has always opposed, it has not exhibited the truth of History as it defines itself, or shown how this determines its nature and validity in the historical process, in the dialectical development of praxis and of human experience. In other words, we do not know what it means for a Marxist historian to speak the truth. Not that his statements are false--far from it; but he does not have the concept of Truth at his disposal. In this way, Marxism presents itself to us, as ideologists, as an unveiling of being, and at the same time as an unanswered question as to the validity of this unveiling.<sup>1</sup>

According to Sartre, historical materialism cannot consistently or even intelligibly aspire to Truth or rationality, while at the same time asserting that all acts of consciousness, and all ideas, and even reason itself, are determined by material conditions. He does not dispute the view that thought is " . . . a form of behaviour strictly conditioned by the world," but rather reminds us that it is also and always "knowledge of the world" and, that historical materialism without a foundation in praxis cannot

account for that knowledge nor for its claim to truth.

How could 'empirical' man think? Confronted with his own history, he is as uncertain as when he is confronted by Nature, for the law does not automatically produce knowledge of itself-- indeed if passively suffered, it transforms its object into passivity, and thus deprives it of any possibility of collecting its atomised experiences into a synthetic unity. Meanwhile, at the level of generality where he is situated, transcendental man, contemplating laws, cannot grasp individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, Sartre argues, the constituent structures of the dialectic--contradiction, totalization, and negation-- cannot be intelligibly applied to Nature per se, unless they can be shown to be mediated by and ultimately grounded in individual human praxis.

There is no denying that matter passes from one state to another, and this means that change takes place. But a material change is neither an affirmation nor a negation; it cannot destroy anything, since nothing was constructed; it cannot overcome resistances, since the forces involved simply produced the result they had to. To declare that two opposed forces applied to a membrane negate each other is as absurd as saying that they collaborate to determine a certain tension. The only possible use for the order of negation is to distinguish one direction from an other.

Resistance and, consequently negative forces can exist only within a movement which is determined in accordance with the future, that is to say, in accordance with a certain form of integration. If the end to be attained were not fixed from the beginning, how could one even conceive of a restraint? In other words, there is no negation unless the future totalisation is continually present as the de-totalised totality of the ensemble in question.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, for Sartre, contradiction and negation can occur only as part of a "totalisation en cours," which cannot be predicated of matter since such a totalization is constituted by both activity and comprehension. It consists in the organization of a practical field with reference to the present, which is experienced as, in some sense, "lacking," and this is the source of the "negation" and "contradiction" characteristic of dialectical movement; and with reference to the future, that is, to an end which is projected as the "negation of the negation," the fulfillment of the experienced lack. Totalization, therefore, can only be a function of the "organic" (i.e. man), and not the "inorganic" (i.e. inert matter).

It is therefore only through man that negation and contradiction come to matter, and the historical dialectic is seen to rest on individual praxis, which alone can be dialectical and totalizing, simultaneously and inseparably, action and comprehension.

We saw in the first chapter that it is need, basic biological, animal need, which institutes the first praxis, the first contradiction (between the organic and the inorganic) and the first totalization (of the material environment as one characterized by scarcity, i.e. of Nature as "a false organism"): <sup>4</sup>

Everything is to be explained through need (le besoin); need is the first totalising relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is part. This relation is univocal, and of interiority. Indeed, it is through need that the first negation of the negation and the first totalisation appear in matter. Need is a negation of the negation in so far as it expresses itself as a lack within the organism; and need is a positivity in so far as the organic totality tends to preserve itself as such through it . . .

On the level which concerns us here, there is nothing mysterious in this transcendence through need since the basic behaviour associated with need for food reproduces the elementary processes of nutrition: chewing, salivation, stomach contractions, etc. Transcendence here takes the form of a simple unity of a totalising function working in a vacuum . . . . This initial totalisation is transcendent to the extent that the being of the organism lies outside it, immediately or mediately, in inanimate being; need sets up the initial contradiction because the organism, in its being, depends directly (oxygen) or indirectly (food), on unorganised being and because, conversely, the control of its reactions imposes a biological statute on the inorganic.<sup>5</sup>

Historical materialism, as both a system of belief and the Truth of History, is possible only because of praxis: i.e. because humanity is situated within "a region of being" where totalization is "the very form of existence."<sup>6</sup> The dialectical movement of History is thus grounded in ontology, i.e. in the dialectical being of man himself. If Nature and matter are also dialectical it is only because they are mediated by man, that is, because they are lived and known always from the point of view of a totalizing praxis. For Sartre, then, the dialectic is not first in Nature and then in man as part of Nature, but vice versa; Nature

is dialectical because man is dialectical.

Dialectical materialism, however, postulates an "external dialectic in human History,"<sup>7</sup> (a "dialectique du dehors dans l'histoire humaine") according to Sartre; the dialectic which determines history is "merely a fact" on this account, a contingent law with "no knowable necessity." All that can be said of it is that ". . . it is so and not otherwise"; and of course that is not good enough for Sartre, for in his view it entails a reduction of reason itself to a mere matter of fact, making of reason an "accident," a "bone." For this, Sartre regards dialectical materialism as an essentially irrational system: it cannot, for example, answer two essential questions:

. . . why should there be any such thing as negation either in the natural world or in human history? And why and in what specific circumstances does the negation of a negation yield to affirmation?<sup>8</sup>

Why, Sartre asks, should we regard physical or chemical changes as "negations," or material forces as "contradictions," or transformations of material conditions as "affirmations"? "Determination will be real negation only if it identifies the determined within a totalisation or a totality."<sup>9</sup> And only praxis, born of need, can constitute such a totalization, and transform the environment into a totality, through comprehending action directed towards an end. Matter per se is inert and therefore incapable of totalization.

Therefore, if material change is dialectical, it is only because it has become part of a human project, because it is mediated by praxis, the only true source of the dialectic.

#### Review and Critique of Sartre's Critical Dialectic

Sartre has two principal objections to dialectical materialism as a foundational theory of History: (i) It cannot account for itself, i.e. its own rationality and Truth; it cannot therefore account for dialectical Reason; (ii) It is irrational in its attribution of dialectical movement (contradiction, negation and totalization, and transcendence) to inert matter, i.e. to Nature.

Both objections arise from, and depend for their very possibility and intelligibility on, his unquestioned and implicit assumption of Cartesian dualism: a perspective which radically and irreducibly bifurcates that which is into two distinct, separate, and essentially opposed regions of being--matter and mind, being and thought, Nature and Man. According to this schema, Reason and intelligibility are identified with Man, and exist independent of, apart from, and most essentially over against and in opposition to the rest of being; this in turn contradicts human being by virtue of its very otherness (its materiality), and must be negated by man, if man is not to be negated by

it (the quest for freedom) ~~is~~

While dialectical materialism refuses the dualism itself; the separation of man from Nature and mind from matter. This is misconstrued by those who continue to assume that dualism as the negation of one of its elements, the Rational and essentially human element; and as the reduction of that element to the other, to "mere" matter. While in fact, this is not the case at all. Dialectical materialism negates only the bifurcation of reality into two distinct regions of being, while preserving the multiple complexities of reality itself. Likewise, it reduces only theory, dualistic theory to monistic theory, and not matter to mind, nor mind to matter (as those still constrained by dualistic thinking fear). Dialectical materialism denies neither the specificity of consciousness nor the possibility of freedom, but rather their relegation to an ontologically distinct and privileged region of being for which the material world of Nature is considered to be Other.

The point of contention here concerns the relationship of "thought" to "being," a question which we address specifically in the next chapter (chapter IV, Consciousness). Sartre assumes the traditional "idealist" position, that, in some sense, thought is radically other than being, and the Cogito primary, and the only appropriate point of departure for epistemological and anthropological inquiry. It is the apodictic certainty, the translucidity of this

Cartesian cogito which provides Sartre with his criterion of intelligibility and validity: ". . . the epistemological starting point must always be consciousness as apodictic certainty (of) itself and as consciousness of such and such an object."<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, for Sartre, if History is rational, i.e. meaningful, and if historical materialism is the truth of History, then that truth must be seen to be grounded in the apodictic self-evident experience of consciousness if it too is intelligible, i.e. rational. Since historical materialism describes the history of real concrete men-- and not that of ideas, spirit, or matter, the only rational foundation available for it is, according to Sartre, man himself; not as "pure" consciousness (subjective idealism), nor man as "pure" materiality (materialist idealism), but man as praxis, i.e. as a practical organism whose lived experience is understanding and being at one and the same time:

In fact, there is a materialist idealism which, in the last analysis, is merely a discourse on the idea of matter; the real opposite of this is realist materialism--the thought of an individual who is situated in the world, penetrated by every cosmic force, and treating the material universe as something which gradually reveals itself through a 'situated' praxis.<sup>11</sup>

Now, it may be true that the knowledge we have that History and Nature are dialectical must be grounded in praxis, in concrete human experience. This would be an

epistemological requirement associated with phenomenology as a method of inquiry aiming at the "comprehension" of the lived world, and one with which we have much sympathy. Sartre is well justified in demanding such a foundation for historical materialism--as a way of avoiding speculative metaphysics, or positivist science, for example. Nevertheless, we are not entitled to assume that, because knowledge of the object (in this case of the dialectic) depends on praxis, so does the reality or being of the known object itself. The theory that there is a dialectical movement in Nature certainly depends on there being men who experience Nature that way and formulate appropriate theories about it. But the dialectical movement itself does not depend on men. The real existence of the object and the real dynamic of its movement is independent of consciousness, of praxis. Sartre can only deny this by compromising the very materialism he embraces in his commitment to Marxism.

Thus, when we claim that the social and material world moves dialectically, the justification (verification), and to some extent the intelligibility, of the claim may require (amongst other things) a demonstration of its foundation in praxis. But the truth of the claim, the fact that such and such is the case, does not depend on, and must not be confused with, the knowledge we have of it. To do so would obscure (negate) the very dialectic--the equivocal

relationship between man and the world, thought and being-- into which we are inquiring. The real movement of the material world is neither determined by nor dependent upon praxis. It just is.

Of course, it is precisely this--this radical contingency of the material dialectic, its lack of rational necessity--which unsettles Sartre, and has unsettled thinkers throughout history; challenging as it does, their lingering aspiration to Godliness; to the absolute freedom and the absolute authority and security, of existing in the absolute Truth of absolute Reason.

It is true, and obvious of course, that the dialectical movement of the natural world, which is described in terms of contradiction, negations, and negations of negations which are affirmations, is not as such characteristic of the world: the world is not self-consciously or reflexively dialectical, it does not label itself. Of course the heat does not actively, i.e. self-consciously, negate the water in the process of evaporation, nor intentionally contradict the ice when it melts under its influence. The interpretation of movement and processes as contradictions and negations is obviously just that--an interpretation, a representation of the world in consciousness, in praxis. Nevertheless, the movements which are described in terms of contradictions and negations do occur in the Natural world, just as they do in the social world, and their material determination

is at least, and always in part, independent of and prior to consciousness and praxis.

Against dialectical materialism Sartre maintains that the dialectic involves totalization as a necessary structure and this can only characterize "organic wholes"<sup>12</sup> which experience their environment as contradictory or negating. But this objection rests once again in his failure to distinguish knowledge from being as indicated above, and his corresponding failure (refusal?) to acknowledge the essentially dialectical (ambivalent and ambiguous) relationship between the two: they are mutually determining, mutually constitutive, and separable only in abstraction from practice and in discourse.

Certainly, knowledge of the dialectic, i.e. dialectical reason, the conscious awareness of the dialectic in History and Nature, requires totalization in the sense indicated by Sartre. But being, the dialectical movement itself of which Reason is just one manifestation requires no such internal totalizing structure.

Sartre rejects the dialectic of Nature because from the very beginning of his inquiry he has assumed as the paradigm of dialectical activity, dialectical Reason, which is just one of its manifestations; and that which does not fit the paradigm is dismissed as non-dialectical. The dialectic which is the focus of the Critique, into whose foundations, limits, and intelligibility Sartre inquires,

is dialectical Reason, knowledge of the dialectic. Yet, he adopts the same dialectical Reason into whose foundations he is inquiring (History) as his point of departure in that inquiry (the Cogito). And because he assumes a fundamentally dualistic ontology, according to which reason and matter are irreducibly opposed, and a commitment to the primacy and privilege of human subjectivity (inspired by the translucent Cogito of Descartes and the absolute subject of Hegel), the dialectic which characterizes Reason can never, for Sartre, be matched, or adequately explained in terms of a "purely" material dialectic. For him, it would be tantamount to abandoning its very rationality.

It is our belief that, contrary to the dictates of Cartesianism and Sartrean existentialism, Reason is not primary, nor paradigmatic; nor does it occupy a privileged region of being. If the dialectic (of Reason and History) has any reality and foundation at all, it must be as part of the material world, which is the only world we know. This fundamental commitment to a through and through materialism has been the premise of our thinking so far (see Introduction); it is elaborated and clarified in greater detail in subsequent chapters. We believe that it is the implicit point of departure of Marxism, phenomenology, and structuralism, and an essential one if we are to avoid the mystifications to which dualism and idealism are systematically<sup>13</sup> vulnerable (see chapter V). Thus, we

maintain that consciousness is a material process like any other, and dialectical reason one of its manifestations. Otherwise, where has it sprung from? "The fact of the matter is that the only way in which dialectics can come about is dialectically, and unless reality has always been dialectical, it cannot be dialectical at all."<sup>14</sup> Either consciousness belongs to the material world and is subject to the same principles of explanation as it (dialectical, not mechanical), or it is a miracle of life, conjured into being without rhyme or reason: "Either thinking is absolutely identical with all other forms of material activity, or it is a self-explaining miracle."<sup>15</sup>

How, we must ask Sartre, can we understand the genesis of dialectical reason from a nature which is mechanical and capable only of going round in circles? How did this mechanical "inorganic" nature produce dialectical "organic" man? Nowhere does Sartre address this problem, let alone resolve it, and we cannot be surprised, for:

. . . surely no one is going to argue in all seriousness that a development as dramatic and far-reaching as the birth of man occurred simply as the miraculous spin-off from a mechanistic merry-go-round dumbly waiting the human kiss of life before it could 'become dialectical.'<sup>16</sup>

Sartre seems (almost neurotically)<sup>17</sup> incapable of abandoning Cartesianism and its notion of matter and things Natural as mechanical and inert. We wonder how he can continue to resist the conclusions of post-Newtonian

science: that matter is more process than product (a wave rather than a discrete particle, for example); that it contains the principle of its own movement within it and does not need mind to move it; that motion is the intrinsic mode of existence of all matter; that consciousness shares this mode and is itself only matter which thinks: that "The fact that thinking is a specific form of activity does not make it any the less material on that account?"<sup>18</sup>

Hoffman, whom we have been quoting above, associates, rightly we believe, the Cartesian view of matter which is implicit in Sartre's criticism of dialectical materialism-- inert, fixed, and externally and mechanically motivated only-- with "bourgeois" philosophy, i.e. with the philosophy of a ruling, privileged, and exploiting class, in whose interest it is to conceive of the material world as unchanging: "No exploiting class can accept the view that the very foundation of society, including human nature, is itself in a continual process of change."<sup>19</sup> They rather yearn for a world of timelessness, of frozen verities (of Reason), confirming the "necessity" (and therefore the security) of their privileged social position.<sup>20</sup> The fact that Sartre continues to regard matter as "inertia . . . incapable of producing anything by itself," not only situates him "2000 years behind the development of the sciences,"<sup>21</sup> but, perhaps more significantly, secures him within the illusions of the epoch, i.e. within the confines of the

bourgeois (and we would add phallogentric)<sup>22</sup> ideology of his time.

The division of labour in capitalist society divides the thinkers from the doers. This social division is reflected in the metaphysical bifurcation of being effected by the thinkers, into consciousness which motivates and directs and matter which moves under its direction and according to (mindless) materialist, mechanical principles. In this respect, Sartre's theory of the dialectic, like his accounts of alienation and history, is more mythical than scientific, in that it remains entirely confined within the constraints of the very consciousness it is attempting to explain. As such, it may provide us with a valuable ethnographic document for further structural and Marxist analysis, but once again it cannot be said to constitute scientific anthropology. Once again, we can confront him with a Marxist critique of his own Marxist phenomenology: for, the apodictic certainties of consciousness can only reveal what consciousness thinks is the case, and not what in fact and practice is the case. Thought is conditioned by the historical and material situation in which it occurs, and it reflects that situation: it must itself, therefore, be further explained and demystified by reference to those conditions in which it is situated. This distinction, between what conscious human activity thinks it is doing, and what it is in fact doing is crucial, and especially

so in any approach to social reality which is attempting to be both phenomenological and Marxist: "Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness."<sup>23</sup>

When Lévi-Strauss claims that kinship structures can be adequately explained only by an appeal to unconscious determinants and not by the accounts of the natives who think they know exactly what determines their relationships and social arrangements, he is acknowledging the same crucial distinction-- between thought and the reality of which it is the thought, and the same methodological principle articulated by Marx above. His practice is closer to Marxism than is that of Sartre, who even in his Marxism persists in his refusal to submit Reason to the court of Being.

#### Lévi-Strauss and Dialectical Reason

Lévi-Strauss, by contrast, argues the opposite view, i.e.: (i) that all thought is dialectical, including analytic thought and the thought of non-historical man; and (ii) that this dialectic of thought is grounded in an "objective coding," i.e. in Nature, and not in praxis or Culture, as Sartre insists. Praxis for Lévi-Strauss is just one form, and not the foundation, of a more fundamental material dialectic.

In contrast to Sartre, who identifies the dialectic with History and individual conscious experience, Lévi-Strauss associates it with system and universal unconscious structures, which he believes determine both thought and action in the final analysis. This view, according to Sartre, reduces the subject of History to a mere epiphenomenon,<sup>24</sup> and this more general problem of subjectivity is explored in the next chapter. Meanwhile, we will examine Lévi-Strauss's account of the dialectic in this section, and its focus on superstructures, rather than on praxis, and on practices and processes rather than events. He argues as follows:

If, as I have said, the conceptual scheme governs and defines practices, it is because these, which the ethnologist studies as discrete realities placed in time and space and distinctive in their particular modes of life and forms of civilisation, are not to be confused with praxis . . . . Marxism, if not Marx himself, has too commonly reasoned as though practices followed directly from praxis. Without questioning the undoubted primacy of infrastructures, I believe that there is always a mediator between praxis and practices, namely the conceptual scheme by the operation of which, matter and form, neither with any independent existence, are realized as structures, that is as entities which are both empirical and intelligible. It is to this theory of superstructures scarcely touched on by Marx, that I hope to make a contribution.<sup>25</sup>

Lévi-Strauss makes his contribution to Marxist thought by examining the "savage mind" as it is objectified in myths, totemism, and kinship systems, for example. His

analyses reveal that the structure of primitive thought, and thus by extension, of all thought, and not just that of "Historical" man, is indeed dialectical. It is, first of all, totalizing thought; secondly, it consists in the reconciliation and transcendence of perceived oppositions and contradictions; thirdly, it is systematic, i.e. logical, in that its significance derives, not from the discrete elements themselves, but from the relationship between them; and finally it integrates thought and content, analysis and synthesis in one movement. We will now examine each of these characteristics of primitive thought in turn.

Primitive thought as  
totalizing thought

Primitive thought is dialectical, first because it is totalizing thought; i.e. it makes sense of the whole of lived experience as a whole. The aim of mythology for example, is to:

. . . reach by the shortest possible means a general understanding of the universe--and not only a general but a total understanding. That is, it is a way of thinking which must imply that if you don't understand everything, you don't explain anything.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, the classificatory system, known as totemism, by which individuals and groups are associated with animal and plant species, is also a means by which primitive man totalizes experience in this sense. It consists of:

. . . classificatory schemes which allow the natural and social universe to be grasped as an organized whole . . . . The whole set constitutes a sort of conceptual apparatus which filters unity through multiplicity, multiplicity through unity, diversity through identity and identity through diversity.<sup>27</sup>

While marriage rules both institute and constitute culture itself, by establishing a "total structure of reciprocity" by means of which relations of kinship, residency, and attitude are introduced for each member of the group at one and the same time.

Thus myths, totemism, and kinship rules exemplify dialectical thought, in their totalization of the world of experience. Each constitutes a closed system of meaning which exhausts reality. It is therefore as true of the "savage" mind as it is of the "domesticated mind" of civilized man, that either everything makes sense, or nothing does, and, according to Lévi-Strauss:

. . . it is in this intransigent refusal on the part of the savage mind to allow anything human (or even living) to remain alien to it, that the real principle of dialectical reason is to be found.<sup>28</sup>

Primitive thought as the  
transcendence of contradictions

Furthermore, the totalizing movement of primitive thought, again like the dialectical reason which characterizes historical man, consists in the reconciliation and transcendence of contradictions, contrasts, oppositions,

and differences:

. . . the dialectic of superstructures, like that of language, consists in setting up constitutive units (which for this purpose, have to be defined unequivocally, that is, by contrasting them in pairs) so as to be able by means of them to elaborate a system which plays the part of a synthesizing operator between ideas and facts; thereby turning the latter into signs. The mind thus passes from empirical diversity to conceptual simplicity and then from conceptual simplicity to meaningful synthesis.<sup>29</sup>

Music and myth, for example, are systems of objectified thought,<sup>30</sup> which in distinct but formally similar ways, overcome the most fundamental of oppositions, that between Nature and Culture. This is achieved through the reconciliation (in thought, of course) of a series of binary oppositions, which taken together constitute the Nature-Culture dichotomy: the oppositions between synchrony and diachrony, continuity and discontinuity, diversity and identity, the general and the particular, the ideal and the real, and so on.

Both myth and music, for example, ". . . overcome the contradiction between historical, enacted time and a permanent constant."<sup>31</sup> They are like discourse, in that they both require a temporal dimension in which to unfold and ". . . this time is irreversible and therefore irredeemably diachronic."<sup>32</sup> Yet they also share the characteristic of language, which in its universality transcends articulate expression and thus ". . . obliterates time:"

. . . music transmutes the segment devoted to listening to it into a synchronic totality, enclosed within itself. Because of the internal organisation of the musical work, the act of listening to it immobilizes passing time; it catches and enfolds it . . . while we are listening to it we enter into a kind of immortality.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, myths, which purport to explain the origin of cooking for example, reconcile similar differences. Raw food is associated with Nature, and cooked food with Culture. Thus, cooking itself, is " . . . conceived of in native thought as a form of mediation . . . between heaven and earth, life and death, nature and society."<sup>34</sup>

Totemism resolves the same oppositions by posing-- "ideologically"--relations between the natural and the cultural series. An homology is asserted between the artificially (i.e. culturally) instituted diversity between men (viz. their system of social functions) and the naturally existing diversity between animal and plant species. The latter act as a " . . . mediating set which man employs to overcome the opposition between nature and culture and think of them as a whole."<sup>35</sup> Totemism provides primitive man with a whole system of reference, which, operating by means of contrasts--between general and particular, and nature and culture, enables the group adopting it to "focus" on all planes, from the most abstract to the most concrete, the most cultural to the most natural, without changing its intellectual instrument.<sup>36</sup> By its means, it is always possible to pass from species (nature) to

an ideal category of thought (culture).

The structure of the totemic system consists of successive dichotomies or binary oppositions: high/low, simple/multiple, hidden/exposed, shallow/deep, sky/land, day/night, summer/winter, wet/dry, male/female, static/mobile, coloured/non-coloured, and so on. All classification proceeds by such pairs and only ceases when it is no longer possible to establish oppositions.

Relying as it does on naturally occurring phenomena, the totemic system has a practically unlimited capacity for extension; and by means of it, the entire universe can be represented as a continuum made up of successive oppositions:

The alleged totemism is no more than a particular expression, by means of a special nomenclature formed of animals and plant names . . . which is its sole distinctive characteristic, of correlations and oppositions which may be formalized in other ways, for example, among certain tribes of North and South America, by oppositions of the type sky/earth, war/peace, upstream/downstream, red/white etc. The most general model of this and the most systematic application, is to be found perhaps in China, in the opposition of the two principles of Yang and Yin, as male and female, day and night, Summer and Winter, the union of which results in an organized totality (tao) such as the conjugal pair, the day or the year. Totemism is thus reduced to a particular fashion of formulating a general problem, viz., how to make opposition, instead of being an obstacle to integration serve rather to produce it.<sup>37</sup>

Kinship systems represent a third solution to the same logical problem: establishing (social) distinctions

and at the same time producing integration out of their opposition. It is a solution which is formally similar to that provided by myth and totemism as outlined above: operating by means of binary oppositions--that between cross- and parallel-cousins being fundamental to any kinship structure according to Lévi-Strauss, and at the same time overcoming these oppositions.

The incest rule resolves the Nature/Culture dichotomy, for example, by being ". . . at once social, in that it is a rule, and pre-social in its universality . . . at once on the threshold of culture, in culture, and in one sense . . . culture itself."<sup>38</sup> And while it appears superficially as a prohibition, as a negative expression of the rule of exogamy, and therefore as an essentially divisive force, its function is entirely positive; tending as it does to ". . . ensure the total and continuous circulation of the group's most important assets, its wives and daughters," it simultaneously unites those it separates, and ". . . ensures the dominance of the social over the biological and of the cultural over the natural."<sup>39</sup> By setting up oppositions between members of the social group and classifying members of the same "biological family" into opposing moieties, the kinship system "socializes" human nature and at the same time ensures the survival of the group as a group.

Primitive thought is once more shown to be dialectical in just the same way as is historical thought: passing from the awareness of oppositions to their resolution in a synthesis which transcends and at the same time preserves them.

#### Primitive thought as logical

Primitive thought is shown to be dialectical in a further sense. In their systems of representation (myth, totemism, and structures of kinship, for example), it is the relations between the terms which generate meaning and not something intrinsic to the terms themselves. The significance and intelligibility of each system resides in its logical form, therefore, rather than in its material content considered apart from that form. A particular myth, a particular totemic classification, a particular rule of residency or affiliation, appears arbitrary and unintelligible when only its individual terms are considered, or if it is considered as a separate and isolable phenomenon of a particular culture. But a term becomes coherent and rational when it is seen as part of a whole set, and a particular myth or totemic classification is intelligible when seen as a specific instance in the larger context of articulated relations between man and the objects of his natural environment.<sup>40</sup>

The terms never have any intrinsic significance. Their meaning is one of 'position'--a function of the history and cultural context on the one hand and of the structural system in which they are called upon to appear on the other.<sup>41</sup>

We should not regard myths, therefore, as first and foremost primitive attempts to explain natural phenomena; on the contrary, natural phenomena " . . . are rather the medium through which myths try to explain facts which are themselves not of a natural but a logical order"<sup>42</sup>--contradictions and connections, oppositions and correlations, continuities and discontinuities, etc.

Likewise, natural species are chosen as totemic classifiers, not because of some intrinsic empirical property, not because they are "good to eat," for example, but because of their logical potential, i.e. because they are "good to think."<sup>43</sup> The particular elements of the system, the individual species in totemism, for example, when considered apart from the system, have no significance. Their meaning consists entirely in the network of relationships which unites them within a system, and which is considered by native thought to be analogous to the network of relationships which characterizes their own social organization:

The homology they evoke is not between social groups and natural species, but between the differences which manifest themselves on the level of groups on the one hand and on that of species on the other. They are thus based on the postulate of an homology between two systems of differences, one of which occurs in nature and the other in culture.<sup>44</sup>

For example, the designation of two clans as Eagle and Bear, does not signify that clan A is like an eagle and clan B like a bear, but that clan A differs from clan B as the eagle differs from the bear. The terms acquire meaning only from the relations which they bear to each other within a larger system of differences.

This is more obviously true of kinship systems. The requirement to exchange particular women clearly does not derive from any "objective" or naturally occurring meaning or significance of the prescribed or prohibited women, but from the position they fill in a logical structure. In fact, the same women that were originally offered can be exchanged in return in some cultures, just as the potlatch rites often entail the circulating exchange of the same item. Matrimonial exchange is intelligible only when it is seen as a particular case of a wider system of reciprocity, consisting of multiple forms of exchange, embracing material goods, rights, and persons. The prescription to exchange particular women and the correlated prohibition against marriage with the same women (two sides of the same coin) are logically prior to the objects which are prescribed and proscribed (exchanged):

If there is a prohibition it is not because there is some feature of the object which excludes it from the number of possibilities. It acquires these features only in so far as it is incorporated in a certain system of antithetical relationships, the role of which is to establish inclusions

by means of exclusions, and vice-versa, because this is precisely the one means of establishing reciprocity, which is the reason for the whole undertaking.<sup>45</sup>

The sign of "otherness" which characterizes the cross-cousin is thus the outcome of his or her position in the structure of reciprocity, and not of any intrinsic property of the person designated. The basic elements of a kinship system are, therefore, not persons, but relationships: pairs, cycles, couples. And the material out of which culture is built, since according to Lévi-Strauss the rule of reciprocity institutes culture itself, is logical relations, oppositions, correlations, and the like. The distinction between logical thought, characteristic of civilized man, and pre-logical thought characteristic of the primitive (assumed by many, including Sartre, and articulated by Lévy-Bruhl in La Mentalité Primitive) is thus exposed as a false antinomy by Lévi-Strauss:

The savage mind is logical in the same sense and the same fashion as ours . . . its thought proceeds through understanding, not affectivity, with the aid of distinctions and oppositions, not by confusion and participation . . . so-called primitive thought is a quantified form of thought.<sup>46</sup>

A dialectical logic  
of the concrete

Lévi-Strauss describes the logic of primitive thought as a qualitative logic of the concrete. Facts--cooked food, eagles, bears, brothers, and sisters--act as

signifiers; and their combination in systems of relationships permits the native to conceptualize his world as a meaningful whole, and at the same time resolve problems which are essentially philosophical and intellectual.<sup>47</sup>

Since events constitute the elements in these logical systems, as signs, they have the qualities of both percepts and concepts, of both images and ideas: they ". . . resemble images in being concrete entities, but they resemble concepts in their powers of reference."<sup>48</sup> Form and content are therefore indissociable in primitive thought. Structures (form) are created by means of events (contents), which acquire significance only because of their place within the structured whole. The relationship between form and content is truly dialectical in that each acquires its meaning from the other, while neither can be reduced to it.<sup>49</sup>

Just as there is an integration of form and content, there is also a corresponding integration of synthesis and analysis in primitive thought. Both are equally necessary and inseparable moments of a single intellectual enterprise. Lévi-Strauss claims that primitive thought goes: ". . . to its furthest limits in both directions, while at the same time remaining capable of mediating between the two poles."<sup>50</sup> This inseparability and irreducibility of form and content, analysis and synthesis lends additional support to the claim that primitive thought, while not

(yét) historical, is nevertheless dialectical.

The Confrontation  
Between Lévi-Strauss and Sartre

Sartre's identification of dialectical reason with praxis and Historical man<sup>51</sup> has been further challenged by Lévi-Strauss's analyses of the practices of non-historical men, which have proven to be equally dialectical, though not Historical in the required sense. And while the two thinkers would seem to agree on the essential structures of dialectical reason and where to look for it: ". . . in the relation of men with nature, with 'starting conditions', and in the relation of men with one another,"<sup>52</sup> they disagree profoundly about its foundation and, following from this, the appropriate mode of access to it, and hence to man himself.

They agree, for example, that dialectical reason is not a determinism; that it is a totalizing movement originating, in some sense, in man himself, by which events acquire meaning through their integration within a concrete synthesis; and that this synthesis is not opposed to analysis but rather inclusive of it. Sartre, for example, defines the dialectical method of his existential Marxism

". . . as a regressive-progressive and analytic-synthetic method";<sup>53</sup> while Lévi-Strauss speaks of dialectical reason as ". . . the bridge forever extended and improved which

analytic reason throws out over an abyss," not as "something other than analytic reason . . . but as something additional in analytic reason."<sup>54</sup>

But this is the extent of their agreement: their differences are more fundamental.

Lévi-Strauss maintains, for example, that the logic of conceptual schemes (i.e. of superstructures) is invariably and universally dialectical because the human mind is constrained to think that way (in terms of binary oppositions, etc.) by unconscious mental structures:

. . . all forms of social life are substantially of the same nature . . . they consist of systems of behaviour that represent the projection, on the level of conscious and socialized thought, of universal laws which regulate the unconscious activities of the mind.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, these laws regulating the unconscious activities of the mind are ultimately described as laws of nature, determined finally by the physical structure of the brain and the nervous system.<sup>56</sup> In this respect, Lévi-Strauss follows Engels in founding the dialectical movement of social life and history in nature itself:

It is, therefore, from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted. For they are nothing but the most general laws of these two aspects of historical development, as well as of thought itself . . . (Hegel's) mistake lies in the fact that these laws are foisted on nature and history as laws of thought, and not deduced from them . . . The universe, willy-nilly, is made out to be arranged

in accordance with a system of thought which is itself only the product of a definite stage of evolution of human thought. If we turn the thing around, ~~then~~ everything becomes simple, and the dialectical laws that look so extremely mysterious in idealist philosophy at once become simple and clear as noon day.<sup>57</sup>

Since the distinction between nature and culture is more conventional (methodological or ideological), than it is foundational or essential (ontological or metaphysical);<sup>58</sup> and since cultural phenomena, in this case group practices and representative systems, are determined, at least, formally, by unconscious laws of thought, the appropriate methods to apply to them, according to Lévi-Strauss, are "... those usually reserved for the study of the physical world,"<sup>59</sup> i.e. the scientific method of inquiry.

Needless to say, this brings him "foursquare in conflict"<sup>60</sup> with Sartre.

In the first place, for Sartre, both the philosophical implications and the scientific methodology of structuralism amount to a denial of the specificity, uniqueness, and logical priority of man and praxis, which it has been his concern to establish as the only intelligible foundation for Marxism and anthropology in the Critique. From his point of view, the insertion of culture in nature and nature in culture is tantamount to a reduction of the cultural to the natural; of the essentially human, active, historical, and transcendent to the inert, the inorganic, the mechanical,

and the determined; a reduction of existence to "exis."

It constitutes a denial of freedom, which for Sartre, is the unique property of man. Although he no longer claims that man is "absolute freedom" in the sense suggested by Being and Nothingness, and now admits that man is indeed constrained to act and think in determinate ways by pre-existing structures of which he is often unconscious, Sartre, nevertheless, continues to insist that this is true only because those constraints on freedom are of freedom's own making, and therefore reversible by freedom, and not immanent in existence itself (cf. the practico-inert). The constraints on freedom are: "... created by activity which has no structure but suffers its results as structure."<sup>61</sup> Sartre believes now, as he has always done, that only freedom can limit the freedom which is man, and he will allow no external constraints on praxis; to him, that would be to reduce human being to that of a material (mechanical) thing-- to reduce the essentially active, to that which is merely acted upon.

For Sartre, praxis is the "irreducible and indubitable unit of existence itself,"<sup>62</sup> beyond which there can be no further reduction. While structuralism finds "the irreducible level of reality" beyond, or beneath, praxis; in Lévi-Strauss's case in the "physico-chemical conditions" of life itself.<sup>63</sup>

From Sartre's point of view the structuralist position amounts to: (i) a denial of both subjectivity and History, and (ii) a return to what he thinks of as "Cartesian" analytic positivism; and therefore, (iii) a counter-revolutionary ideology: ". . . le dernier barrage que la bourgeoisie puisse dresser contre Marx"<sup>64</sup> (the last barrier the bourgeoisie can build against Marx).

It should be clear, however, from the exposition of Lévi-Strauss's thought which has already been given, that Sartre cannot sustain any of these criticisms against structural anthropology. They stem from a misunderstanding and oversimplification of both the aspirations and implications of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, as well as from his own inability (or reluctance) to overcome the Cartesian point of departure itself. I will now consider each of these objections in turn.

#### Structuralism and the denial of the subject

We saw in the last chapter that Lévi-Strauss may ignore History and praxis in his efforts to develop a theory of superstructures, but he never denies them, nor their relevance for anthropology;<sup>65</sup> nor does he ever suggest that his is the complete or final account of man and his behaviour. I do not want to repeat here the arguments of the last chapter which demonstrate this, but I will cite some further passages in its support:

If, as I have said, the conceptual scheme governs and defines practices, it is because these . . . are not to be confused with praxis which--and here at least I agree with Sartre--constitutes the fundamental totality for the sciences of man.<sup>66</sup>

Although there is undoubtedly a dialectical relation between the social structure and systems of categories, the latter are not an effect or result of the former: each, at the cost of laborious mutual adjustments translates certain historical and local modalities of the relations between men and the world which forms their common substratum.<sup>67</sup>

My aim here is to outline a theory of superstructures . . . . We are however merely studying the shadows on the wall of the Cave without forgetting that it is only the attention we give them which lends them a resemblance of reality.<sup>68</sup>

Nor does Lévi-Strauss's structuralism imply a denial of subjectivity or freedom, i.e. the ability of the human subject to transcend given conditions. Describing a logic of thought and locating unconscious determinants of praxis denies neither the praxis, nor the freedom which is its condition of possibility. Establishing objective foundations of the subjective does not destroy it; nor does it entail a vulgar, mechanical, or deterministic materialism. As we have already indicated, Sartre assumes it does because his thought is still trapped within the Cartesian polarities: matter as inert and moving mechanically according to the laws of causal determinism and only in response to an external stimulus; mind as self-moving and not according to the same causal-mechanical principles. Mind, therefore,

cannot be materially based, on this account, without being at the same time denied its specificity in the process.

But a consistently dialectical philosophy does not assume an initial dualism of mind and matter, nor characterize the latter as merely mechanical. Mind and matter, subject and object, have no independent existence and no independent significance from a truly dialectical perspective: they are inseparable moments of one interaction and one experience, and they determine and imply each other, both in actuality and in meaning:

It is no longer a case of the operation of an agent on an inert object, nor of the return of an object, promoted to the role of an agent, or a subject dispossessing itself in its favour. . . . The beings confront each other face to face as subjects and objects at the same time.<sup>69</sup>

A consistently dialectical materialism, therefore, offers no threat to subjectivity or freedom. On the contrary, one might argue that unless freedom is to remain "a mere abstraction, a metaphysical state or essence,"<sup>70</sup> a scientific understanding of man and his world in terms of their significant structural properties, such as Lévi-Strauss (following Marx) tries to provide, is an essential condition of the real possibility of that freedom.

What structuralism does challenge, however, is the "place occupied by the conscious self in the production of human artifacts,"<sup>71</sup> and it does reduce significantly the role of the cogito in the determination of human thought

and action, and thus in rendering it intelligible. It is, in fact, this "décentrement du sujet"<sup>72</sup> (decentering of the (Cartesian) subject) which provokes and unsettles Sartre. It is certainly implicit in Lévi-Strauss's analyses of myths, totemism, and kinship systems, which show that primitive thought is meaningful and intelligible in ways unbeknownst to the thinkers themselves. But this decentering is also an explicit principle of both his philosophy and his chosen methodology.

In his appeal to Rousseau as the "Founder of the Sciences of Man,"<sup>73</sup> for example, Lévi-Strauss cites the following as a methodological rule for anthropology:

When one wants to study men one must look around oneself; but to study man one must first learn to look into the distance; one must first see differences in order to discover characteristics.<sup>74</sup>

Two principles are contained in this rule: (i) to understand man, as opposed to men, you must study those men most remote from yourself and from your own socio-historical situation; (ii) together with a "systematic will to identify with the other," there must also be "an obstinate refusal to identify with self."<sup>75</sup>

Sartre's philosophical anthropology fails on both counts. By addressing himself to the knowledge of men, those of his own socio-historical group, he closes the door on knowledge of man; and by choosing the phenomenological method he imprisons himself in his own Cogito:

Descartes made it possible to attain universality, but conditionally on remaining psychological and individual; by socializing the Cogito, Sartre merely exchanges one prison for another. Each subject's group and period now takes the place of timeless consciousness . . . Descartes, who wanted to found a physics, separated Man from Society, Sartre who claims to found an anthropology, separates his own society from others. A Cogito which strives to be ingenuous and raw--retreats into individualism and empiricism and is lost in the blind alleys of social psychology.<sup>76</sup>

Lévi-Strauss cites geology, psychoanalysis, and Marxism as appropriate models for anthropology:

All three demonstrate that understanding consists in reducing one type of reality to another; that the true reality is never the most obvious; and that the nature of truth is already indicated in the care it takes to remain elusive.<sup>77</sup>

Whereas phenomenology postulates "a kind of continuity between experience and reality" which he rejects:

. . . because of its over-indulgent attitude towards the illusions of subjectivity. The raising of personal pre-occupations to the dignity of philosophical problems is far too likely to lead to a sort of shop-girl metaphysics . . . Instead of doing away with metaphysics, phenomenology and existentialism introduced two methods of providing it with alibis.<sup>78</sup>

Lévi-Strauss appeals to language as an unreflecting totalization, i.e. as an example of "a dialectical and totalizing entity but one outside (or beneath) consciousness and will."<sup>79</sup> Structural linguistics has discovered unconscious structural laws which determine what can and cannot be said in language, and thus revealed a

" . . . human reason which has its reasons and of which man knows nothing." Language, according to Lévi-Strauss, like myth, speaks through man and not man through language; the reflecting subject, therefore, is neither primary nor primordial.

Sartre would not dispute this characterization of language; he would, however, point out that the apparent autonomy of language is not necessary and intrinsic to language, but a contingent and historical fact of human existence. It is one of the structures of alienation; part of the practico-inert, which man himself has made. For Sartre, language is a structure which constrains human thought; but this constraint, like all others admitted by Sartre, is not immanent in man or nature, nor exterior to praxis, nor a mere matter of fact. Language is a social structure: the institutionalized effect of multiple praxes, of multiple discourses and "paroles," which have occurred within conditions of scarcity, and therefore within an alienated human existence. It is because of these contingent conditions--of scarcity and alienated humanity--that language limits freedom and actively hinders contemporary man from speaking the "truth": " . . . absolutely no one, either in the East or in the West writes or speaks a word about us or our contemporaries that is not a gross error."<sup>80</sup>

Presumably he looks forward to a time when language will not constrain but liberate men--after the suppression

of scarcity and the alienation consequent upon it.

Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, does not see language as a contingent constraint in spite of its autonomy; for him, language is not a temporary mask which ~~hides~~ us from ourselves, nor an historical restriction of our freedom, or of our ability to speak the truth, or even perceive our own true natures; it is rather:

. . . a mechanism which, with the proper degree of self-awareness and the use of methodological tools, we can hold up for inspection as a direct expression of our own fundamental thought processes.<sup>81</sup>

Structuralism, therefore, does not deny, destroy, or ignore subjectivity as Sartre fears. What it does, however, is displace it, as Cogito, as the self-conscious agent-subject, from the position of privilege and priority which Sartre strives to preserve for it in the Critique. Translucent consciousness is not the final irreducible reality for structuralism; nor the final arbiter of "truth" and intelligibility; nor the primordial source of human activity. Structuralism claims that we must probe deeper than the Cogito in our efforts to understand humanity and the limits and extent of our freedom.

Structuralism and positivism:  
the role of analysis

Sartre further misunderstands and oversimplifies structuralism by assuming that because it advocates a "scientific"<sup>82</sup>

method, i.e. one appropriate to the study of the material world, it must therefore operate solely on the basis of analytic reason, and because of this be in principle incapable of understanding the phenomenon, i.e. man, who is essentially dialectical.

. . . derrière tout ce courant de pensée on retrouve une attitude très Cartésienne . . . . C'est une charge à fonds contre le temps. On ne veut pas un dépassement ou du moins pas du dépassement qui se fasse par l'homme. Nous revenons au positivisme. Seulement ce n'est plus un positivisme des faits, c'est un positivisme des signes . . . . La méthode des sciences est analytique, celle de la philosophie ne peut être que dialectique.<sup>83</sup>

Again, Sartre's critique is only possible because of his prior assumption of a fundamental ontological difference between man and the rest of the material world; an assumption we, and Lévi-Strauss, do not share. His critique also assumes that analytical and dialectical reason are two distinct and separable kinds of reason, and that one of them has priority where anthropological understanding is concerned. Lévi-Strauss addresses specific criticisms to this aspect of Sartre's thought in his chapter on "History and Dialectic."

First of all he observes that:

Sartre vacillates between two conceptions of dialectical reason. Sometimes he opposes dialectical reason and analytical reason as truth and error, if not as god and the devil, while at other times these two kinds of reason are apparently complementary.<sup>84</sup>

This is true; Sartre does vacillate and neither conception is acceptable. The first, which opposes dialectical and analytical reason as truth and error, would discredit all scientific knowledge, and perhaps even the Critique itself:

... for the work entitled Critique de la raison dialectique is the result of the author's exercise of his own analytic reason; he defines, distinguishes, classifies and opposes.<sup>85</sup>

The second, weaker conception, according to which dialectical and analytical reason are complementary, renders Sartre's polemic against analytic reason superfluous: for, if analytic and dialectical reason are different but complementary ways of comprehending man, then analytic reason cannot be opposed to dialectical reason, nor can one kind of reason be given priority over the other. But Sartre clearly does oppose the two reasons in the Critique, and privilege dialectical reason, by attributing to it a reality "sui generis" and independent of analytical reason.

It is possible to argue here, in defense of Sartre, however, that he does, after all, have only one conception of dialectical reason--though he himself does not make this clear: a conception close to that of Lévi-Strauss, whereby " . . . all reason is dialectical." Dialectical reason, according to Lévi-Strauss, is only "analytical reason in action";<sup>86</sup> and analytical reason, for Sartre, is simply dialectical reason "in repose." Sartre separates the two

and speaks as if they were distinct because that is the position of those he is opposing. What he is criticizing is what he sees as the reduction, in some science and in "vulgar" Marxism, of this one reason, which we may call dialectical in its broadest sense, to one of its poles, the analytical; and the consequent forgetfulness (or denial) of the synthetic, progressive, or more narrowly-defined dialectical pole. It is analytic reason as distinguished from and forgetful of dialectical reason that Sartre rejects, but not analytical reason properly conceived, as part of and inseparable from dialectical thought.<sup>87</sup>

However, even if we grant him this proviso, Sartre still remains at fault in assuming that because Lévi-Strauss espouses a through-and-through materialism and therefore empirico-deductive methods of inquiring into social reality, he therefore renounces dialectical reason in either the narrow or the broad sense, and therefore all hope of understanding dialectical reason in action, i.e. humanity.

In fact, the structuralist method followed by Lévi-Strauss and outlined in "History and Dialectic" is thoroughly dialectical and actually exemplifies Sartre's own "progressive-regressive" method as proposed in the Critique. It is, however, as Lévi-Strauss points out, ". . . progressive-regressive not once but twice over."<sup>88</sup> The first movement consists in observing, describing, and analyzing the phenomena, to:

... try and grasp its historical antecedents as far as we can delve into the past, and bring all those facts back to the light of day to incorporate them into a meaningful totality.<sup>89</sup>

Having constituted the object by this double movement of analysis and synthesis, the second movement, the "properly scientific work" can begin. This repeats the first, but "on a different plane and at a different level," at the level of unconscious structures, for example. Thus dialectical reason, in the narrower sense considered above, provides the human sciences with the phenomenon, "a reality with which it alone can furnish them." Then this preliminary stage of constitution is succeeded by a second dialectical investigation, by further decomposing and recomposing, detotalizing and retotalizing at another level-- and this constitutes the "properly scientific work." "With all respect to Sartrean phenomenology, we can hope to find in it only a point of departure and not one of arrival."<sup>90</sup>

Throughout his work, Lévi-Strauss emphasizes the "mutual implications of the concept of structure and dialectical thought,"<sup>91</sup> of anthropological inquiry, and the demands of comprehension; e.g.:

Forms of social existence cannot be apprehended simply from the outside--the investigator must be able to make a personal reconstruction of the synthesis characterizing them; he must not merely analyse their elements, but apprehend them as a whole in the form of a personal experience--his own.<sup>92</sup>

To this end he insists that the anthropologist do field work, to accomplish that "inner revolution" required to enable him to re-constitute the social phenomenon in his own lived experience.

Analysis alone is by no means considered to be an appropriate tool for anthropology:

. . . it is not enough to break down and to dissect. Social facts are not reducible to scattered fragments; they are lived by men, and this subjective consciousness is as much a form of their reality as objective characteristics.<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of the human sciences is not, according to Lévi-Strauss, this constitution of man, which is for him only the first--though essential--stage of scientific inquiry; but rather his dissolution; and the integration of " . . . culture in nature and finally . . . life within the whole of its physico-chemical conditions."<sup>94</sup>

Sartre misinterprets this project as a reductive one, when it is really integrative; aiming at a unified science of the material world which preserves the two poles (culture and nature) without reducing one to the other. But Sartre sees it as a reduction of dialectical man to inert nature, and therefore as a denial of the dialectic; for, to him, nature:

. . . ne connaît que l'indépendance des forces. Les éléments matériels sont liés les uns aux autres, agissent les uns sur les autres. Mais ce lien est toujours extérieur. Il ne s'agit pas

de rapports internes . . . C'est à dire d'un système où l'existence de chaque élément conditionne celle de tous les autres.<sup>95</sup>

Sartre misunderstands both the "nature" and the aspirations of Lévi-Strauss in his criticism.

Natural conditions are not just passively accepted . . . they do not exist in their own right for they are a function of the techniques and way of life of the people who define and give them meaning by developing them in a particular direction. Nature is not itself contradictory. It can become so only in terms of some specific human activity . . . man's relations with his natural environment remain objects of thought: man never perceives them passively.<sup>96</sup>

While all structuralist "reductions" are required to satisfy two conditions: (i) " . . . the phenomena subjected to the reduction must not be impoverished," i.e. everything contributing to its richness and originality must be collected and preserved. "For it is pointless to pick up a hammer unless to hit the nail on the head"; and (ii):

. . . one must be ready to accept, as a consequence of each reduction, the total overturning of any preconceived idea concerning the level whichever it may be, one is striving to attain. The idea of some general humanity to which ethnographic reduction leads, will bear no relation to any one man have formed in advance. And when we do finally succeed in understanding life as a function of inert matter, it will be to discover that the latter has properties very different from those previously attributed to it.<sup>97</sup>

Lévi-Strauss does not, therefore, reduce dialectical man to non-dialectical nature: for he does not even

conceive of nature in those terms. Nor does he adopt Cartesian methods of analysis, but rather explicitly rejects them. Can he be similarly exonerated of Sartre's final criticism of structuralism, therefore--that it is counter-revolutionary, supportive of the status quo, and the last barrage of the bourgeoisie against Marxism?

#### Structuralism and political conservatism

It is this political objection to structuralism which is perhaps the most telling and the most critical from a Marxist's point of view, and to which we will now briefly turn our attention: the question is taken up more thoroughly in our final chapter.

I have argued above that Sartre cannot sustain this objection to Lévi-Strauss on his own terms:<sup>98</sup> there is in Lévi-Strauss's anthropology, neither a refusal of history, nor a denial of subjectivity, nor a reduction of dialectical reason to analytical reason, or of man to mechanical matter. Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss explicitly commits himself to Marxism, both as a method and political project, in his writings.

Sartre's existential Marxism, by comparison, and again on its own terms has appeared, so far, as more vulnerable to the Marxist critique than the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss.<sup>99</sup> We have argued that for Sartre to give priority to the absolute freedom of individual praxis and to

History in the project of anthropology is for him to adopt the very standpoint of bourgeois and therefore ideological thought which he is so quick to detect and denounce in others.

Nevertheless, we are not entirely convinced that his suspicions about structuralism are misplaced--even though he may not himself be able to sustain them. The fear remains, that by grounding the dialectical movement of reason and history in unconscious, universal, and eternal (?) structures of the mind, ultimately of the brain and nervous system--that is, by grounding culture in nature--one does deny the specificity of man and the significance and uniqueness of his praxis, and ultimately his ability to make his own history in accordance with his chosen ends.

We can only dispel this fear by confronting the central issues implicit in our previous discussions of alienation, history, and the dialectic, the resolution of which is fundamental to any anthropological inquiry: that is, the question of the relationship of reality to thought, of infrastructure (base) to superstructure (ideology), of consciousness to that of which it is conscious. What is at stake in the resolution of these questions is human freedom, and the real possibility of social and political revolution.

It is to this central question, therefore, that I will now direct my attention.

Chapter IV  
Consciousness

I have been arguing, against Sartre, the consistently materialist position: (i) that "being" is in a fundamental (i.e. foundational) sense prior to "thought";<sup>1</sup> and (ii) that consciousness is "matter which thinks," and not a uniquely distinct and privileged region of being.

In this chapter I shall explore these two theses in greater detail, from the points of view of Marxism and structuralism, with which they are in an obvious sense compatible; and also from the phenomenological point of view to which they appear, at least prima facie, and certainly in Sartre's case, to be somewhat opposed. I shall argue that the materialist thesis indicated above is not only compatible with and indeed fundamental to all three contemporary theoretical approaches to man, including the phenomenological, but also that it actually provides the necessary common ground for grasping their mutual compatibility, and for perceiving the mutually supportive and complementary relationship which Marxism, structuralism, and phenomenology bear towards each other.

According to historical materialism, consciousness, i.e. what is thought, is a function of historically specific

social and material conditions, of which the decisive determinant is always--in the last instant--the economy, i.e. the mode of production of the necessities of life.

Just how and to what extent the economic base determines thought has been, and continues to be, a bone of much contention within Marxist debate. Any account of that relationship (between thought and its object) must situate itself between two possible extremes: (i) the extreme of so-called "vulgar" Marxism, which endorses a rigidly causal and deterministic relationship between being and thought, whereby the latter passively "reflects" the reality of which it is an effect; and (ii) the opposite extreme (exemplified perhaps by Sartre), of "existential" Marxism, which emphasizes the dialectical character of the relationship and the essentially active and constitutive character of consciousness and praxis.

The former does not do justice to man's responsibility for his praxis and practices; to his experience of "freedom" and to the emphasis in Marx that it is, after all, men who make their own history. The latter often over-compensates for this lacuna by granting too much priority, privilege, and power to the individual subject and his experience of freedom; to the extent, as we have seen in Sartre, of "fetishizing" both the individual and the experience of what often becomes an essentially "abstract" freedom.<sup>2</sup>

I have argued in earlier chapters in favour of a middle position between these two extremes, i.e. in favour of a dialectical and materialist theory of consciousness which decentres but does not deny human choice, agency, and responsibility. Such a theory is required by historical materialism to account for both aspects of its principal tenet—~~that~~ men make history but in circumstances not of their own making. I have suggested that Lévi-Strauss's structuralism offers major contributions to the development of such a theory of consciousness and this will be reconsidered later in the chapter (together with other structuralist theories, those of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, for example). The foundation for such a dialectical and materialist theory of consciousness can, I believe, be established phenomenologically and is, I believe, available to us in the particular phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Consciousness and the World:  
Merleau-Ponty

Fundamental to all phenomenologies is a commitment to the intentionality of consciousness, i.e. to the belief that consciousness is never "pure," but always "conscious of" something. Consciousness, according to phenomenology, is never present to itself as a phenomenon, but always appears (already) conjoined with a world which is given to it as

independent of and external to the consciousness which thinks it.

Two conclusions about the relationship between being and thought can be drawn from this starting-point. Either, (i) neither being nor thought is prior; since they are both given at the same time as inextricably conjoined together in primordial experience. Or, developing this, (ii) being is prior; since it is only as the consciousness of being that there is any consciousness at all.<sup>3</sup> Consciousness becomes self-conscious only later; by deliberately withdrawing from the world with which it is in the first place primordially conjoined. As I already commented in chapter I, the experience of the lonely isolated consciousness separated from the material world and from others is a secondary, and not a primordial, phenomenon of experience.<sup>4</sup> The original experience of consciousness is one of absorption in and inseparability from a world which is not of its own making. Thus, from the phenomenological point of view, it is the "autonomy" of the world rather than the autonomy of consciousness which is primordial; it is "being" which is in some sense prior to "thought."<sup>5</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's descriptions and analyses of the experience of the human subject--specifically as "corps propre," or "corps sujet"--enables us to develop this materialist thesis of consciousness further--from a phenomenological perspective, which unlike that of Sartre, does

not result in the "mystification" of human subjectivity nor its reduction to an essentially "spectator consciousness" (or pour-soi).

In Marxism and Philosophy, Merleau-Ponty comments that in Marxism (as in his own work) "matter" and "consciousness" are never considered separately, but inserted "in the system of human coexistence"; that, man, therefore, is not to be defined as consciousness, since this would be:

. . . a chimerical realization of the human essence, for once man is defined as consciousness, he becomes cut off from things, from his body and his effective existence. He must therefore be defined as a relation to instruments and objects . . . which involves him in the world in such a way as to give him an external aspect, an outside, to make him "objective" at the same time that he is "subjective."<sup>6</sup>

Thus in the Phénoménologie, for example, Merleau-Ponty denies the existence of an "interior man,"<sup>7</sup> and indeed of "interior" thought.<sup>8</sup> His phenomenological descriptions there and elsewhere reveal, on the contrary, that consciousness is primordially prepersonal<sup>9</sup> and thought primordially anonymous (" . . . 'Je pense' ou encore 'quelque chose m'apparaît' . . .");<sup>10</sup> that consciousness is first and foremost a relation to the world, and always outside itself ("eccentric") in the world; that consciousness first "inhabits" and is "at work in" its object before it ever "posits" or "possesses" it in "abstract" cognitive thought.<sup>11</sup> Thought, therefore, on Merleau-Ponty's account, does not

constitute the whole, but is rather primordially situated in it;<sup>12</sup> thus, "We are in a sort of circuit with the socio-historical world."<sup>13</sup>

Thus neither subject nor object, thought nor being, appear in primordial experience as separate phenomena. Furthermore, primordial experience is essentially concrete and eccentric, i.e. in and of the material world, and not in and of any kind of "spiritual" or internal consciousness. The subject of that experience is not a detached Cartesian cogito, nor an immaterial consciousness, but a "corps sujet," a "sujet incarné," therefore a material and concrete subject.

On this account, neither "being" (the so-called "external" or material world), nor "thought" (the so-called "internal" or ideal world) can be said to be in any sense prior or primary. Both are abstractions from a more fundamental lived reality: "existence." In Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology it is "existence" which provides the "troisième terme" between "pour-soi et en-soi"; it is existence which is the primordial foundation of both. Existence, therefore, is prior to both being and thought. The "situation" of concrete human subjects "in circuit" with specific social, historical, and material circumstances, which is at one and the same time an activity and an understanding, a product and a production, is what is prior.

Thus we are provided with the kind of "materialism" we need: one which lies "beneath" Cartesian dichotomies

(subject/object, matter/spirit, moved/unmoved, etc.) and is not therefore confined within them, nor obliged to reduce what is an "ambiguous," "paradoxical," "equivocal,"<sup>14</sup> and essentially dialectical relationship between man and the world, to one of its structures or one of its poles. On this account, existence precedes essence, contingency, necessity,<sup>15</sup> and the unreflected the reflected: thus "being" is prior to "thought." And since consciousness is primordially a relation to the world, and neither personal nor internal, but eccentric and absorbed in its object, then it is indeed "matter which thinks," and not an ontologically distinct region of immaterial being.

Furthermore, according to Merleau-Ponty, our primordial experience is also one of "mitwelt" i.e. of a world inhabited by and shared with other subjects like myself. The system "moi-autrui-le monde" appears first in the initial upsurge of consciousness, for example in the child; and this "initial community" is broken only later in the child's life--after about the third year. "Consciousness of oneself as a unique individual, whose place can be taken by no one else comes later and is not primitive."<sup>16</sup> It depends on the development of sensory-motor and proprioceptive skills, and finally on the perception of one's own body in a mirror image. This makes possible " . . . a kind of schism between the immediate me and the me that can be seen" (as an image in the mirror by the "immediate me," or as a

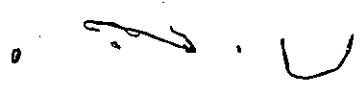
body-object in the world of others). But this first self-consciousness depends on the prior perception of the others as others and is derived from it. Consciousness of self does not on this account found consciousness of others, but vice-versa; for Merleau-Ponty the latter is prior, and is an essentially pre-reflective, "lived" consciousness. "The ego, the I, cannot truly emerge . . ." without doubling itself with an ego in the eyes of the other."<sup>17</sup>

This "dédoublement" makes possible (though not necessary), the separation (and isolation) of consciousness, which according to Merleau-Ponty, is only realized or recognized as such when there is a breakdown of the "primordial communication" which originally characterizes human co-existence in a shared world.

Consciousness is thus, for Merleau-Ponty, a thoroughly historical phenomenon;<sup>18</sup> indeed an epiphenomenon, tied as it is to the existence of the "corps sujet" in specific social and material conditions. Self-consciousness, or subjectivity, i.e. the experience of the self as isolated and separate from others and their respective worlds, is likewise a particular historical event or fact in the history of consciousness, which can, at least in principle, be dated (in the individual as well as in the "species"). Extrapolating from this (and what has been said in earlier chapters), the experience of an

essentially private and "internal" subjectivity should correspond to changes in social conditions which reduce effective communication between individuals; and this indeed appears to have been the case.<sup>19</sup>

Where there are "high levels of authenticity" (to return to Lévi-Strauss's terminology, see chapter I), i.e. in communities of up to five hundred persons, communications between individuals is direct and concrete and the historical fact of "subjectivity" (or "self-consciousness" as outlined above) and the corresponding preoccupation with individual freedom and/or alienation is not present. As communities grow, indirect methods of communication increase and "levels of authenticity" drop. Knowledge of the other no longer originates in a concrete participation in a shared world, but becomes "abstract" knowledge--i.e. knowledge of others who exist elsewhere, in their own world which is not also mine. Individuals in these larger societies, especially when they include differentials of class or caste (which, as I suggested in chapter I, can be seen as necessary concomitants of increasing size and density), experience a loss of the "mitwelt" as they grow beyond infancy and childhood, and a corresponding loss of control, i.e. a sense of their own powerlessness and a sense of estrangement which amounts to "alienation." Self-consciousness, subjectivity, and a concern for individual freedom characterize such societies.



Merleau-Ponty, (echoing Lévi-Strauss, see chapters I and II), observes that the same " . . . history which produced capitalism symbolizes the emergence of subjectivity."<sup>20</sup> We should add that it is the same history which also produced "history" itself: i.e. historical consciousness, subjectivity, and the concern for freedom, individuality, progress, and de-alienation.

Since consciousness, on this account, is both in and of the socio-historical world--"part en part en rapport au monde"-- and in no way "external" to it (or "above," "beyond," or "beneath" it),<sup>21</sup> any causal analysis of the interaction between "thought" and "being" will be inadequate. Abstract and reductive, as it must inevitably be, in giving one term priority over the other (and therefore "idealist" even in its most materialistic manifestation),<sup>22</sup> causal thinking cannot do justice to the essentially dialectical nature of the system "moi-autrui-le monde" in which no element can be said to be phenomenologically, logically, or chronologically prior or primary.

The human subject, or "corps sujet," as part of this system, is in an essentially paradoxical position; it is always at one and the same time, and inseparably, product and producer, "corps touchant et corps touchée," "liberté et servitude." Thus, I am never with respect to the world (nor the world with respect to my consciousness of it), either wholly transcendent nor wholly immanent.

For the world and consciousness are always and inseparably immanent and transcendent to each other, at one and the same time: ". . . tout est fabriqué et tout est naturel chez l'homme."<sup>23</sup>

It is true that the world exists and has a sense only ". . . par moi ou par les sujets tels que moi,"<sup>24</sup> but this does not mean that the world and its sense is wholly immanent to or constituted by consciousness. We must not forget that the subject which "produces" ("reveals," "discloses," or "unveils" is perhaps a more appropriate characterization of this activity), the world, as an event or as an idea, is not a cogito, not an isolated and separate consciousness, but a "corps sujet," engaged in the world (as the heart is in the body). It can "produce" only on the basis of what is first "given" to it; and the human subject lives in ("circuit with") the world before he or she appropriates, reproduces, or describes it in thought or language.

Since I am only ever a point of view on the world in which I inhere,<sup>25</sup> the world (which in some sense I make exist, and exists only for me and other subjects) always escapes me in part; spatially in that I certainly cannot perceive the present from other than a limited number of points of view; and temporally, since the world was before and will remain after me. Thus, the world "transcends" any "prise de conscience" made of it, at

the same time as it provides the foundation of its truth; and " . . . la raison est enracinée dans la nature,"<sup>26</sup> and not vice-versa.

On the basis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of human existence, we can better articulate the relationship between thought and the world which was posed as a problem for Marxism at the beginning of this chapter. Since the human subject is not causally connected to the world but rooted in it as an integral part of it, the "determining" force of the economic substructure, which is the principal thesis of historical materialism, cannot (and should not) be understood as a "determinism" or as an "economism" which reduces human history to the "mere" effect of "blind" economic forces. It represents, rather, an integration of the economic into history, which remains always human history made by men.

Since consciousness is always and necessarily consciousness of the world, it is inevitably "determined" by the world of which it is a part and in which it is engaged as an essentially embodied consciousness. Historical materialism only draws our attention to the central role of the mode of production in the determination of all other social forms, the political, religious, cultural, educational, etc. The latter do not passively "reflect" economic relations, nor are they the "causally inevitable" effects of them: they all, along with the economic

structure, form the system, "moi-autrui-le monde," which constitutes social existence.<sup>27</sup> Historical materialism only maintains that changes in social systems, at whatever level (political, cultural, religious, etc.) always occur in response to more fundamental changes in the economic sub-structure, i.e. in the forms and relations of production, which are, therefore, considered to be the real "motor" of history.

Thus, primitive societies do not have a history because their economic structure has remained stable and unchanged over time.<sup>28</sup> They do not, therefore, think of themselves as historical subjects, because as a matter of fact, in their non-historical world, they are not subjects of historical change. They regard themselves rather as the re-incarnation of their ancestors, which, they are: as subjects of a repetitive, unchanging world.

This account which combines the insights of historical materialism and phenomenology with respect to consciousness and its contents, certainly decentres the subject; no longer " . . . the sun from which the world radiates . . . its actions and all actions are possible only as they follow the course of the world."<sup>29</sup> But it neither denies nor disqualifies its existence and its significance.

## Freedom

Since the world is essentially contingent--open and "inépuisable"<sup>30</sup> --so also must be the subject which is co-extensive with it.<sup>31</sup> On this account there are no absolutes: neither with respect to man, " . . . une idée historique et non pas une espèce naturelle";<sup>32</sup> nor the world, "unité-ouverte et indéfinie";<sup>33</sup> nor history "itself an historical fact";<sup>34</sup> nor reason "Evidence is never apodictic, nor is thought timeless . . .";<sup>35</sup> nor finally with respect to freedom for " . . . l'idée de situation exclut la liberté absolue à l'origine de nos engagements . . ."<sup>36</sup>

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Because the human subject is a concrete subject and inseparably engaged in the concrete world, any freedom attributed to it must also be concrete (therefore contingent and variable) and that attribution grounded in the real circumstances of existence. Since the world which is constitutive of existence is essentially "open" and inexhaustible, there is at the core of human existence, therefore, an essential "indeterminacy" of being, a radical contingency, which we experience as "existential" freedom. The human subject projects, and therefore "determines" his or her own future on the basis of this indeterminacy. But always within a situation; i.e. from within a given socio-historical world, which also "determines" how we

assume our existence and project our future.

Thus, even our existential freedom is necessarily equivocal and ambiguous, because it is concrete, and not the "absolute" freedom of a rarified cogito. It consists in our tendency (which is both our freedom and our necessity) to transform the world (and ourselves) from contingency to necessity, i.e. from non-sense to sense. We do what we do and think how we think because we have assumed the world in a particular way. Our world, our history, and our existence have meaning only because we have attributed meanings to them. Thus is human existence free. But, at one and the same time, these actions, these thoughts, and these meanings are themselves rooted in the very world, the very history, and the very existence they transform, and they never transcend (in any absolute sense) their own spatio-temporal determinants. Thus is human existence necessary.<sup>37</sup> It is, therefore, as Merleau-Ponty says:

... impossible de dire où finissent les fortes de l'histoire et où commencent les nôtres . . . puisqu'il n'y a d'histoire que pour un sujet qui la vive et de sujet que situe historiquement.<sup>38</sup>

The problem of "causality" (of a crude "determinism" or "economism") cannot even be posed within the context of such a radically dialectical and historical materialism; because, from this point of view, it is impossible to

separate the "single global phenomenon" of human existence

("moi-autrui-le monde") into isolable components: the

"external," impersonal, and general pole and the "internal,"

personal, and particular pole. "Tout est nécessité dans

l'homme . . . tout est contingente";<sup>39</sup> " . . . le monde

est tout dedans et je suis tout hors de moi:"

. . . la généralité et l'individualité de sujet,  
la subjectivité qualifiée et la subjectivité  
pure, l'anonymat de l'On et l'anonymat de la  
conscience ne sont deux conceptions du sujet  
entre lesquelles la philosophie aurait à choisir,  
mais deux moments d'une structure unique qui  
est le sujet concret.<sup>41</sup>

We must therefore strive to understand the world,  
the better to understand ourselves and the extent and  
limit of our real concrete freedom; i.e. our ability  
to direct the course of both. The abstract freedom to  
judge, much vaunted by Sartre, " . . . which even slaves  
in chains have," which " . . . never becomes what it  
does . . . never becomes flesh, never secures anything, never  
compromises itself with power . . .,"<sup>42</sup> is only a  
parody (a mystification) of real and concrete human freedom  
which consists in self-determination; i.e. in the deter-  
mination of existence, not the abstract negations of  
a cogito. The extent to which human beings are free,  
in this sense, to determine their own existence, will  
now be considered.

## Necessity

We accept the view, shared by both Marx and Sartre, that praxis, i.e. the indissoluble unity of understanding and action, characterizes (or defines) human existence and is the "locus" of human freedom. That freedom, however, is never "absolute" because both elements of praxis, understanding as well as action, are always constrained and limited, in short, "determined," by the specific socio-historical material world of which they are an integral part. Constraints on action are more readily and easily identified and acknowledged than are constraints on the understanding (which are often attributed to lack of access to available knowledge): and historical struggle has, for the most part, directed itself at the former, i.e. at extending humanity's freedom of action. The more concrete choices of action men and women have available to them, the more "free" are they considered to be. The contemporary struggles for education and economic and political power by women, minority groups, Third World nations, etc., and traditional class struggles (of which these are sometimes considered to be examples), are regarded as "liberation" movements, precisely because their aim is to extend the real-range of choices of action available to the people concerned, on the assumption that this will increase their chances of self-determination.

But the constraints on human praxis (and therefore on existence itself) are not limited to the range of activities available to individuals and communities; they extend as far as their thoughts, their understanding, their very consciousness. Our vision of what is possible and appropriate for ourselves and for humanity is also constrained by socio-historical material conditions; and the "liberation" of that vision--which is in fact prior, in a foundational sense, to any choices of action we make--from constraints of which we are in the first instance essentially unconscious, presents us with a far more difficult and formidable task.

In the first place, we have to acknowledge that absolute freedom of thought--from socio-historical determinants--is unavailable to us and so, therefore, is absolute, universal truth. This does not mean, however, that no truth about humanity and the world is available, but rather that all truth is contingent and radically so, as is that of which it is true. Our problem then becomes one of establishing a criterion of truth which will distinguish the contingently true from the contingently false, that is: ". . . a theory of consciousness which accounts for its mystification without denying its participation in truth."<sup>43</sup> This challenge will be taken up in the following chapter. My concern here is to consider to what extent consciousness is in fact

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constrained by determinants of which it is largely unaware.

Historical materialism maintains that what we think is determined by socio-historical conditions, and that in the last instance the mode of production of material life conditions "social, political and intellectual life processes in general." Consciousness, therefore, is determined by social life and not vice-versa: "Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks himself" so we should not judge consciousness and transformations of consciousness (ideas, their conflicts, and developments) by what consciousness says of itself, i.e. on purely ideal or "ideological" grounds:

. . . on the contrary this consciousness must be explained rather from the conditions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.<sup>44</sup>

[Freudian theory maintains with respect to idiosyncratic conscious processes a similar thesis: according to Freud, the individual consciousness does not create nor is it capable of explaining its own contents; they originate elsewhere, and have sources and significance of which the thinking individual is necessarily unconscious.]

However, consciousness is not only determined with respect to what it thinks, but also with respect to how it thinks and how transformations in thought occur. The structuralists have addressed themselves to this aspect

of thought.

Saussure's distinction between "langue" and "parole" enabled what came to be described as "structural" linguistics to isolate language, as a code or system distinct, from "parole," from that which is said in it; a system whose principles and structures remain constant while the messages it conveys vary according to specific social and personal historical conditions. While these messages are social (and personal) events and therefore diachronic, and amenable to historical explanation and understanding, the code itself survives diachrony. As a system, it is collective and timeless; its essential determining structures must therefore be sought for not at the level of diachrony, but at the level of synchrony.

We have learned from structural linguistics that language (langue) is a system of items (e.g. phonemes) and rules; and that the speaker of any language in speaking it, reveals an unconscious but implicit knowledge of those rules. To speak (and make sense) is to make use of distinctions, categories, and operations of which you are unaware, which together form a system, which is the condition of possibility of there being any meaning and significance at all.

Structural anthropologists, like Lévi-Strauss, have extended this analysis of linguistic behaviour, which emphasizes the primacy of the unconscious, to all cultural,

i.e. social, behaviour. They consider culture itself as a language, and therefore all cultural products (generally "superstructures") as messages. The content and meaning of these messages may well be prescribed by history and dialectic, as Marxism suggests (and Lévi-Strauss is committed to this view); but their conditions of possibility, as messages with meaning, cannot be looked for in history. The determining structures (of form) of systems which signify must be sought for at the level of synchrony.

According to this view of culture, all human actions have meaning only because there is an underlying system of conventions which make this possible; as in the following,

Wherever there are two posts, one can kick a ball between them, but one can score a goal only within a particular institutionalized framework.<sup>45</sup>

A particular culture is composed of a set of symbolic systems which make possible various forms of behaviour--like scoring a goal, or writing a poem; being impolite, getting divorced, being unemployed, etc. Signs signify only as parts of a system or of a network of relations, and it is to these determining synchronic structures of cultural phenomena that the structuralists turn their attention.

Lévi-Strauss has analyzed myth, totemism, and rules of kinship as three separate systems of representation, i.e. as three distinct languages, by means of which messages

are exchanged between members of particular cultures. In each case, the significant units (respectively mythemes, totemic species, and cross- and parallel-cousins) were seen to derive their significance from the place they held in a whole system of relations--a system of which the "speakers" themselves were unaware. In each case, rules of transformation (oppositions, mediations, conjunctions, disjunctions, contrasts, and correlations, etc.) were revealed, accounting for the variability of the messages conveyed within each "language" system; again, these were rules of which the "speakers" were unaware.

Lévi-Strauss's purpose in The Raw and the Cooked, for example, was: ". . . to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths, operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact."<sup>46</sup> He concludes from his analyses that there are universal unconscious laws of thought which "govern" or "constrain" cultural practices: i.e. mental invariants beyond the diversity of human societies. The "relevant explanation" of these, he claims, "falls within an order which transcends both historical succession and contemporary correlations";<sup>47</sup> that is, both synchrony and diachrony, residing, as it must in nature: that is, in life and "the whole of its physico-chemical conditions."<sup>48</sup>

Myths signify the mind that evolves them by making use of the world of which it is itself a part. Thus, there is a simultaneous production of myths themselves, by the mind that generates them and by the myths, of an image of the world which is already inherent in the structure of the mind.<sup>49</sup>

For Lévi-Strauss, as for Merleau-Ponty, there is no clear-cut distinction between subjective states and the properties of the cosmos<sup>50</sup> since they mirror each other.<sup>51</sup> The truths learned through men are "of the world," and therefore at the same time "of man" who is of the same world.<sup>52</sup> Just as myth represents the "free functioning of the mind," of the "savage" mind not yet "domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return,"<sup>53</sup> so also do mathematics and music in our own culture. Lévi-Strauss considers myths, mathematics, and music as products of the mind when it is " . . . left to commune with itself and no longer has to come to terms with objects." In such "untamed" circumstances, the mind " . . . is reduced to imitating itself as an object" and:

. . . since the laws governing its operations are not fundamentally different from those it exhibits in other functions, it shows itself to be the nature of a thing among things . . . if the human mind appears determined even in the realm of mythology, a fortiori, it must also be determined in all its spheres of activity.<sup>54</sup>

More precisely, what is reflected in the free-functioning of the mind, in mathematics, music, and myth, is:

. . . the activity of the cells of the cerebral cortex, relatively emancipated from any external constraint and obeying only its own laws. As the mind too is a thing, the functioning of this thing teaches us something about the nature of things: even pure reflection is in the last analysis an internalization of the cosmos. It illustrates the structure of what lies outside in a symbolic form.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, for Lévi-Strauss, culture and consciousness ultimately reduce to nature. The formal structural principles of collective representations, considered as codes, are seen to be determined, in the last instance, by the brain and nervous system. The content and meaning of the same representations, considered as messages, are "determined" by the material dialectic. According to this account, our freedom for self-determination, as historically determined subjects, that is, as subjects of an historically determined world, is doubly constrained: firstly, our immediate activity is limited by the specific material conditions in which we live; and, secondly, our interpretations, visions, and projections are limited by the same historically specific material circumstances which give content to consciousness, as well as by unconscious laws of thought by which these contents are structured and transformed.

Since no thought escapes these final determinants-- nature and the material dialectic, which are the very conditions of possibility of there being thought at all--

it would appear (i) that superstructures are in the last instant, inscrutable and autonomous, and (ii) that praxis is relatively powerless to intervene in their direction and development.

#### The Subject Decentred: Foucault

The work of Michel Foucault supports these conclusions while extending the relevance of the structural analysis to the actual contents of conscious thought processes. Like Lévi-Strauss, he treats culture as language, and cultural phenomena as messages; and he examines the latter at the level of synchrony to disclose the underlying "episteme" (or code) which is their condition of possibility. Furthermore, he maintains, following Bachelard, that the history of ideas is discontinuous rather than continuous, and that shifts in superstructure represent radical "epistemological breaks" with past "ideologies" rather than the continuous development of them.<sup>56</sup>

Specific cultural phenomena, therefore, the appearance of the prison as a system of punishment for example, are not to be explained by reference to their own self-consciousness (cf. Marx, Lévi-Strauss, Freud), in this case to what the prison system says about itself, its history, purpose, etc.; but by reference to the larger network of particular discourses within which it functions.

The art of punishing, then, must rest on a whole technology of representation . . .<sup>57</sup> the representation of his (the incarcerated) interests, the representation of his advantages and disadvantages, pleasure and displeasure . . . Individual correction must, therefore, assure the process of redefining the individual as subject of law, through the reinforcement of the systems of signs and representations that they circulate.<sup>58</sup>

The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. Knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect of this analytic investment of this domination-observation.<sup>59</sup>

According to Foucault, the shift from punishment as torture (which was always a spectacle), to punishment as incarceration (which is essentially "unseen"), is intrinsically related to the appearance of the "individual" in discourse, of the individual as "judicial subject," as "rational animal," as "homo economicus"; i.e. the individual as essentially representative of some norm or value. So, it is the "invisible," inner man (and not the body) that is punished by incarceration; the same "inner" man that is "disciplined" by school and work, and studied by the human sciences, which emerged during the same period. Whatever made possible the new discourse connecting punishment with imprisonment, also made possible the new discourse about man, that essentially abstract individual, possessor of mind, will, psyche, life, labour, freedom, rights and duties, etc. The

same "man" which remains today the "object" of social scientific discourse. Such an individual, Foucault claims, did not exist prior to the Nineteenth Century because there was no place for him in the conceptual space governing the discourses of those earlier periods.

Before the end of the eighteenth century man did not exist--any more than the potency of life, the fecundity of labour or the historical density of language . . .<sup>60</sup> Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.<sup>61</sup>

Just as Lévi-Strauss maintains that there are general and universal laws of thought which are the final determinants of particular myths, and totemic and kinship systems, so Foucault argues that there are general rules of formation which govern in a much more total way the possible "scientific" discourses of particular historical periods. These rules of formation govern what can and cannot be said (or thought) during that period. They make possible some discourses and block out other types of investigation which might count as science in other times.

In the Renaissance, for example, the basic conception of order was founded on the notion of resemblance:

" . . . relations of similitude and analogy link together the microcosm and macrocosm, heaven and earth, the book of the world and the books of men."<sup>62</sup>

These relations formed part of the "episteme," the set of rules of formation, which governed what could

and could not be said in that period.

In the classical period, the notion of representation displaced that of resemblance, and the world was organized, no longer by qualitative and symbolic correspondences, but by quantifiable identities and differences. Mathesis, analysis, genesis, the construction of tables and taxonomies characterize the science of this period. Nature is now classified according to the visible, which is taken to represent the hidden order of the world: thus, language represents "thought," money represents "wealth," plants and animals represent "life." The new "episteme" gave rise to what were essentially new sciences:

Philology, biology and political economy were established, not in the places formerly occupied by general grammar, natural history and the analysis of wealth, but in an area where those forms of knowledge did not exist, in the space they left blank.<sup>63</sup>

In any given culture, at any given time, there is, according to Foucault, only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed as theory or " . . . silently invested in practice."<sup>64</sup> These socio-historically specific a prioris of knowledge are not constituted by, and cannot be reduced to, " . . . the general model of a consciousness that acquires, progresses and remembers"<sup>65</sup> since they themselves constitute the outer limits of that same consciousness and its very positivity. He claims, for example, that

we cannot now legitimately speak of the history of "man" since man no longer has a history (of his own). The human subject of contemporary discourse is rather the nexus of several distinct histories (of the prison, for example, of the clinic and the asylum, of political economy; biology, linguistics, etc.), that are neither subordinate to him, nor homogeneous with him, nor even homogeneous with respect to each other. It is the "episteme" that determines man's place in the world; and this is not subject to the intervention of individual consciousness, since it makes possible those interventions.

Foucault's conclusions echo those of Lévi-Strauss in that they suggest; (i) the relative autonomy of superstructure, i.e. of man's interpretations of the world and his place in it; they appear to be self-determining, and to obey internal laws of formation and transformation of which the thinking subject is completely unaware; (ii) the "determining" role of superstructure in the constitution of human behaviour; and (iii) that man as the subject of history is a relatively recent "invention"; "a new wrinkle in our knowledge," and "a figure not yet two centuries old" by Foucault's reckoning.<sup>66</sup> The human subject is thus once more displaced and decentred: ". . . no longer the sun from which the world radiates," it becomes in Foucault's work the ". . . blank space from which I speak."<sup>67</sup>

Ideology and the Subject: Althusser.

Althusser's structuralism makes similar points. Like Foucault, he eschews the historical explanation of historical events; that is, any explanation in terms of genesis, continuity, development, teleology, or individual praxis--in favour of a synchronic analysis of their determining structures. Again, like Foucault, he displaces "man" from his traditional position at the centre of the historical process; maintaining that the true subjects of history are not individuals (nor even classes) but relations: the relations of production, and political and ideological relations:

. . . the structure of the relations of production determines the places and functions occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, insofar as they are the "supports" (Träger) of these functions.<sup>68</sup>

Human subjects are literally "subjects," in that they act and think according to the norms, laws, and rules of the (ideological and economic) systems of which they are functions, and to which they are indeed "subjects."<sup>69</sup> They are not the agents or motor of history, but rather constituted as subjects in history. They can, therefore, have no explanatory role in ". . . the only real history, the history of the material life of men."<sup>70</sup>

He does not argue, like Foucault, that the notion of subject is a recent invention, but that it is necessarily ideological, and therefore a "pre-scientific" notion. It is the off-spring of ideology,<sup>71</sup> and represents, therefore, a "mystification" of reality.

"Ideology is a 'Representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."<sup>72</sup> According to Althusser, therefore, the problem, which is Sartre's problem, of the "role of the individual in history," is a "false" problem; but nevertheless it is "an index to a true problem," that . . . of the concept of the historical forms of existence of individuality."<sup>73</sup> Thus Althusser shares Foucault's view (but for somewhat different reasons), that the human subject as such, and strictly speaking, has no "real history" of its own; since its history, like that of all ideological notions, is situated outside itself<sup>74</sup> in the material conditions of existence. Properly scientific, as opposed to ideological (philosophical, and mystified) discourse, must, therefore, be subjectless.<sup>75</sup> Each society has its own individuals, historically and socially determined; for us to begin with man, therefore, would be to begin with the bourgeois idea of "man," and ensnare ourselves in the vicious circle of ideology.<sup>76</sup> The "free-subject," which is Sartre's point of departure, the "free man as subject of his

actions," is a false and illusory construct of bourgeois ideology masking the reality (to which all ideology alludes, according to Althusser) which is, in this case, ". . . first of all, man free to possess, to sell and to buy," and man as the subject of law.<sup>77</sup> Real men are what class conditions make of them; and their real liberties, ". . . including the forms and limits of these liberties and including their will to struggle" depend on these conditions.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, all three perspectives on "man," the Marxist, the phenomenological, and the structuralist, support the materialist thesis of consciousness and culture which has been the argument of this chapter. For all of them, "being" is prior to "thought" (thesis [i]), and thought part of, and not ontologically other than, the material world (thesis [ii]). All of them situate the individual within a context of historically specific social and material processes from which he or she cannot be separated, and which constitute both the positive and negative limits of our freedom of thought and action. Although none of them endorse a reductive or mechanically deterministic theory of human behaviour, none of them adopts the Satrian ("bourgeois") strategy of making individual praxis foundational of both the reality and the understanding of social phenomena. Consciousness and praxis, on all three accounts, is epiphenomenal rather than foundational. Yet all

three perspectives reject causal thinking as inappropriate and inadequate for the exploration and understanding of social processes, in favour of approaches which are, either implicitly or explicitly, material and in some sense, dialectical. The phenomenological, and the structuralist approaches considered are all committed to some form of Marxism and I have tried to indicate where the three different perspectives coincide, and how they complement each other. In the chapters which remain, I examine their respective strengths and limitations in greater detail, and their relevance and significance to and for each other, and for anthropological inquiry in general.

## Chapter V

### Marx

So far, in this thesis I have levelled two major criticisms at Sartre's attempt to ground the truth and intelligibility of Marxism (of historical materialism) in existential man. I have argued, first, that even if we accept the Critique on its own terms, it does not succeed in its aspiration. Sartre's assumption of a primordial alienation resulting from man's materiality and seriality (that is, from his material existence with others in conditions of scarcity) makes it impossible for him to establish the real possibility (let alone the inevitability) of revolutionary social change which would eliminate alienation and establish a "reign of freedom" amongst men. The best he offers is a repetitive historical cycle, whereby genuine group (though not class)<sup>1</sup> praxis explodes periodically from the series, into which it quickly returns, once the moment of fusion in the face of a common "external" enemy has passed.

Secondly, I have argued that Sartre's account in the Critique is insufficiently critical, and more Hegelian and Cartesian than it is Marxist. Sartre too often forgets the historically specific situatedness of his own phenomenological descriptions and generalizes them into apparently

universal, if not eternal and essential truths. He makes claims about Humanity and History which approach the metaphysical in their implicit universality and generality, and betray the spirit of Marxism, which if nothing else, eschews all philosophy of the specifically metaphysical kind.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, these "essentialist" claims are based on phenomenological reflexion, which even at its best and most critical, can reveal the truth only of historically specific human experience, and cannot therefore provide the intelligible foundation of the historical and structural scientific anthropology to which Sartre aspires in the Critique.<sup>3</sup>

I have appealed to Lévi-Strauss's alternative approach to scientific anthropology in support of these criticisms, arguing that Sartre's point of departure, the isolated and alienated worker; his methodology, phenomenology; and his a priori characterization of man, in terms of History and Dialectical Reason, force him into descriptions of social life which are more mythological than scientific and more bourgeois than revolutionary.

The intelligibility of these criticisms will be examined in the chapters which remain with respect to Marxism, existentialism, and structuralism in turn as they are articulated by Marx, Sartre, and Lévi-Strauss. We begin with Marx.

### Marxism: Philosophy, Science or Ideology?

The epistemological status of historical materialism is ambivalent because it is at once both a philosophy of history and a science of history.<sup>4</sup> This ambivalence is the basis of the various divisions within Marxism, since it permits a variety of quite radically different and conflicting intellectual sympathies and projects to parade under the same banner. Those who, like Sartre, are inspired by the philosophical in Marx<sup>5</sup> cry "economism," "scientism," "quietism," and "idealism" to those Marxists who reject philosophy in the interest of "scientific" objectivity (Lévi-Strauss and Althusser, for example). While they in turn cry back "historicism," "relativism," "mystification"--and once more--"idealism" to Marxist historians and philosophers like Sartre.

I shall now explore this confrontation in greater detail; not so much take up arms in support of one side or another, but to clarify their differences and isolate the strengths and weaknesses of their respective arguments. I argue that the various contenders are fundamentally united in their most basic commitment to an epistemological and political principle<sup>6</sup> which, if consistently applied and acknowledged with respect to their own theoretical work as well as that of others, would reveal that the respective approaches complement rather than contradict

or exclude each other, as different ways of demystifying consciousness and rendering the socio-historical process intelligible. What divides these thinkers is, therefore, not something fundamental, but rather their respective mystifications of social reality; to which even the most vigilant and committed thinker will always remain vulnerable--simply by virtue of his or her continuing situatedness within the capitalist social formation. A continuing and persistent materialist and dialectical critique is therefore required to reveal these inadvertent and inevitable mystifications, from as many different points of view as possible: existential, phenomenological, and structural; or anthropological and feminist, as in the present case.

I develop this argument through an exploration of ideology and science since these have emerged as perhaps the key terms in the confrontation between structuralist and existential Marxism.

Before doing so, however, I will first clarify my earlier comment on the ambivalence of historical materialism, as both a philosophy and science of history; an ambivalence, it was suggested, which is at the root of the various confrontations within Marxist thought.

Historical materialism:  
a philosophy of history

Historical materialism is a philosophy of history

because it attributes a meaning to past events which transcends their specific spatio-temporal significance and the particular intentions of the agents involved.

It is, in the words of Engels:

. . . that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another.

It is a philosophy of history because it interprets the past from the point of view of the present, and renders it intelligible in terms of a projected future; because it regards historical change, not as a series of random, arbitrary, and meaningless events, but as part of a progressive and teleological process, susceptible to rational interpretation and intervention; because it assumes historical continuity and rationality, and like all histories, tells a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Unlike many histories and philosophies of history, however, unlike Hegel for example, historical materialism assumes the story in medias res, and not at its end. The end of the story is projected into the future on the basis of the scientific laws which are generated by and internal to the theory itself. The story has a plot and a subject like all other stories; it is about class

struggle, which it takes to be the very motor of history, which will come to an end only when the exploited class overthrows capitalism and establishes, possibly for the first time in human history, a classless society of men and women.

Again like other histories, historical materialism assumes a model of man which is intrinsic to the story's intelligibility. In this case it is made explicit: man is a self-creating species-being. In fact, man, or human nature, is the principal character or hero of the story, which describes his alienation from himself under capitalism and anticipates his recovery of himself and of his freedom as a species-being through social revolution. The self-creation of man constitutes the plot, the theme, and the motive of the story.

Again like all other histories and philosophies, historical materialism has a point of view. But unlike previous histories which have assumed the point of view of the ruling class without making this explicit, historical materialism adopts the point of view of the working class and is explicit in this position and methodical about its application. In fact, the intelligibility of Marxism depends on the explicit assumption of this point of view. This really distinguishes historical materialism from other histories and philosophies of history, which while tacitly adopting the perspective and interests of the

ruling class, pose as neutral and objective or non-partisan descriptions of events, available to anyone belonging to the same social group and the same historical period-- twentieth-century Germany, nineteenth-century England, Canada in the Sixties, or whatever. Historical materialism denounces and renounces such poses of neutrality and pseudo-objectivity.

Since historical materialism takes up the story in medias res and discloses a meaning in history which has not yet been realized, i.e. the emancipation of all of Humanity from alienation, exploitation, and oppression, it is much more than a philosophy for those who are persuaded by it; more than a mere theory which makes history intelligible, it indicates a practice and explicitly calls men to action: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."<sup>8</sup>

Precisely what kind of action Marxism calls for is however not self-evident.<sup>9</sup> It depends to a large extent upon how the scientific element of the theory is interpreted along with its relationship to the philosophical; and upon how current conditions are described in the light of this interpretation.

Since Marx himself did not clarify the relationship of the philosophical to the scientific in his own writings, and appears to some to have done his philosophical work

early in his career, and his scientific work later, it is sometimes argued that there is not one unambivalent theory of historical materialism, but two: attributable to the early and later Marx respectively. Thus a conflict has grown over who is to be considered the "real" Marx and what is to be considered the authentic core of historical materialism; the earlier historicist and humanistic writings of Marx, or the scientific and economic work of the later Marx? Althusser and the structuralists clearly favour the later Marx and align themselves as Marxists on its account; Sartre and the existentialists and phenomenologists identify their allegiance to Marxism with the earlier writings.

There are dangers--theoretical and political-- in both interpretations when they are made exclusive of the other, as they invariably are. It is the goal of this chapter to think the tension between the two, to do justice to the complexity and richness of Marx's thought which is inevitably reduced whenever one is forced to choose between the horns of a supposed dilemma. I do not therefore enter into the conflict on the side of one or the other contending interpretations; but rather aim to clarify some of the key issues involved in the confrontation, showing how a reconciliation could be effected between the opposing views, without betraying the most fundamental tenet of Marxism which, I maintain,

is that theory be revolutionary in specific ways. .

Historical materialism:  
a science of history

We must first of all establish what Marx means by "science" when he speaks of historical materialism as a science of history.

Marx is actually quite explicit in his work on political economy about what constitutes a specifically scientific analysis of social phenomena: it is an analysis which is at once material, dialectical, historical, concrete, and revolutionary.

1. Scientific i.e. materialist

Historical materialism is a materialism for two reasons. First, because it explains social phenomena (e.g. legal, political, and economic reality), not from their immediate appearances, but by probing beneath their surface phenomenal forms to the mode of production and reproduction of material life which is the decisive factor in their historical determination.

For example, the phenomenal form of social relations within the capitalist social formation appears as the exchange of commodities between free and equal individuals in the market-place. It appears, therefore, at the level of the distribution and consumption of commodities. This apparent reality is both the point of departure and the point of arrival of liberal-bourgeois thought--economic,

political, and legal--which assumes as its first premise a society of free and equal individuals entering into contracts with each other.

However, this phenomenal form of social relations under capitalism is the complete inverse of the real material processes which make possible and are at the same time concealed by these appearances. For, according to Marx, it is the production of commodities, not their consumption, which determines social relations, and in capitalist society: "These relations are not those between one individual and another, but between worker and capitalist . . ."<sup>10</sup> The relationship between them may be one of exchange, but it is neither free nor equal. The worker sells his labour out of necessity: it is his only means of survival; and the wages he receives in exchange for his labour are always less than the value of that produced by it. The surplus, as we know, is appropriated by the capitalist and is the condition of his possibility as a capitalist: he therefore, needs the worker if he is to continue his existence as a capitalist.

At the level of production, therefore, there are no individuals: just workers and capitalists; and they are neither free nor equal in their exchange relations.<sup>11</sup>

Marx continues his analysis to show that this social reality of productive relations is necessarily mystified and inverted at the level of consumption to provide

the conditions of possibility of commodity exchange-- that is, the co-existence of free and equal individuals.

Marx's scientific analysis is materialist in a second sense, in that it aims to discover the unconscious determinants of social life: laws of social formation which are " . . . independent of the will, the consciousness and the purposes of men,"<sup>12</sup> themselves the manifestations and effects of social reality rather than its determinants. Because of this, and because there is a systematic mystification of reality at the level of ideas in the capitalist social formation, bourgeois or "vulgar" economists, according to Marx, never penetrate beyond the appearances of social relations to their reality in the productive process:

. . . . it is only the immediate phenomenal form of these relations that is expressed in their brains and not their inner connection . . . if the latter were the case, what need would there be of science?<sup>13</sup>

2. Scientific i.e. historical and dialectical

Science, according to Marx's stipulations, is also historical and dialectical. It recognizes that " . . . reality is not, it becomes," for example; that movement is the only constant; that facts do not speak for themselves, but derive their meaning and reality from their interconnectedness within a totality of relations.

Science takes processes and not isolated facts, therefore, as its object, and is concerned not with the validity of their forms, but with their historical birth and death, and their material "essence" and substratum. In the words of Engels, dialectical science: ". . . comprehends things and their representations, ideas, in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin and ending."<sup>14</sup>

Marxist science, therefore, rejects metaphysics and traditional bourgeois Science\* as mystifications which deny process and becoming by fragmenting and reifying reality into "being" and "artificially isolated and ossified facts." Genuinely scientific political, legal, economic, and anthropological inquiry does not aspire to general truths; for truths vary according to variations in social relations, which are in turn determined by changes in productive relations. Each historical period, therefore, will have laws of formation and transformation peculiar to itself, and it is into these particulars that the social scientist is called upon to inquire. It is in this sense that Marxist science claims to be concrete:

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\* Since the difference between Marxist science and bourgeois science is so extreme, I shall use the following designations to distinguish them:

science: to denote Marxist science.  
 Science: to denote bourgeois science.  
 "science": when the reference is ambiguous.

The scientific value of such investigations lies in the disclosure of the special laws that regulate the origin, existence, development and death of a given social organism.<sup>15</sup>

Such a science will never arrive at a final and definitive description of social reality, on account of the historical and dialectical nature of that reality itself, which is always changing, and of its own descriptions which must change in response to it.

### 3. Scientific i.e. revolutionary

In recognizing and demystifying appearances, science, according to Marx, at the same time transcends them and the reality which they express and reproduce. Seeing through the reified objectivity of the given world is tantamount to changing it.<sup>16</sup> Thus theory and practice are united, and science includes a truly revolutionary potential. Martin Nicolaus reminds us of this in his Forward to the Grundrisse:

Marx's theoretical labours were not concerned with economics for the sake of economics, philosophy for the sake of philosophy, or criticism for its own sake; but rather the aim of this work was to prepare, to educate the next generation of leaders of the working class in the objective preconditions, possibility and necessity of the historic task.<sup>17</sup>

While Engels's words at the graveside of Marx are more direct: "Science was for Marx a historically dynamic revolutionary force . . ." <sup>18</sup>

The economic laws discovered by Marx, which function independently and in spite of society's conscious attempts at self-direction, do not, therefore, describe a timeless and mechanical determinism, but an historical and dialectical process of becoming into which we can intervene, once we have attained knowledge of its basic material determinants--" . . . to shorten and lessen the birth-pangs"<sup>19</sup> of the future, as it were. Social forces, like unconscious psychic forces, only work " . . . blindly, forcibly and destructively so long as we do not understand and reckon with them." The point of Marxist science is to develop an understanding of those forces, so that they can be reckoned with and ultimately transcended.

Historical materialism is, therefore " . . . a weapon in the class struggle, and not merely an instrument of scientific knowledge."<sup>20</sup> Its truth is visible only from a certain point of view (as all truth) and only to those who are willing to see it, i.e. to those " . . . whose mission it is to create the future."<sup>21</sup> It is not visible to those who prefer to contemplate timeless truths in perpetuation of past and present realities. Since the " . . . active participation of thought is needed,"<sup>22</sup> if that future is to be realized, those who are anxious for social change in the direction of some kind of "socialism" and the destruction of capitalism will be inclined to Marxist science as a theory and a practice.

While those in whose interests it is to preserve the status quo, will reject it, in favour of metaphysics or of Science.

Historical materialism: science  
or philosophy of science?

What we have described, however, is a particular philosophy of "science" and not "science" as such; a philosophy of science which cannot be understood or judged apart from a particular philosophy of man and history upon which it depends for its credibility and intelligibility. For, only if you first accept historical materialism as a philosophy of history, with a particular point of view and a particular future project, will you be able to endorse Marx's elaboration of it in terms of science.<sup>23</sup>

As a philosophy of science, like all philosophies, historical materialism assumes a point of view and a set of interests--those of the working-class. In doing so it challenges all previous philosophies and practices of Science which have consistently assumed the point of view and the interests of the ruling class, beneath their official guise of "neutrality," "objectivity," and "impartiality." Previous Science has been metaphysical because it has assumed a non-historical and non-dialectical position with respect to reality and has, since the Scientific Revolution, considered: ". . . the capitalist system, not as a transitory phase of historical development

but as the absolute and final form of social production."<sup>24</sup>

Marxism can justify its claim to scientificity, therefore, but only on its own terms (again like all "science"); it is certainly not Scientific according to the rubric of traditional (bourgeois) Science. What Marx presents is not so much an account of historical materialism as a Science, but the prescribed norms and objectives of a new social scientific practice. Historical materialism, therefore, cannot be legitimized by its claim to scientificity; on the contrary, it is the philosophy which legitimizes the science, which has no significance and no meaning apart from it.

Marx, and certainly subsequent Marxists, have tended to overlook this last point, and the radical discontinuity between traditional bourgeois Science and Marxist science which it indicates.<sup>25</sup> Still mystified by the ideology of Science, according to which Science is self-validating, Marx and his commentators and successors have appealed to "science" and "scientificity" to legitimize their own practice of historical materialism. But, as I have argued above, this is to put the cart before the horse (or indeed, the means before the end). For what legitimizes historical materialism and distinguishes it from other theoretical practices is not its "scientificity," but rather its specifically dialectical, historical, and essentially revolutionary perspective; its assumption of an explicitly

political point of view in opposition to the "accepted wisdom" of the day, and of an explicitly political project-- the destruction of that so-called wisdom and the social reality that maintains it, including the mystified theories and practices thrown up by Science itself within the capitalist social formation..

Contributions to Marxism, like Sartre's for example, should not, therefore, be judged by Marxists according to whether or not they are "scientific" in some unspecified sense. For "science" like "freedom" is a devalued currency; it is little more than a pawn in a social and political struggle whose real battles are being waged elsewhere. In fact, the argument over the "scientificity" of ideas only serves to divert attention from what is really at stake in those ideas: whether or not they contribute to the creation of revolutionary social change. Analyses of social phenomena which are materialist, historical, dialectical, and concrete, as specified by Marx and indicated above, which constantly strive to raise the veil of ideology and establish the possibility of a qualitatively different future, will satisfy that revolutionary requirement. They will also, as it happens, be identified as scientific according to Marx's specification of "science." But their scientificity is incidental, and not fundamental; a classification rather than an evaluation of their epistemological and political intelligibility.

Historical Materialism:  
science or ideology?

What then is meant by "ideology" in the context of Marxist science? It clearly has a more specific and critical sense than it has for the sociologist of knowledge, for example. For the latter, all thought is considered to be "ideological" by virtue of its necessary historicity; and consequently, no thought can transcend ideology, since no thought can transcend its situatedness in specific socio-historical conditions. On this view, Marxism is no different from other interpretations of social life; it too is an ideology.

But this equation of Marxism with all other ideologies is possible only at the cost of reducing "ideology," which in Marx is an essentially critical and political concept of revolutionary practice, to a descriptive, value-neutral category of epistemology. What identifies ideology for Marx is not the historical origin and specificity of ideas, which he takes for granted, but their practical and political consequences. The historicity of thought is the condition of possibility of ideology and therefore the foundation of its intelligibility; but it is not its equivalent.

Ideological ideas are, for Marx, ideas which mystify reality by describing the surface appearances of social life as if they were describing its reality, while at the same time, failing to disclose, and thus obscuring and

concealing, its fundamental material determinants.

Ideological ideas also reify reality by presenting historically specific truths as if they were eternal verities; describing Man and Consciousness, or Society, the Family, and Money, as if they had an existence and an essence apart from the particular social formation in which they occur.

Both mystification and reification obstruct social change by obscuring its fundamental material determinants. It is for this reason that Marx rejects traditional economic and political theory as ideological--not because they are historically based and necessarily partisan, but because they mystify and reify reality.

According to Marx, each historical epoch produces its own illusions. Ideologies are, therefore, socially and historically specific and differ under different modes of production. Ideologies can only be disclosed concretely, therefore, in their socio-historical specificity, and not as generalities or abstractions. The ruling ideas of any social formation will tend to be ideological, however, i.e. mystifying and reifying, because it is always in the interests of the ruling class to present reality as if it were unchanging. In class society:

The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production . . . generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.<sup>26</sup>

Since all science, philosophy, literature, art, and all social and political thought in the past have been articulated and directed by the ruling class, they have tended towards the mystification and reification of human reality in the interests of that class, and, therefore, have been largely ideological. But only with the rise of capitalism, and of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class, has there emerged an almost total hegemony of the ruling class ideology, and a systematic mystification of social reality. This is because capitalism, as an economic system, needs to conceal the truth of its productive relations (inequality between social classes) in order to function at all at the level of distribution and consumption which requires exchange between free and equal individuals. To ensure the consumption and exchange of commodities, capitalism must not only obscure productive relations (mystification), but also present its own ideas and interests as a class as if they were objective, neutral, universal truths, and the "only rational, universally valid ones" (reification); concealing the real material inequality and unfreedom between classes behind a screen of ideal equality and freedom attributed to individuals consenting and contracting in a society founded on consumer economy. Bourgeois thought is, therefore, thoroughly ideological according to Marx; and it is the historical task of revolutionaries to first demystify it, to reveal the social reality of unequal and

exploitive productive relations which nourish it, and then to work towards its destruction through the destruction of its material conditions of possibility.

Thus ideology is not the Other of Science, Truth, Objectivity, or Validity, for Marxism, but rather a general term of refusal of them; an indictment of them and the bourgeois point of view they presuppose and express.

For example, the view that separate, free, and equal individuals are the basis of society into which they enter by consent and which then serves them and their mutual interests, is rejected as bourgeois ideology by Marxists, not because it is untrue--which it may or may not be, or because it is "unscientific" or biased, but (i) because it mystifies reality: it does not see beyond the appearance and the conscious appropriation of social life, and presents those appearances and that consciousness as if they manifested reality; and (ii) because it reifies reality: it presents those appearances, not only as real, but also as if they were timeless universals, and not the historical products, of human existence.

Ideology is not, therefore, the Other of Science, but the Other of Marxist science, i.e. of the historical, material, dialectical, and revolutionary examination of social reality.

"Ideology," like "science," however, is not always used in this very precise sense specific to Marx, neither

by Marxists, nor by Marx himself. Danny Goldstick has recently suggested seven different senses of "ideology" which can be found in Marxist and non-Marxist writings alike:

- (a) science of ideas (the original eighteenth-century meaning, now obsolete); (b) overconcentration on theorizing and ideas (also obsolete);
- (c) non-economic component in a social order (e.g. art, politics, law, religion, philosophy);
- (d) body of ideas which owes its popularity to the function that it serves--without its adherents realizing it--of glorifying one of the non-economic occupational specialties to which the division of labour gives rise, exaggerating relative autonomy of (the subject-matter of) that speciality and so concealing the actual determination of its main features in the long run by economics;
- (e) unsystematic partisan system of ideas;
- (f) "non-cognitive" (i.e. truthvalueless) partisan system of ideas;
- (g) partisan system of ideas.<sup>27</sup>

Of these seven, (g) is probably the most commonly used sense amongst both Marxists and non-Marxists; (f) is prevalent amongst " . . . those influenced by the claims of bourgeois philosophy . . . that partisanship is incompatible with objectivity"; and (d) is the sense most common to Marx and Engels, in Goldstick's opinion. It is also the sense which most closely approximates my own specification of a Marxist theory of ideology in terms of reification and mystification, as outlined above.

Nevertheless, the term is ambiguous and like "science" is not always used, not even by Marxists, in the suggested sense specific to Marx.<sup>28</sup> Because of this, I would suggest

that Marxists jettison both "ideology" and "science," as normative terms, and replace them with the more precise critical terms, specific to a Marxist critique, of "reification" and "mystification." Rival ideologies and sciences, of which Marxism itself could be considered one, could then be assessed according to a general standard: that is, according to their tendencies to mystify and reify reality. And this is how we shall use these terms for the rest of the thesis.<sup>29</sup>

#### Marxism: A Critique

Since historical materialism is not itself "carved in tablets," and thus "not exempt from its own laws,"<sup>30</sup> it is appropriate that we first evaluate Marx's thought according to his own criteria, before applying those criteria to the existential and structural interpretations we have been considering.

Historical materialism is first and foremost a philosophy of history and therefore is subject to the same kind of critique which it itself addresses to other histories and philosophies of history: that is, a critique in terms of its actual and potential mystifications and reifications of social reality. I shall argue that Marx's ideas of history, freedom, and nature, and therefore his notion of man to which they all refer, do mystify reality to varying degrees.

## History

The very assumption of history, for example, as linear, progressive, and meaningful, ". . . the process of evolution of humanity,"<sup>31</sup> the process of the genesis of man,<sup>32</sup> is both an ethnocentric and a phallogocentric prejudice which must not go unchallenged. This idea of history, as rational and teleological and directed towards the emancipation of humanity, has been used throughout human history, and continues to be used, to mystify and so justify the systematic exploitation, oppression, repression, and abuse of most men and all women and children, in the interests of a few. While all human beings have been diminished in the process.

As long as this assumption of historical progress goes unchallenged, it will continue to mystify and justify inhuman social practices, in "socialist" and capitalist regimes alike, for it makes possible the separation of means and ends and the justification of the former in terms of the latter.<sup>33</sup> Thus present social realities are legitimized as means for the fulfillment of a "more humane" future--and satisfaction forever deferred. There ensues a refusal to look at the present as it is for itself: its meaning and truth are always projected either onto the past (present realities are the effects of past practices, the practices of others over which we have no control), or onto the future, which is forever on the horizon.

Thus is concrete immediate lived experience both reified and mystified; for its reality and significance is referred to a future (or past) which is not, which is necessarily abstract, mediated, ideal, and unknowable.

Such a "history" clearly serves the interests of those with power and influence over presently existing social forces. It also serves to obscure, and conceal the specificity and lived reality of present social relations by reducing them to a single meaning (as Sartre rightly pointed out in his critique of vulgar Marxism in the Questions--my argument is that this danger is intrinsic to any approach to human affairs which takes this particular concept of History for granted, as does Sartre himself, following Marx's own example). The specific truth of the relations between men and women, for example, has been consistently refused, obscured, in short denied (i.e. mystified and reified), by Marxist and non-Marxist "history" alike.

Mary O'Brien in her Politics of Reproduction explores this particular omission of traditional historical discourse in detail. Her argument suggests that the subjugation and oppression of women does not appear as such in (male) history because it is its very condition of possibility; it is that upon which history is built. She maintains that history is an essentially male invention; that it is phallocentric and phallocratic, not per accidens--because males and not females, as it happens, invented

and dominated culture--but by necessity, because it serves specifically male needs.

She argues that history is founded in the different relationship of men and women to reproduction, and that it is, therefore, reproductive (not productive) relations which are the fundamental motor of history. The reproductive process consists of eight dialectical moments, according to O'Brien: menstruation, copulation, alienation, conception, labour, birth, appropriation, and nurture. Only one of these moments requires active male participation: copulation, and this is a short-lived event with no significant temporal structure and therefore giving rise to no specific temporal consciousness--neither cyclical, episodic, nor linear. Women, by contrast, experience and actively participate in the whole reproductive process, and all of its temporal structures, which are episodic (copulation and conception), cyclical (menstruation), and linear (pregnancy, birth, nurture). The moment of alienation (the third moment) is peculiarly male, and refers to the alienation of the male seed during intercourse, whereby men are radically estranged from the consequences of their actions, and more importantly, from the reproductive process itself. The moment of copulation, therefore, constitutes both the inclusion and the exclusion of men in and from reproduction, and is the first historical contradiction. This experience of contradiction, which is peculiarly male,

is therefore mediated by a peculiarly male praxis: by the appropriation of children, and later of mothers, through the institution of rites/rights of paternity.

The profound difference between the social reality and experience of paternity and maternity is thus revealed and it cannot be over-emphasized: the former is entirely cultural, in that it relies on a social institution; the latter entirely natural, in that no specifically cultural mediation is required to establish it. Maternity, both known and lived, is a natural, immediate, direct, and concrete relation (no-one can dispute a woman's claim to have mothered a particular child when she has both borne and bred that child, least of all the mother); while paternity, lived and "acknowledged," is always and necessarily cultural, indirect, mediated, conventional, and abstract; and always disputable, relying as it does on male control over women plus a decision by a particular male to acknowledge a particular child. Indeed, ". . . the office of father is man's first political office."<sup>34</sup>

Because of their innately different relationship to reproduction, ". . . male and female time consciousness is different." "Female time is continuous, male time is discontinuous." This ". . . frees men from the contingencies of natural time, but deprives them of experienced generational continuity."<sup>35</sup> Men, therefore, created artificial cultural principles of continuity in the

public, cultural, and political realm (a realm constituted for that very purpose) to mediate their experienced estrangement from temporal and species continuity in the private, natural, and personal realm which is uniquely available to mothers.<sup>36</sup>

For men, species time is discontinuous. Men have to create artificial modes of continuity in social and symbolic ways, and the most successful of these is the political community. It is not by chance that the vocabulary of politics is persistently organic. Constitution, body politic and hereditary monarchy are instances of male potency, the power over a natural process which is indifferent to men's post-coital fate, and the ability to develop a collective praxis which creates artificial modes of continuity powerful enough to obscure from the searching gaze of Karl Marx the fact that genetic continuity is a material substructure of human history.<sup>37</sup>

History, conceived of as rational, teleological, and continuous is one such artificial principle of continuity. It is, therefore, not so much an expression of humanity's need to conquer time, scarcity, or the alienation resulting from productive relations, as it is an expression of men's specific need to overcome their alienation from temporal and species continuity as a result of their primary exclusion from the reproductive process.

. . . history is, among other things, the actual creation of continuity, for men must act, to create continuity by virtue of their alienation from continuity in the reproductive process.<sup>38</sup>

Marx, by assuming history as a legitimate and unquestioned point of departure for rendering social reality intelligible and social change inevitable, falls victim to the mystifications implicit in that same history; and so, like Sartre, fails " . . . to transcend the ideological fetishism of pater familias Victorian style."<sup>39</sup> He does, however, and this is what constitutes his enormous worth as a thinker, provide us with a method (material, dialectical, historical, concrete, and revolutionary) which allows us to disclose his limitations and transcend them.

The ethnocentric limitations of the concept of History have already been discussed in detail in chapter II with respect to Sartre's definition of man in terms of history and the dialectic, and history and the dialectic in terms of man. We argued there that to privilege history in such a way was to mystify and reify an essentially socio-historically specific and ethnocentric superstructural formation, which cannot found anthropological understanding, but rather demands it: " . . . in terms of deeper material substructures, which alone will explain that same historical consciousness."<sup>40</sup>

We learned from Lévi-Strauss that non-historical societies exist, and consist of human beings whose practices and praxes are as dialectical as our own. These societies conquer time, make discontinuous events intelligible and, if we accept Mary O'Brien's thesis, overcome male

estrangement from temporal and species continuity, not by inventing History and interpreting events in terms of their historical progression towards some humanly desirable end, but by establishing permanent social structures which persist throughout time without significant change, and by interpreting events in terms of myths, i.e. in terms of primordial realities which events merely confirm.

These repetitive societies were also seen to be non-alienated societies, in spite of the real conditions of scarcity in which they exist. Thus scarcity, as a foundation for History, was challenged by Lévi-Strauss's work. He suggests that increased population size and consequent reduced levels of authenticity provided History's conditions of possibility (alienation, for example), together with hierarchical social organization, writing, and private property, which emerged simultaneously with them.

This view, which considers population size to be the fundamental and necessary variable in the determination of history and historical consciousness challenges the conventional Marxist view which focuses on the division of labour (in production) and the emergence of private property contingent upon it. Marx's vision of bringing an end to alienation and (pre-) history through the destruction of private property and the establishment of international socialism is shown to be unfounded; unless it can include within it some stipulation or strategy for maintaining

low levels of population and hence high levels of authenticity. Sartre's analyses of the alienating structures of seriality (see chapter I), and Merleau-Ponty's account of the emergence of self-consciousness as a consequence of the break-down in communication (chapter IV) point to the same limitations in traditional Marxism.

In fact, Marx himself realized that the division of labour and the institution of private property were not the sufficient conditions of history and the emergence of historical (alienated) consciousness. For he recognized that the first division of labour and the first acquisition of private property occurred within the family, and that non-historical, non-capitalist, non-alienated societies consist of families so-structured.<sup>41</sup> In such families men own women and children (Lévi-Strauss testifies to the primordial ownership of women by men within culture by identifying human culture with the exchange of women), and labour is divided between the sexes; public and productive labour being performed by the men, and private, reproductive labour by the women.

We must recognize, however, that it is not the nature of the work which determines its public/private and productive/reproductive classification, but the nature of the worker; that the division of labour within the family is neither "natural" nor "spontaneous," as Marx and Engels and others have assumed, but historical and conventional, for sexual discrimination both precedes and conditions

it. For whatever men do is considered public and productive, even if it is, as it is in rare cases, nurturing activity, raising children or preparing food. While, whatever women do is considered private and non-productive, whether it be cooking and cleaning, or farming (both crops and animals), fishing, manufacturing (clothes and tools), or construction work (boats, houses, furniture), which it often is.

Within the primordial human family, therefore, labour is divided and men own woman and children; but there is not yet History, nor Alienation in Marx's sense.

The first challenge to Marxism, therefore, posed by the anthropological and feminist critique, is to render these prehistorical patriarchal relations intelligible in terms of their historical and material conditions of possibility; since it is only on the basis of this prior social formation of the patriarchal family that the historical appropriation of productive surplus in the hands of men rather than women in capitalism can be adequately understood, or adequately challenged, therefore.

Patriarchal political organizations will remain after the destruction of capitalism if their specificity is either denied or ignored, or if we are mistaken about their historical and material conditions of possibility (if we imagine that they are rooted in scarcity, for example, or in the implicit weakness of women who have the misfortune

of getting pregnant). Patriarchy does not seem to be rooted in contingent productive relations, but in the relationship of men to the reproductive process. I have suggested above that men created patriarchy (their first political production), to secure for themselves by political means an identification with species and generational continuity which only women experience immediately, directly, and naturally by virtue of being mothers; and that they did this by establishing paternity rights/rites over women's offspring. But the institution of relations of paternity is at one and the same time the institution of patriarchy; for paternity is guaranteed only if maternity is first controlled--and that is possible only if all women are collectively controlled by all men. This truth of social reality has to be acknowledged before it can be transcended. But we have learned from Marx himself in whose interests the ruling ideas rule; and they consistently rule the critique of patriarchal structures and ideology out of the court of "serious" ~~philosophical~~ philosophical and political discourse. As long as this continues, political and philosophical discourse will, in our opinion, continue to run around in a vicious circle, in its neurotic refusal to examine its own conscience, and the unconscious of its discourse which is patriarchy.

The second challenge to historical materialism is to make the remaining condition of possibility of

capitalism intelligible; that is the appropriation and accumulation of the surplus in the hands of some men rather than all. Lévi-Strauss's observations correlating increases in population size with decreasing levels of authenticity (together with the emergence of hierarchical social relations, writing, and history itself) are suggestive in this respect.<sup>42</sup> He forces us to look beyond the traditional Marxist categories for our explanation of history and the rise of capitalism in particular, by isolating population size rather than the mode of production, as the critical determinant linking private property and surplus production with the establishment of hierarchical class relations between men (in no way comparable, historically, to those already existing between men and women).

Again, changes in reproductive relations emerge as determinant, as increases in population size force changes in kinship structures to occur. Contingencies of climate and geography also stimulate transformations of kinship structures in response to stimulated growth and fertility, and the migration and mixing of societies and the formation of "nations," for example.

The mode of production is not denied as a critical determinant of social change in this analysis; but like the decentred cogito of previous chapters, it is no longer acknowledged as the final determinant, in the last analysis, of all social relations. This has significant consequences

for the revolutionary character of historical materialism, and for any discussion of strategy for radical social change, for it suggests that perhaps more than changes in productive relations are required to remove the excesses, injustices, inequalities, and alienations traditionally associated with capitalism.

#### Freedom

A similar critique can be addressed to Marx's concept of freedom: that his assumption of freedom as the supreme value and end of human nature, serves to reify and mystify social relations, aspirations, and values, rather than transform or "liberate" them.

Marx realized that the abstract, individual freedom of traditional, social, and political theory (e.g. that of Rousseau) was a bourgeois mystification, disguising real social relations of unfreedom in capitalist society;<sup>43</sup> that, in fact, it described only the relations of the marketplace and the freedom of men as consumers, to buy and sell commodities. He also realized that "freedom" and "equality" were the ruling ideas of the bourgeoisie and served their interests, while other values had reigned supreme under different social systems: honour and loyalty during the rule of the aristocracy, for example.

Nevertheless, even though he acknowledged the historicity of freedom as a value, and its mystifying political function as a ruling idea of the ruling class,

Marx retained it as one of the principal values of historical materialism--redefining it, but nevertheless, having his cake (exploiting the emotional appeal of the call to "freedom") and eating it too (rejecting the bourgeois appeal as a mystification).

The appeal to freedom, like the appeal to science, is retained in historical materialism because it is intrinsically normative and self-validating: "everyone, it is presumed, is in favour of science and freedom; they should therefore be in favour of historical materialism, the "scientific" pursuit of "freedom." But, as we have seen in our discussion of science above, the terms of traditional political philosophy may appear in Marxism, but they do so only under radically different descriptions. It was suggested there, that such a practice, not only obscures and confuses the real points of conflict between Marxists, and Marxists and non-Marxists alike, but also runs the risk of transforming a social and material struggle into one conducted at the level of ideas only.<sup>44</sup>

In fact, the hegemony of the bourgeois ideology of freedom, is so total that attempts to combat that hegemony on its own terms, that is, in terms of freedom, are quite self-defeating. They invite, not only confusion, (but also co-option, by diverting an essentially political conflict into a conflict of ideas (we are freer than they, etc.).

Marxists should, therefore I suggest, cease promoting socialism as the "road to freedom" (a fundamentally abstract formulation), because whether they believe it or not, freedom has come to mean freedom from production (work) and freedom for consumption (leisure); and this, of course, is not what Marxism is promoting at all.

But even Marx's reformulations of freedom do not escape criticism, for he assumes too many of its original bourgeois mystifications; for example, he characterizes freedom as:

- (i) an historical achievement; (ii) the antithesis of the alienation specific to capitalist productive relations;
- (iii) the victory of humanity over need and nature itself.

I will consider each of these mystifications in turn.

1. Freedom as an historical achievement

We have already argued that Marx's uncritical adoption of the Hegelian idea of History, as rational and continuous, the story of man's progressive evolution towards emancipation and genuine humanity, is both ethnocentric and phallogocentric, and as such contributes more to the mystification of social reality, than to its revolutionary transformation.<sup>45</sup> It validates the excesses of past history and present social reality, by regarding them as necessary stages in an evolutionary process whose end term is "freedom,"<sup>46</sup> and thus justifies conditions which are existentially intolerable, as the necessary historical means for the creation of an equally necessary future end which will negate and

transcend all injustices and hardships, and all unfreedoms.

In the first place, this notion of freedom, as the achievement of human history, invalidates primitive societies and denies the specificity of their social organizations.

This is exemplified in the following observation by Marx:

Atheism and communism are not flight or abstraction from, nor loss of, the objective world which men have created . . . . They are not an impoverished return to unnatural, primitive simplicity. They are, the first real emergence, the genuine actualization of man's nature as something real.<sup>47</sup>  
[emphasis mine]

Primitive people, presumed to be less "free" than we, less "real" as human beings because their productive forces-- and therefore their humanity--are less developed,<sup>48</sup> have been "advanced" towards genuine humanity and freedom; and rushed through stages of economic and productive development in fifty, sometimes fifteen years, which were spread over 3,000 years or more in the case of the Western capitalist nations which provide the model for their "enlightened" leadership. All on the assumption that this way lies the "essence" of man, his freedom and fulfillment, and his emancipation from bondage to nature: "Liberation is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture . . ." <sup>49</sup>

This view of freedom, as the historical achievement and goal of man, also legitimizes a priori all scientific

and technological developments, which are regarded as "progressive" almost by definition--again, because freedom and human fulfillment are assumed to lie in that direction:

. . . natural science has penetrated all the more practically into human life through industry. It has transformed human life and prepared the emancipation of humanity . . . . If industry is conceived as the exoteric manifestation of the essential human faculties, the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man can also be understood.<sup>50</sup>

. . . only through developed industry, i.e. through the mediation of private property does the ontological essence of human passions, in its totality and its humanity, come into being; the science of man itself is a product of man's self-formation through practical activity.<sup>51</sup>

Such a view, which perceives science and technology as the necessary pre-conditions for human freedom, also pre-empt the critical analysis of specific scientific and industrial developments, as well as the criticism of science and industry themselves; since it is assumed that they will ultimately and necessarily serve the revolution. It, at the same time, often prejudices opinion against artistic and discursive cultural activity, which appear to make no obvious contribution to, or even to obstruct, the eventual liberation of humanity from need and the domination of nature. They come to be regarded, therefore, as counter-revolutionary and bourgeois pursuits; at best forms of propaganda, which, if not explicitly in favour of change,

implicitly obstruct it and perpetuate the status quo.

Meanwhile, the repressive and alienating structures and consequences of science, technology, and industry—of instrumental reason in general—are passed over in silence, or legitimized a priori as the necessary means of human emancipation. And thinkers like Freud, members of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, and Lévi-Strauss, for example, are denounced as bourgeois reactionaries for issuing warnings against this identification of historical development with the increasing liberation of mankind; Freud showing how progress in civilization is not necessarily progress in freedom, but in repression; and Lévi-Strauss how progress in the cultural realm (in the organization of things) correlates negatively with social progress, i.e. the organization of people; success in one only increasing entropy in the other.

2. Freedom as the antithesis of an alienation specific to capitalism

Marx identifies freedom with the existence of man as a species-being:

. . . not only in the sense that he makes the community (his own as well as those of other things) his object both practically and theoretically, but also . . . in the sense that he treats himself as the present living species, as a universal and consequently free being.<sup>52</sup>

Capitalist productive relations, which isolate individuals and set each man's self-interest over against that of

the other, systematically alienate men from species-being, and therefore from freedom, which will not be realized, according to Marx until the capitalist mode of production is overthrown, and together with it, that whole system of alienations which it generates:

. . . private property, acquisitiveness, the separation of labour, capital, and land, exchange and competition, value and the devaluation of men, monopoly and competition-- and the system of money.<sup>53</sup>

We do not question the premise that the destruction of capitalism is a necessary precondition of human emancipation; only its presumed sufficiency for the task. Marx's assumption that: ". . . all human servitude is involved in the relation of worker to production,"<sup>54</sup> does not, in our opinion, lift the veil of the specifically male mystification of social reality far enough. For it conceals the traditional and continuing subjugation of women within patriarchal social relations, which are determined not by the relation of women to production, but by the relation of men to reproduction.

Along with all the other "male-stream"<sup>55</sup> thinkers of the political and philosophical tradition, Marx overestimates the significance of production for humanity, identifying production with man's self-creation, the creation of his "second" nature, while remaining blind to the human and political importance of reproduction

which has been assimilated by the same tradition into man's less-than-human "first" (animal) nature, along with copulation, sexuality, and women themselves. This tradition which Marx continues, fails (refuses?) to acknowledge the following, for example:

1. That human labour is involved in reproduction, just as it is in production: that men do not, in spite of Heidegger, fall into being as fully-fledged adults, but are brought forth by women's labour.

2. That reproductive labour is necessarily social, as well as socially necessary labour.

3. That reproductive labour creates value: synthetic value, affirming "the ~~unity~~ of sentient beings with natural process," and "the integrity and continuity of the race."<sup>56</sup>

4. That reproductive labour is a specifically human activity and not merely an "animal function"; it is a form of praxis like all other human activities<sup>57</sup> (see chapter IV); reproducing women " . . . like the architect knows what she is doing, like the bee she cannot help what she is doing."<sup>58</sup>

Like his predecessors and successors in political and philosophical theory, Marx was unable to see in the reproductive process the objective material base of a specifically male alienation, which gave rise to a specifically female oppression, and a specifically male ideology obscuring both. He consequently falls victim

to its mystifications, conceiving of the material basis of existence solely in economic (productive) terms, for example, and labour as exclusively productive. He is, therefore, mystified twice-over: first by the male, and then by the bourgeois appearances of social relations, which in this case, as in most, coincide and collaborate in their denial of historical and social (i.e. human) significance to reproduction.<sup>59</sup>

As long as transformations occur only in productive relations, however, and not in the reproductive relations, which, I maintain, precede them logically and chronologically, patriarchy and the oppression of women will persist, and half of humanity will remain unliberated. Since the overthrow of capitalist relations of production offers no guarantee of transformations in reproductive relations, it holds out little promise for women's liberation and the destruction of patriarchy upon which it depends.<sup>60</sup>

Marx's identification of freedom with the supersession of capitalist productive relations therefore overlooks those experiences of alienation which are rooted in other contingencies: in population size for example; in the exclusion of men from the reproductive process (and women from "public" life); and in that very conquest of nature which is frequently considered by Marxists and non-Marxists alike to be a necessary precondition and constituent of human freedom.

Simply transforming capitalist productive relations will not eliminate the structures of alienation which are a consequence of size: low levels of authenticity, seriality, the practice-inert, etc.; nor those which are a consequence of male estrangement from the reproductive process: male control over women and children and a male stream ideology which falsely bifurcates human existence into isolable and opposing functions, public/private, political/personal, production/reproduction, cultural/natural, human/animal, mental/material, rational/emotional, etc.<sup>61</sup>

While the realization of genuine species-being, whereby each individual . . . treats the species as his own being, or himself as a species-being<sup>62</sup> will not occur as long as these oppositions remain;<sup>63</sup> they must be negated, mediated, transcended, and integrated theoretically and practically before humanity can consider itself "free." And this, we contend, will not happen as long as their material basis in male reproductive relations is ignored or denied.

### 3. Freedom and the creation of humanity

This need for integration, which is implicit in Marx's appeal to species-being as the condition of freedom and genuine humanity,<sup>64</sup> actually contradicts other specifications of freedom in Marx's writing; for example, his identification of the free individual with the self-created individual:

A being does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself.\* A man who lives by the favour of another considers himself a dependent being . . . for socialist man, the whole of what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labour, and the emergence of nature for man, he therefore, has the evident and irrefutable proof of his self-creation, of his own origins.<sup>65</sup>  
 [\*Emphasis mine.]

The preoccupation with autogenesis seems to be a peculiarly male obsession and actually contradicts the ideal of integrated species-being in its emphasis on self-development and independence. It has characterized all male-stream political thought since its inception with Plato (who was, after all, the "mid-wife" of ideas). Mary O'Brien identifies this concern for human origins as one of the symbolic and ideal ways by which men mediate their primary estrangement from real human generativity:

Male supremacy, estranged from natural regeneration needs not only a non-biological principle of continuity, but also a non-biological principle of beginning.<sup>66</sup>

And like all ideological mystifications of reality, male-stream political thought on human origins mystifies the truth of human existence by completely inverting it.<sup>67</sup>

Thus:

The reality of maternity as opposed to the real abstraction of paternity, is inverted and procreativity plus creativity are asserted as both prior to and ethically superior to mere biological continuity.<sup>68</sup>

Accordingly, men's exclusion from the creation and reproduction of real natural men, is mystified by an ideology which posits their necessary participation in the creation and production of cultural, artificial "man."<sup>69</sup> While, correspondingly, women's natural participation in reproduction is concealed and negated as significantly human, by her institutionalized exclusion from the cultural production (by men) of "humanity" itself.

Similarly, men's alienation from natural species continuity is mystified by their creation, control, and appropriation of cultural, i.e. political continuity; from which women, who do experience natural continuity with the species, are once again systematically excluded.

And finally, men's primordial freedom with respect to the natural reproductive process, i.e. their freedom from reproductive labour, and their corresponding freedom to choose, or not to choose, paternity,<sup>70</sup> is mystified into a primordial alienation from the cultural, artificial production of man, in the public and political realm (as a consequence of scarcity, for example). This alienation is not considered to extend to women, once again, because of their exclusion from the culturally and humanly specific realm of production.<sup>71</sup>

The reality beneath these mystifications is that men's primordial, direct, concrete, and unmediated experience of alienation occurs not in the productive process, but

in the reproductive process which at the primordial level men do not control, i.e. in the creation of their first nature, and not in the (artificial) creation of a "second" nature which they do control. This truth is concealed and mystified by an ideological theory and practice which posits "man's"<sup>72</sup> second nature (i.e. that created specifically by men and not women) as the truly human nature, and men's first nature (that created specifically by women and not men) as a less-than-human, merely biological nature.<sup>73</sup>

Thus human reproduction, according to traditional political thought, has no essentially human value, and is identified, along with women and that which makes it all possible--sex, with biology and nature and the essentially non-historical aspects of existence; while men have appropriated for themselves the essentially human and cultural historical project of the production of humanity itself.<sup>74</sup> The facts and the historical and political significance of real human birth are thus passed over in silence and never considered worthy of philosophical or political comment. While death, no less biological, no less natural, and no less inevitable than birth, has acquired enormous philosophical and political significance over the years.<sup>75</sup> Let us speculate a little upon why this might be the case.

In the first place, the relationship of men and women to death is equal and similar; it is an event which includes/excludes them equally. Secondly, it requires

no labour. Thirdly, at the fundamental level of lived experience, death separates the dying individual from the social group and is an experience which is essentially and peculiarly one's own. It is perhaps the very generality of death (as an experience directly available to one and all) as well as its radical individualism (only I, and I alone, experience my death) that have legitimized it within the context of male ideological representations of reality as an essential and significantly human experience; in contrast to birth (which is essentially social but exclusive of male experience) which has always been presented within the same tradition of thought as a non-essential and accidental property of being human--despite the undeniable fact that it is its sine qua non and involves a considerable degree of socially useful and necessary labour.

Unfortunately, this is not the place to pursue, or even unravel, all the threads of mystification in male-stream thought to which Marx, as much as any other traditional thinker, is susceptible. I can only indicate the major areas in Marx's materialist and historical philosophy of history which remain unscientific in the given sense, i.e. mystifying and reifying, leaving their detailed examination for a later occasion and another work.

One such area of mystification concerns the latent individualism of a position which characterizes freedom in terms of autonomy, independence, and self-creation,

and "man's"<sup>76</sup> production of his own essential second nature above and beyond his first which he owes to "woman." The desire for such a freedom actually contradicts the project of integration--of the individual with the community, with nature, and with himself--which the freedom defined as species-being supposedly entails.

The argument of this section has been that as long as male thought persists as dualistic thought, and men continue to separate their "first" from their "second" self-made human nature, pitting themselves against the first (nature and women) in their efforts to produce the second (the cultural hegemony of "man" over nature and women), species-being will forever elude them, for:

A compromise (between collectivism and individualism) is impossible in any theory where the individual is constituted without ever getting born and the alienation of second nature is perceived as infinite.<sup>77</sup>

As with all ideological mystifications, it is not so much that the proposition that "~~man~~ makes himself," is untrue, but that it takes appearances for reality and tells only half the truth as if it were the whole of it: ". . . it is merely one-sided, still theorizing on a second nature for man abrupted from his first."<sup>78</sup>

## Nature

Marx looks to Communism for the necessary reconciliation of man with nature, ". . . the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature,"<sup>79</sup> which will herald the arrival of the new age of freedom. But this view of nature, as an antagonist of human existence, to be dominated, mastered, and controlled by "man" in the process of his self-development, actually undercuts its own project of emancipating humanity. It expresses, once again, an ethnocentric and phallogocentric prejudice to which the lives of women and primitive people do not conform.

Primitive people do not, for example, regard themselves as engaged in a constant battle against nature: they live in symbiosis with nature; they co-operate with nature, and let nature be so that they too can be. And reproducing women do the same. Both exist with-Nature, and Nature is neither their Other nor their adversary. For this, both primitive people and women have been stigmatized by male-stream\*thought as inferior, deficient, deformed, or debased types of the species "humanity."

What Marx has in mind as the resolution of the man/nature antagonism is not so much a reconciliation of one with the other, but a victory of man/men over nature by way of science, industry, and technology. Only then, when nature has been "subdued," "conquered," controlled, and rendered "ready-to-hand" as it were, as a tool serving

man/men, will men be ripe for Communism, a "fully developed humanism" and a "fully developed naturalism"; and only then will natural science " . . . incorporate the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate natural science" and be, for the first time, a "single science" of an essentially human nature.<sup>80</sup>

But such a resolution offers no solution at all to mankind's disruption from species-being; for it only repeats and reinforces the original separation of man/men from his/their "first nature" (true, material, real, concrete, immediate, primordial), which, we have been arguing, is the foundation of his/their alienation in the first place. Genuine species-being requires integration: that is, the mediation of opposing dualisms (mind/matter, public/private, subject/object, reason/emotion, etc.), not the domination of one pole-- in this case Nature, by the other, in this case "Man" (i.e. men). Such a programme of domination only consolidates man's / men's primary alienation from nature and from their human nature as contingent, sentient, dependent, and essentially vulnerable existences.

Marx maintains that "Man produces when he is free from physical need" and " . . . only truly produces in freedom from such need."<sup>81</sup> Surely this is mystification? For if this really were the case, "man" (men) would be chasing a chimera. They will never be free, never be human in this sense; for as natural and sentient creatures they will

always be obliged to produce, and reproduce, in response to physical need.

In this respect, Sartre only follows Marx's (bourgeois and phallogentric) example, in regarding physical human need as a limitation on human freedom and the realization of a genuine humanity. What can these men think they are, if they consider human biology as a burden, and as a constraint on their essential humanity? Surely not solitary and free-floating, self-contained minds after all? But what else remains for them, given their scorn for, denigration of, and self-conscious separation of themselves from Nature?

Not even Marx, it seems, could resist the seduction of a traditional idealism (bourgeois and male) which persists in its denial of that which is most fundamental to man/men: their existence as, in and with nature. We have already commented upon the inadequacy of the concept of need for the job Sartre required of it: to be the primordial material foundation of human alienation and human history. Marx is vulnerable to the same critique.

Since both Sartre and Marx acknowledge the essential historicity of human needs, beyond the most basic of survival needs, a much more precise and concrete specification of what would constitute freedom from need is required in their respective theories of "man" and history, both of which claim that "man"/men's freedom from need, from the constraints

of nature, is a necessary precondition of human emancipation (from alienation and exploitation) and of the possibility of true species-being under socialism.

We do not doubt for one minute that scarcity, like need, determines human existence. But, as we argued in chapter I and recapitulated in chapter II, scarcity, like need, is not an absolute, but an historical, relative, and social value, which will always characterize human existence under different specifications. (For example, compared to another, or another time and place, or another desirable object, something will always be scarce; even if it is only time itself, or snow, or sun, or hair on the head, or chest, or whatever . . .). Scarcity, cannot, therefore, be regarded as the contingent condition of an historically specific and removable human alienation: for scarcity can only be eliminated by decree, and not in fact. Furthermore, anthropological evidence suggests that scarcity of resources essential for survival, food (and women!) for example, unites rather than divides both individuals and social groups; provides the real material base for reciprocity and co-operation between people rather than for oppression and competition as the mystified ideology of the wealthy nations would have us believe.

We cannot afford to forget: (1) that the experience of alienation central to the historical materialism of both Sartre and Marx, i.e. alienated labour, and the impoverishment

of humanity which is contingent on it, is foreign to primitive people; (ii) that their resources for the satisfaction of basic survival needs are nevertheless minimal; that they are very dependent on Nature (rather than science and technology) for their survival; (iii) that primitive people in spite of this, remain human, not animal, and cultural, not biological, organisms; (iv) that the alienation under consideration emerged along with surplus not scarcity, and with the production of commodities for exchange and accumulation as wealth and power. That is: alienation appeared along with that very freedom from basic need which is so fetishized in traditional Western political thought, Marxist and non-Marxist alike.

I am suggesting that alienation is a necessary correlate of the very freedom to which it is ideologically opposed in traditional political thought, and that this contradiction is at the heart of liberalism and Marxism alike, for they both agree in their identification of human freedom with "man's"/men's increasing domination and control of Nature.<sup>82</sup> I have argued that this impasse is a consequence of a specifically male mystification of a specifically male experience of alienation from the reproductive process; the reality of which, independent of and prior to any alienation contingent upon production, has been denied, obscured, and mystified by their traditional social, political, and philosophical ideology, which has

single-mindedly (and we have suggested, neurotically) promoted productive activity as the only legitimate and essentially human praxis.

It is the primordial relationship of men to reproductive activity which is the real historical and material basis of a necessarily male political process and ideology, which is essentially separative: differentiating human existence into, not just different and complementary functions, but into opposing dualisms--that between the natural (or biological) and the cultural (or human) being the most comprehensive of these dualisms to which all the others can be assimilated: male/female, body/mind, public/private, etc.

The value of the emerging feminist critique of traditional thought, some of which has been indicated here, is that for the first time these dualisms, oppositions and contradictions (which are lived as well as thought) can be challenged and resolved (mediated, transcended, and integrated) not just in abstract theory as has been attempted in the philosophical past, but in actual praxis. For, although women must speak to a tradition and in a language which is male-ideological in the specific sense suggested in this chapter, they do so from a completely different material base: from an experience of species-generativity, continuity, and being which is material, historical, and dialectical, and now revolutionary, given the transformation

in reproductive relations made possible by increasingly reliable and sophisticated techniques of contraception, abortion, and sterilization, for example; an experience which is grounded in a lived relationship to human reproduction which neither begins nor ends with the moment of copulation.

We must now, however, extend our critique to the remaining "anthropologies" under examination; first to Sartre's existentialism and finally to Lévi-Strauss's structuralism.

## Chapter VI

### Sartre

The limitations of Sartre's attempt to existentialize Marxism were explored in detail in the first three chapters of this thesis. In addition, our critique of Marx in the last chapter, of his concepts of history, freedom, nature, and "man," is equally applicable to Sartre who assumes similar points of departure, i.e. history as teleological and rational; freedom as its goal and achievement; and "man" as an essentially self-creating species, presently alienated from his essential self by a productive process which has not yet mastered nature, nor conquered natural scarcity.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way, Sartre's references to "science" are as ambivalent as the status and meaning of "science" in Marx's and Marxist discourse: denoting, as it may, either the norms and practices of bourgeois Science, or those of a revolutionary Marxist science, or some unspecified mixture of both--as is more often the case.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we would argue that Sartre, like other Marxists and revolutionaries, would be better off renouncing the aspiration to scientific anthropology, to the "anthropology" as well as to the "science," with their implicit claims to (bourgeois-identified) universality, totality, objectivity, and impartiality, for a more precise and specifically Marxist

critique of social reality, described in the last chapter as material, historical, dialectical, concrete, and revolutionary. And his denunciation of "scientism" in others would likewise be more tellingly expressed in more precisely Marxist terms; i.e. in terms of their mystifications and reifications of reality, and their failure to be consistently or adequately material, historical, dialectical, concrete, and revolutionary as specified.

My own concern in this chapter is to appraise Sartre's Critique according to the criteria developed in the last chapter: to consider how far his attempted integration of Marxism and existentialism fulfills the requirements of a specifically Marxist and essentially revolutionary practice.

Sartre certainly aspires to such a practice. Both the regressive-progressive method elaborated in the Questions, and the project of the Critique, to ground alienation and history in the material relationship of men with nature and each other in contingent conditions of scarcity, testify to this commitment. And although, as we have seen, he failed in his project in many respects, being still too much enthralled by Cartesian dualism (non-dialectical and non-historical) and its aspiration to an absolute freedom (subjectivity) unfettered by the essentially inert material world (objectivity), we must not, nevertheless, underestimate Sartre's achievement.

### Sartre's Achievement in the Critique

In the first place he raises, and resolves, the critical question of subjectivity in the Critique: a central question for Marxism which has not been able to resolve it on its own terms. Traditional theories of the subject, consistent with historical materialism, reduce either to a crude voluntarism, or to an equally crude economism, neither of which can do the important political job required of them, which is to render both feasible and intelligible historical materialism's call for social revolution and the creation of "scientific" socialism.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, he adopts an appropriate methodology: a phenomenology of lived experience, as that which mediates subject and world and is reducible to neither; a method which is, at least in principle and intention, material, dialectical, historical, concrete, and revolutionary.

Thirdly, through the use of this method, he has considerably illuminated and extended our understanding of the functioning of contemporary capitalism, and thus raised important strategic and political questions concerning both its possible demise and the future of socialism.

I shall consider each of these achievements in greater detail.

Subjectivity and the  
intelligibility of Marxism

The problem of subjectivity which traditional Marxism has not been able to resolve, is at one and the same time the problem of Marxism's own intelligibility. The Critique represents, therefore, not only an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of revolutionary subjectivity, but also an attempt: ". . . to find the basis of intelligibility of the categories and conclusions of Marxist historical materialism."<sup>4</sup> The fundamental question can be posed in several different ways; it concerns most essentially, in all its forms, the nature of the relationship between the individual and society, and the nature of human freedom and responsibility.<sup>5</sup> How can men be held responsible for making history, when they are themselves made by it? is one way of posing the problematic. Upon what can we base the truth of historical materialism when as a knowledge claim, it is itself only an historical effect? is another. Or again, how do we explain: ". . . how history is determined in ways which conflict with the conscious intentions of its subjects,"<sup>6</sup> when those intentions and those subjects actually constitute that history? Or group action, which, according to historical materialism, both sustains and revolutionizes social reality, when in fact all that really occurs occurs always as the actions and intentions of individuals? In Sartre's own words,

how can we:

. . . give man both his autonomy and his reality among real objects, avoiding idealism without lapsing into mechanistic materialism?<sup>7</sup>

To resolve these questions we need a method which will permit us to:

. . . find the 'mediations' linking the immediate, directly experienced project of the individual with the external, material, technical and social conditions of human life.<sup>8</sup>

Sartre's phenomenological method, with its appeal to existential comprehension:

. . . discovering the unity between conscious motives and the historical causes that provide their ultimate content and driving force.<sup>9</sup>

is just such a method.

The phenomenological method of the Critique

1. Materialist

Sartre's method in the Critique is materialist, in that it locates the intelligibility of the truths of historical materialism, not in ideas, nor even in the contemplation or "objective" scientific<sup>10</sup> analysis of experience, but in praxis itself, which, according to Sartre, ". . . provides its own clarification":<sup>11</sup> "It is the work or the act of the individual which reveals to us the secret

of his conditioning."<sup>12</sup> Since every action is an intentional action and aims at some end, it is theoretically possible to reconstruct, from an examination of the act itself, the dialectical movement of totalization, comprehension, negation, and transcendence, which constitute it: the intention of the agent, for example ("sa signification terminale"), as well as the material conditions which made it possible ("ses conditions de départ").<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in Vietnam: Imperialism and Genocide, we see the projected method of the Critique in action (i.e. dialectical reconstruction). There Sartre argues, from a close examination of American praxis in Vietnam, that the intention of the U.S. was total genocide of the Vietnamese people, despite verbal declarations to the contrary:

. . . since it was a whole and united people which was holding the classical army at bay, the only anti-guerilla strategy that could pay off would be the destruction of this people, i.e. of civilians, of women and children.<sup>14</sup>

Traditionally, genocide, as a response to a people's war, has been restrained by economic considerations: the colonial, invading power has relied on the colonized sub-proletariat for cheap labour and, therefore, cannot, in most cases, afford to totally eliminate them. In these situations the native peoples' " . . . value as almost free manpower protects them for some degree from genocide."<sup>15</sup> But the U.S. was not engaged in the Vietnam struggle for

directly economic reasons. It had, therefore, " . . . no reason to hesitate to end it by an absolute strategy, i.e. by genocide."<sup>16</sup>

Although the U.S. government at first declared that it was sending troops only out of generosity and to help an ally, their real objective became clearer as the war continued. General Westmoreland defined it in these terms in October 1967: "We are waging war in Vietnam to show that guerilla warfare does not pay."<sup>17</sup> Now, Sartre argues, this lesson can be demonstrated in only two ways: either by the complete submission of the native people, or by their radical liquidation. From the point of view of the Vietnamese, both possibilities amount to genocide, to:

" . . . death by violence, or slow death at the end of a period of physical and mental degradation . . ."<sup>18</sup>

" . . . collective death or disintegration."<sup>19</sup>

Escalation of the war was thus inevitable, according to Sartre, for its only possible resolution from the U.S. point of view was genocide, one way or another--or defeat. This, of course, was not acknowledged by the U.S. government nor by the generals, but, as Sartre shows, " . . . their action in the course of its accomplishment provided its own clarification":<sup>20</sup>

The intention becomes apparent from a consideration of the facts. It is necessarily premeditated . . . Anti-guerilla genocide, a product of our time, presupposes organization, bases and therefore accomplices . . . a special budget. It must

therefore be thought out, planned. Does this mean that its authors are clearly aware of what they want? It is hard to decide about this one: one would have to probe deep into men's hearts, and Puritan bad faith can work wonders . . . The Truth is to be found on the spot, in the racism of the American forces . . . they say to themselves quite simply that any Vietnamese is, by definition, suspect. And this is true, from the neo-colonialists' point of view: they understand vaguely that, in a people's war, the civilians are the only visible enemy . . . The armed forces of the United States torture and kill the men, women and children of Vietnam because they are Vietnamese. In this way, whatever the lies and verbal precautions taken by the government, the drive to genocide is lodged in the heads of the soldiers.<sup>21</sup>

Genocide is the only possible reaction to the rebellion of a whole people, and was the only strategy available to the U.S.--" . . . short of calling a halt and leaving."

Thus, Sartre's method of existential comprehension is materialist in both required senses. First, it looks beyond the surface appearance and conscious representations of events<sup>22</sup> to the praxis which constitutes them and its specific and concrete determinants and consequences. And, secondly, it explains that praxis in terms of motivations and determinants of which the agent is not consciously aware; showing how history is made by individuals, though not necessarily according to their conscious wills and intentions.

According to this approach, every action has its own logic, rooted in the dialectical comprehension of existence which is its very condition of possibility; and while this logic is never fully and consciously known by the agent,<sup>23</sup>

it nevertheless makes possible the action and is its only intelligible explanation; it also remains available for reconstruction by an other.

## 2. Dialectical

Sartre's method is also dialectical, in that, (i) it acknowledges the dialectical nature of history and the praxis which constitutes it:<sup>24</sup> as a unity of totalization, negation, and transcendence irreducible to any of its moments, or to any causal sequence, and equally determined by consciousness and conditions alike;<sup>25</sup> and (ii) it explains events by reconstructing, dialectically, the movement which has constituted them, and thus the comprehension of both conditions and ends which made that praxis possible.<sup>26</sup>

## 3. Historical and concrete

It is also an historical and concrete method in that it insists on the specificity and particularity of events;<sup>27</sup> and derives theory from existence instead of forcing existence into the predetermined conceptual molds of theory:<sup>28</sup>

Existentialism reacts by affirming the specificity of the historical event, which it refuses to conceive of as the absurd juxtaposition of a contingent residue and an a priori signification. Its problem is to discover a supple, patient dialectic which espouses movements as they really are and which refuses to consider a priori that all lived conflicts pose contradictories or contraries.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, Sartre's existential Marxism goes even further in the direction of concreteness in its insistence that  
 "... in each case the role of the individual in

the historic event" be considered:<sup>30</sup>

For this role is not defined once and for all: it is the structure of the groups considered which determines it in each case. Thereby, without entirely eliminating contingency, we restore to it its limits and its rationality. The group bestows its power and efficacy upon the individuals whom it has made and who have made it in turn, whose irreducible particularity is one way of living universality.<sup>31</sup>

Sartre never ceases to remind us in the Critique that history is a "totalisation en cours" and not a totality which can be labelled, defined, and generalized. Consequently, only a dialectical, historical, and concrete approach to particular events can render them intelligible:

In abstract terms, this means that only a man who lives within a region of totalisation can apprehend the bonds of interiority which unite him to the totalising movement.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Revolutionary

Finally, his method is revolutionary, since it aims to change social reality by piercing the ideological veils which obscure its truth from us. Since it considers history to be a totalization and not a totality, it excludes metaphysics a priori as necessarily mystifying and reifying a reality which is essentially historical, changing and ambiguous.

Thus the true intellectual in his struggle against himself will come to see society as the arena of struggle between particular groups . . . In

contradiction to the tenets of bourgeois thought, he will perceive that man does not exist. But by the same token, once he knows he is not yet a man, he will grasp--within himself and then outside himself, and vice-versa--man as a task. As Ponge has said: man is the future of man.<sup>33</sup>

Since Sartre considers all praxis to be dialectical, i.e., irreducibly comprehension, totalization, and transcendence, revolutionary social change always remains, at least in principle, as a possibility for humanity--for no action is regarded as the simple consequence of a purely external and mechanical determinism.

The event is not the passive resultant of a hesitant, distorted action and of an equally uncertain reaction; it is not even the fleeting, slippery synthesis of reciprocal incomprehension. But across all the tools of action and thought which falsify praxis, each group realizes by its conduct a certain revelation of the other . . . . Thus it is the very ambiguity of the event which often confers upon it its historical efficacy. This is sufficient for us to affirm its specificity. For we do not wish to regard it as the simple unreal signification of molecular bumps and jolts--neither as their specific resultant nor as a schematic symbol of more profound movements. We view it rather as the moving, temporary unity of antagonistic groups which modifies them to the extent that they transform it.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, no account of history or history's intelligibility can be considered as final or definitive on this account; not that of Marx, nor Sartre's own, as he acknowledges in his discussion of "Marxism and Existentialism" in the Questions:

Every philosophy is practical, even the one which at first appears to be the most contemplative. Its method is a social and political weapon.

Thus a philosophy remains efficacious so long as the praxis which has engendered it, which supports it, and which is clarified by it, is still alive. But it is transformed, it loses its uniqueness, it is stripped of its original, dated content to the extent that it gradually impregnates the masses so as to become in and through them a collective instrument of emancipation . . .

There is no need to readapt a living philosophy to the course of the world; it adapts itself by means of thousands of particular pursuits, for the philosophy is one with the movement of society . . .

It is the very movement of History, the struggle of men on all planes and on all levels of human activity, which will set free captive thought and permit it to attain its full development . . .

And since I am to speak of existentialism, let it be understood that I take it to be an 'ideology.' It is a parasitical system living on the margin of knowledge, which at first it opposed but into which today it seeks to be integrated.<sup>35</sup>

Thus there is an additional sense in which Sartre's method is revolutionary: in that the philosophical perspective itself remains open to revision, transformation, or even repudiation.

Furthermore, not only are Sartre's questions about subjectivity and his methodological approach to them consistent with and complementary to Marxist historical materialism, but so also are his conclusions: he succeeds in demonstrating that it is both possible and true that individuals at the same time make history and are in turn made by it. His theory of subjectivity is both consistent

with and complementary to historical materialism, in that it offers an intelligible foundation for its truth.

New concepts for understanding  
the constituent structures of  
alienation in contemporary Capitalism

In addition to complementing and enriching Marxism as indicated, Sartre's analyses in the Critique offer us new and useful conceptual tools which considerably extend our understanding of the complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities of our own everyday lived experience of contemporary capitalism. For example:

1. Internalization-externalization: to describe the dialectical process of social conditioning; indicating how the universal is revealed in the particular, as well as realized by it; emphasizing the constant mediation between the world and the individual, each of which is reflected in and determined by the other.

2. Counter-finality: to describe the inertial control which our own objectified praxis can hold over us; controlling and constraining us against our own desires and intentions.

3. The practico-inert: to describe the same "passive-action" of the world, intensified and augmented by a social existence which is essentially serial; whereby each person's praxis threatens to rob the other of his own, and stands opposed to his own as alien and antagonistic.

4. Exterio-conditioning: to describe the impersonal process of social determination--by the "they," the anonymous "other"--which occurs in large and highly bureaucratized (serial) societies, like our own, which are controlled (always elsewhere) by a hierarchy of institutionalized powers and functions.

5. The series itself: to describe the relationship between individuals which characterizes such a society; a relationship which is: (i) false, because it is mediated solely by the circumstances of existence rather than by existence itself: people co-exist in series, they do not share a project or a life; (ii) negative, therefore, in that serial existence represents a separation rather than a community of individuals and interests; (iii) antagonistic, for each member of the series lives his relationship with the other as an essentially threatening one. Members of the series are divided in their interests; in competition for the satisfaction of those interests; and, therefore, constantly suspicious of each other. They are juxtaposed, like atoms, within a social structure which they have not determined and do not control.

"Working oneself over": a necessary constituent of revolutionary praxis

Nevertheless, Sartre shows in the Critique how genuine revolutionary group praxis can emerge from such alienated, atomized, social existences--on the basis of a spontaneous

and simultaneous recognition within each member of the group that their present existence is intolerable and that together, as a unified group, radical social change is possible. He has also shown why it is that such unified revolutionary groups are so short-lived: because their existence as a group "in fusion" can last only as long as the praxis which constitutes the group continues, which can be anything from a few hours to a few weeks at the very most. After the revolutionary moment has passed, the group either disintegrates, and its members return into the series, or it is transformed into a "sworn" group whose solidarity and fraternity is sustained only by terror and repression.

Sartre's analysis of revolutionary praxis has not been well received by revolutionary Marxists, because it seems to suggest that successful social revolution and non-alienated social existence is unavailable to human beings;<sup>36</sup> that even under Socialism, the alienating structures of serial existence, contingent upon simply being with others in an institutionalized group, will prevail: objectification, reification, alteration, etc.

These criticisms miss the point, in my opinion, and overlook the considerable contribution to revolutionary politics (theory and practice), which Sartre's analyses offer.

In the first place, it should be noted that Sartre is not making prognoses in the Critique. He is doing

phenomenology: i.e. describing events and examining experiences which have already actually occurred, in an attempt to understand history, and our conscious interpretations of it, from the inside; from the "totalisation en cours" which has constituted it, and remains constituted by it. His conclusions do not distort the historical facts in question, but rather clarify them in significant ways--which at the same time illuminate contemporary and continuing political struggles. What follows from his descriptions of the dialectical movement of history and of the individuals who make it, should not, therefore, be despair in the face of the cultural hegemony and tenaciousness of capitalist social structures, but a determination to undermine it by changing the prior conditions, the infrastructure of alienated, atomized, serial existence which sets limits to the revolutionary potential of individuals and organizations, and predisposes "conventional" modes of revolutionary praxis to failure.

It is not social revolution as such whose limits Sartre has described, but social revolution in particular socio-historical circumstances--the current conditions of contemporary capitalism. It is those conditions themselves which limit the potential of the revolutionary project: limits which are not so much economic or political, as they are cultural and human. For it is "men" who must be changed for Socialism, which only they can create, and not Socialism

which can be relied upon to change "men." That is the lesson of the Critique:

. . . ideas do not change men. Knowing the cause of a passion is not enough to overcome it; one must live it, one must oppose other passions to it, one must combat it tenaciously, in short one must 'work oneself over'\* . . . what is involved here is not a mere play of concepts but real History . . . there must be material work and revolutionary praxis.<sup>37</sup> \*[Emphasis mine.]

May 1968 illustrates the truth of this conclusion.

The students and workers of France revolted then against the everyday alienation of their lives within contemporary capitalism: they did not succeed in making a social revolution out of their revolt, however, because they were themselves too much the children of the system; too much the products of that same atomized, alienated culture which they were rejecting:

. . . even if we have here the first manifestations of new forces, these have not yet reached a sufficient developed level of theoretical and historical consciousness; the majority of students and workers who participated in the May movement were speaking, and are still speaking, the language of the period of authoritarian structures, both of the dominant forces and of the protest forces. Whatever judgment one makes on Marcuse's thought . . . his merit is to have posed the problems which relate to the new generation and to the world in which it has grown up, while the majority of Marxist theoreticians continue to talk the language of immiseration, the proletarian political revolution preceding all social and economic change, and the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>38</sup>

The experience of the students and workers of '68, however, of solidarity and revolt, will have made some contribution to changing "men" for socialism, since it revealed, if only fleetingly, the possibility of alternative ways of organizing social reality. In addition, it has had observable effects on the organization of labour and education, which will in turn be internalized by a new generation, who will, we hope, be better prepared for revolution and not simply revolt.

. . . changes take place within social being, which give rise to changed experience, and this experience is determining, in the sense that it exerts pressure upon existent social consciousness, proposes new questions.<sup>39</sup>

Sartre's analysis of the failure of revolutionary groups, therefore, raises important strategic questions for revolutionary Marxists in its revelation of the inherent limitations of traditional revolutionary praxis. The revolutionary change of everyday life, to which Marxists aspire, requires more than revolt, and more than an economic and political transfer of power (which may have sufficed in Marx's day): it calls for a radical cultural transformation, i.e. a transformation of individuals, so that we can create a social revolution which will neither disintegrate back into serial existence, nor degenerate into an authoritarian and terrorist practice of social control.<sup>40</sup>

The lesson of May was that social transformation in advanced society must concentrate on the immediate creation of new relations of reciprocity rather than concentrate on overthrowing the enemy. Exemplary action embodying the new principles must be combined with negative unmasking of established oppressions.<sup>41</sup>

In the Western sphere of advanced capitalism, only an alienating Socialism can be imposed from above, or outside, according to some pre-established and pre-conceived pattern. While genuine, non-alienating forms of socialism will emerge only on the basis of a collective experience of alternative social relations, of genuine reciprocity and mutual caring and responsibility, for example; experiences not generally available to individuals within capitalism.<sup>42</sup>

Sartre discusses these problems explicitly in "France: Masses, Spontaneity and Party" (1969),<sup>43</sup> in response to the events of May 1968. He argues there that the overthrow of capitalism, not simply as an economic system, but as a way of life, as a total culture, will require: ". . . a long patient labour in the construction of consciousness"<sup>44</sup> (emphasis added), and in the construction of a counter-culture:

The revolt of the students was a typical expression of the problem of a counter-culture: it was a refusal which, because it lacked its own elaboration, ended up borrowing, even though it gave them a contrary meaning, a series of ideological trappings from its opponents (conceptual simplification; schematism, violence, etc.).<sup>45</sup>

When asked upon what precise bases such a genuinely revolutionary alternative could be prepared, Sartre replied unequivocally: that it could only be founded on the "reconstruction of the individual and of freedom":<sup>46</sup>

Without a cultural mediation and a positive response, it is impossible to go beyond revolt; and revolt is always defeated politically.<sup>47</sup>

The Critique demonstrates that the failure of post-revolutionary movements to create an acceptable Socialist social organization is rooted in their conditions of departure. What is needed, therefore, is a transformation of those conditions and the construction of an alternative in praxis;<sup>48</sup> that is, a revolutionary project which will itself constitute the possibility, ideal, and reality of a new society; a transitional model of social organization grounded in everyday praxis; and a precise, particular, concrete, and flexible theory of the passage to Socialism based on that praxis.<sup>49</sup>

Class, party, Stalinism: the demystification of traditional Marxist notions

Sartre's analysis of revolutionary praxis also challenges classical Marxist conceptions of class and party; while at the same time increasing our understanding of Stalinism, and therefore, our potentiality for combatting its recurrence.

According to Sartre, the revolutionary group in fusion is soon transformed into an institutionalized group and its individual members returned to an alienated and atomized existence (as "functionaries" for example). A sovereign of some sort emerges in such collectivities, as symbol of the collective unity, freedom, and subjectivity, the experience of which constituted the group, and the preservation of which was its sole motive for continuing to exist as a sworn group.

However, the unity and subjectivity of the group in fusion necessarily elude the sworn group, because it is not constituted in praxis but by decree, de jure. The sovereign may symbolize the unity of the sworn group, but it is a false and illusory unity: a unity which is necessarily and forever absent. The sovereign, therefore, cannot be said to "represent," or "express" the will of the "people," of the "majority" or of the "conscience collective," for example--for there exists no such unified organic subject (or object) as the people, the majority, or the collective consciousness, to express or represent: these are just convenient fictions.

The traditional apologetics of classical political theory, therefore, mystify a concrete reality which is the actual antithesis of the idealized state of affairs they posit; for the reality sustaining the ideology consists of a collectivity of powerless individuals separated in

series, and ruled by a sovereign power which derives its power, not from the mythical "will of the people," nor from an equally mythical "social contract," but from the total powerlessness and anomie of the collectivity of isolated individuals, who obey and conform because they cannot do otherwise.

The sovereign, by contrast, whether it takes the form of an elite or an individual, is not only supremely powerful, but also all powerful: neither a member of a series, nor of a hierarchy of power or functions; the sovereign escapes the alteration, reification, inertia, and alienation which are intrinsic to them and constitutive of the individual existence of the members of the collectivity.

Furthermore, through the mass media, the sovereign controls, not only the actions of the members of the collectivity, but also their very thoughts; perpetrating and perpetuating the illusion of social unity and coherence to individuals whose existence is essentially serial and alienated. This only augments their experienced alienation, inertia, and powerlessness, for it presents individuals, first, with a history and a social reality (supposedly "their" history and "their" society) which is always made elsewhere and always by others; secondly, with a myth which actually contradicts their concrete, immediate, everyday social experience, which is of social separation, disunity, atomization, alienation, isolation, etc.

This disjunction between what is essentially false propaganda and lived experience leads to the mutual suspicion between the members of the collectivity; each, on the basis of his or her own experience of incongruence and alienation, suspects the praxis and the motivation of others as a masquerade, concealing beneath its official garb of social, collective, or group solidarity a reality which is essentially competitive, individualistic, self-serving, and antagonistic.<sup>50</sup>

#### 1. Class

In fact, what we are describing are the necessary structures of class conflict: a unified ruling class with all the power (the sovereign), and a divided and powerless collectivity manipulated by it; as well as the constituent structures of Terror, which Sartre believes are inherent in any sworn group and a necessary component of institutionalized Fraternity, i.e. Stalinism.

But Sartre's analysis of collective action and co-existence raises some fundamental questions with respect to traditional notions of class, which are of crucial strategic importance for revolutionary Marxism.

First, it casts doubts on the reality of the existence of a unified and identifiable working class, which can be mobilized, organized, or transformed in the revolutionary struggle against capitalist alienation, for example; and therefore, on the intelligibility and possibility of genuine

revolutionary class action in the traditional Marxist sense. According to Sartre's analysis, groups may unite around particular struggles (as in strikes, for example), and thus constitute temporary revolutionary group praxis; but these groups do not coincide with an identifiable, discrete, and "fused" class.

Thus the whole notion of "class-consciousness" is challenged. In the first place, because a class only exists as an isolable and unified totality for those who are outside it, i.e. only as an abstraction. Thus the unity of the supposed class is false, because it is externally imposed and not internally constituted in praxis. Furthermore, this false unity at the ideological level obscures the concrete reality of existence within the said class; which is at best, an undefined, non-systematized, and confused "totalisation en cours"; or, as is more often the case, an atomized and serialized existence in process.<sup>51</sup>

Since consciousness is constituted only by praxis, and political "class" consciousness only in struggle, what we can realistically expect to encounter are varied and variable forms of consciousness, contingent upon the specificity of particular struggles and collective practices-- and not a unified, solidary, coherent, and identifiable class-consciousness:

. . . on the one hand, an advanced consciousness, on the other an almost non-existent consciousness, with a series of mediations in between. This is why it does not seem to me that one can speak of class spontaneity; it is only appropriate to speak of groups, produced by circumstances, and which create themselves in the course of particular situations; in thus creating themselves they do not rediscover some kind of underlying spontaneity, but rather experience a specific condition on the basis of specific situations of exploitation and of particular demands; it is in the course of their experience that they achieve a more or less accurate consciousness of themselves.<sup>52</sup>

The intelligibility of the classical Marxist notion of a class dictatorship of the proletariat is similarly discredited as an "impossible condition," since: ". . . the working class can never express itself completely as an active subject,"<sup>53</sup> according to this analysis. Likewise, the role of the party in revolutionary practice: first, with respect to its own internal organization, and secondly, with respect to its role vis-a-vis the working class and the creation, first of revolution, and then of Socialism.

## 2. Party

Sartre has shown that structures of alienation and terror are intrinsic to any institutionalized group, and Marxist political parties are no exception.<sup>54</sup> The party is not the place, therefore, to develop the alternatives necessary for revolutionary social change indicated above, for:

As an institution the party has an institutionalized mode of thought--meaning something which deviates from reality--and comes essentially to reflect no more than its own organization, in effect ideological thought. It is upon its own schema that is modelled and deformed, the experience of the struggle itself.<sup>55</sup>

The experience of party membership is more likely to militate against revolutionary social change, therefore, i.e. against the creation of genuine reciprocal social relations, rather than facilitate them; since the institutionalized party will only duplicate the alienated relations of the larger social reality it is attempting to overthrow:

The latter [the party] comes into being to liberate the working-class from seriality; but at the same time it is a reflection . . . of the seriality and massification of the masses upon which it operates. This seriality of the masses finds expression in the party's institutional character. Compelled as it is to deal with what is serialized, it is itself partly inert and serialized.<sup>56</sup>

Nor can the party ever legitimately claim to "represent" or "express" the interests of the working-class or the working-class itself, for example; for, as we have seen, there exists no such unified, unitary phenomenon to be represented. The "working-class" is an ideal subject/object of political discourse, not a reality of social life.

Indeed, as Sartre argues, the very existence of the party depends on the non-existence of the class as a genuine fused group; for if such a group were ever realized, the party would be redundant. The upsurge of a united,

revolutionary class praxis should herald the demise of the party; which is, after all, an institutionalized group-- a process and not a praxis--and thus incapable of being the agent of revolutionary change.

Thus there is " . . . a contradiction which is inherent in the very function of the party," which compels it, in practice, " . . . either to absorb or reject the fused group which it has itself helped to create":<sup>57</sup>

We have seen these two different attitudes adopted by the French and the Italian Communist parties vis-à-vis the students: the French party rejected them; more subtly, the PCI tried to attract them and to direct their experience by means of contact and discussion. A party can only choose between these two attitudes: this is its underlying limitation.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, both responses result in defusing and containing any spontaneous revolutionary praxis which was not instigated by the party in question.

### 3. Stalinism

Finally, Sartre contributes significantly to our understanding of Stalinism: not as a temporary, historical deviation from revolutionary Marxism, but as one of its permanent possibilities. For the Stalin phenomenon can be seen as one realization of the sovereign: a response to, and a mystified symbol of the forever absent unity and subjectivity which always haunts the sworn group.

. . . the cult of personality is above all else the cult of social unity in one person . . . Stalin does not represent the indissolubility of the group, but is it, forges it, incarnates collective distrust.<sup>59</sup>

The repressive violence of the Stalin years in the U.S.S.R. can be grasped as a response to the contradictions inherent in any sworn group; contradictions which, in Russia's case, were aggravated and augmented by the specific historical conditions of Russian socialism: fundamental internal disparities, combined with constant external political harassment.

From the moment the USSR, encircled and alone, undertook its gigantic effort at industrialization, Marxism found itself unable to bear the shock of these new struggles . . . the ideology itself was subordinated to a double need: security (that is, unity) and the construction of socialism inside the USSR . . . The Party Leaders, bent on pushing the integration of the group to the limit, feared that the free process of truth, with all the discussion and all the conflicts which it involves, would break the unity of combat: they reserved for themselves the right to define the line and to interpret the event. In addition, out of fear that the experience might not provide its own clarifies, that it might question certain of their guiding ideas and might contribute to 'weakening the ideological struggle,' they put the doctrine out of reach.<sup>60</sup>

By re-integrating existence--la réalité vécue--as the foundation at the heart of Marxist knowledge, Sartre has provided us in the Critique with an immediate, particular, concrete, and material basis from which we can both comprehend historical Stalinism, and combat the conceptual

Stalinism (Marxist idealism) to which historical materialism (and any revolutionary theory) is always prone: ". . . the terrorist practice of liquidating the particular,"<sup>61</sup> of reducing change to identity,<sup>62</sup> of suppressing subjectivity:<sup>63</sup>

Marxist formalism is a project of elimination. The method is identical with Terror in its inflexible refusal to differentiate; its goal is total assimilation at the least possible effort. The aim is not to integrate what is different as such, while preserving for it a relative autonomy, but rather to suppress it. Thus the perpetual movement toward identification reflects the bureaucrats' practice of unifying everything. Specific determinations awaken in the theory the same suspicions as persons do in reality. For the majority of Marxists, to think is to claim to totalize and, under this pretext, to replace particularity by a universal.<sup>64</sup>

#### Heuristic versus dogmatic Marxism

By comparison, the Critique aims to be a living, heuristic Marxism, whose principles and prior knowledge ". . . appear as regulative in relation to its concrete research";<sup>65</sup> which takes the statements of Marx and Engels, for example: ". . . as guiding principles, as indications of jobs to be done, as problems--not as concrete truths."<sup>66</sup> And although individual praxis is taken to be the irreducible foundation of history, of its possibility, intelligibility, and truth, the dialectical experience of that praxis is clarified in such a way as to render intelligible our everyday lived experience of alienation and powerlessness with respect to that same history, even as it is being made.

Sartre distinguishes three modalities of human action: (i) "praxis constituante" (individual praxis), "moment indispensable de toute opération, même dans le champ pratico-inerte d'aliénation";<sup>67</sup> (ii) "praxis constituée," which characterizes the fused group; and, (iii) the "praxis-processus" of the series, ". . . à la fois une action et un processus."<sup>68</sup>

. . . individual praxis, common, constituted praxis, and praxis-process . . . these three modalities of human action are in themselves distinct from the practico-inert process and . . . are its foundation. It is even possible--as we have just shown--to see one and the same development both as a praxis (oppression) and as a process (exploitation), and that the process constantly conditions the praxis . . . Provided one takes care to determine what modes of rationality one is employing, all of this is still completely intelligible--provided that analytical Reason and economic Reason are finally dissolved in the constituted dialectic or (and this amounts to the same thing) that the transformations and avatars of praxis are always resumed in circularity and that its alienations at every level, as a series of necessities of which it is both the mystified victim and the fundamental support, are demonstrated.<sup>69</sup>

It is Sartre's exposition of the dialectic of praxis-process in particular which enables us to correct some of the potential excesses of structuralism; which like "lazy Marxism" often appears to suppress, or even deny, if only by implication, the opaqueness, ambiguity, and equivocalness of human experience--by reducing truth which becomes, for example (i.e. historical totalization), to already

realized and inert totalities (i.e. primordial structures). We shall return to this shortly, in our final chapter on Lévi-Strauss. But, before this I will turn my attention once more, and for the last time, to the Critique's failures.

### The Failure of the Critique's Materialism

I have made three major criticisms of the Critique in this thesis, and each of them refers us to the fundamental failure of Sartre's attempted materialism in this work.

1. Alienation: emerges as a necessary rather than a contingent condition of human existence; grounded in materiality, not scarcity.

First, I have argued that Sartre fails in his attempt to ground alienation in contingent material conditions of production, i.e. in scarcity; and that, on the contrary, his assumption of a primary alienation conditioned by materiality and seriality alone establishes alienation as a necessary and insurmountable condition of human co-existence; a condition which can be relieved only momentarily and occasionally, by the temporary, spontaneous, and short-lived formation of groups in fusion.<sup>70</sup> (See chapter I.) This analysis is neither historical, concrete, nor genuinely revolutionary, and is therefore inadequate and unacceptable as a moment of Marxist practice.

2. Man: emerges as an essentially translucent and isolated cogito, necessarily alienated in his relations with the material world and others.

Secondly, I have suggested that what grounds the failure of Sartre's Marxism in this respect, is his inability to espouse a through and through materialism; that Sartre's work is flawed by his residual, but fundamental, Cartesian idealism. This is revealed in: (i) his implicit identification of human freedom with absolute freedom and subjectivity of the Cartesian cogito--or of the traditional God;<sup>71</sup> and (ii) in his explicit assumption of a dualistic, non-dialectical metaphysics, which bifurcates being into two distinct ontological regions: the passive, inert, and mechanical being of material things, and the active, dialectical, and rational being of consciousness.<sup>72</sup>

Sartre identifies freedom with Culture and Reason, and repeatedly asserts that these are not reducible to Nature. Reason, he tells us, is not a bone, nor an accident.<sup>73</sup> Thus Reason and Nature are diametrically opposed throughout the Critique. As metaphysical categories, abstract, non-dialectical, non-historical, and ideal, they are assumed as points of departure, when they should, in fact, be challenged as objectifications (as specific and historical ideological points of arrival), to be questioned and demystified by Marxist practice.

3. Phenomenology: emerges as abstract and metaphysical, instead of concrete, historical, and descriptive.

Thirdly, I have argued that Sartre is not sufficiently critical in the Critique; he does acknowledge the limitations of all philosophical discourse, including those of Marxism and existentialism, in the Questions,<sup>74</sup> but he then proceeds as if acknowledging the danger guaranteed immunity from it. And while we wholeheartedly support the phenomenological method (under certain descriptions as outlined in chapter IV), as an appropriate tool for Marxist social analysis, we emphasize that its practitioners must, nevertheless, be constantly alert to the specific limitations intrinsic to it. For example, the apodictic certainty and translucidity of phenomenologically based descriptions of existence are not guarantors of their truth, of their lack of possible mystification; while all the truths revealed by phenomenology are necessarily specific--to a particular person, time, and place.<sup>75</sup>

Sartre, in the Critique, however, grounds his reconstruction of the historical dialectic as such--of the cyclical movement from series to group and back to series again--in the comprehension intrinsic to praxis; and in doing so, seems to assume that what is revealed to him, about human existence through his phenomenological reconstruction of social reality is some sort of foundational and implicitly true and necessary knowledge of historical

and social reality as such (as opposed to a particular and limited knowledge specific to a particular historical period).

The phenomenological method, however, does not entitle him either to pose that general question of the historical dialectic as such, nor draw that conclusion: questions and answers which are, after all, expressions of metaphysical, rather than concrete and socio-historical, concerns. But Sartre seems to be unaware that much of what he is doing in the Critique is, in fact, abstract metaphysics. While this is evident from both the type of question he poses, as for example:

Our aim is to define the formal conditions of History; we need not dwell on the relations of material reciprocity between classes in their real historical development.<sup>76</sup> [Emphasis mine.]

and from the clarifications he arrives at which are correspondingly general and necessarily abstract.<sup>77</sup>

He describes as "la vraie question critique" the following, for example:

. . . what type of existence or being characterises the common action of the organised group in so far as it is common (rather than in so far as it can be resolved into a multiplicity of functions?). What kind of intelligibility does this action define? What is a constituted dialectic?<sup>78</sup>

This particular question, thus posed, is ambiguous: it could be intended as a concrete and specific inquiry into

contemporary group practice, or as an abstract question concerning group action as such. But the following, which occur at the end of Questions are more unequivocally formal and metaphysical:

What must be the nature of human relations in order for these relations to be capable of appearing in certain definite societies as the relations of things to each other? . . . What kind of practical organism is this which reproduces its life by its work so that its work and ultimately its very reality are alienated; that is, so that they, as others turn back upon him and determine him?<sup>79</sup>

Jameson, in his essay "Sartre and History" interprets Sartre's fundamental problematic in the Critique as a metaphysical one; that he is asking, for example: "What preconditions are necessary, what must the structure of human existence be, in order for history thus to prove dialectical in its movement?"<sup>80</sup>

But such questions are inappropriate for a study which aspires to concreteness,<sup>81</sup> and proclaims elsewhere the essential variability and indefinability of "man" and human existence:

. . . we must abandon any idea of humanity historialising itself in the development of a single temporalisation which began with 'the first men' and which will finish with 'the last': the dialectical investigation establishes that here too, in the absence of a temporal hyper-organism, we have treated diachronic totalisation as though it were a free, individual temporalisation. Humanity treated as one Man: this is the illusion of the constituted dialectic. There are in fact several temporalisations.<sup>82</sup>

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Where Sartre observes his own principle, his work is excellent; but for much of the time in the Critique he does not, and draws general metaphysical conclusions (about man, social man, historical man, praxis, etc.) from socio-historically specific premises--that is, from his own existence as a middle-class, male, intellectual, adult in conditions of advanced capitalism.

This constitutes the most serious flaw in this work and together with the Cartesianism described above (points [1] and [2]), of which it is just another aspect, is at the root of all the weaknesses of the Critique which have been itemized in our earlier chapters.

#### Sartre's Cartesianism

1. His uncritical adoption of the isolated, alienated individual worker, for example, as the irreducible point of departure for the reconstruction of the dialectic of history. This meant that: (i) he failed to acknowledge and therefore understand, the historicity, and specificity of that subjectivity, and instead, merely universalized his own class experience,<sup>83</sup> taking: ". . . the ideological effects which Marx calls fetishism and alienation to be the intrinsic reality of the processes of historical development."<sup>84</sup> And (ii), as a consequence of this, he remained vulnerable to the mystifying and reifying appearances of that same subjectivity throughout the Critique.

Thus, he speaks always from the specific socio-historical position of an adult, middle-class, European, male intellectual--as if it were the position of every man--and of course, it is not. Women, children, middle-class non-intellectuals, working-class intellectuals, industrial and agricultural workers, immigrants, etc.; etc. have quite different everyday existences, and are privy to quite different apodictic certainties in their comprehension of that existence. These constitute, in fact, the silent majority; whose particularity has not (yet? we hope) been admitted into the traditional ideology of the subject, which has always been articulated by members of the same privileged class; white, middle-class, and male. When Sartre makes his own adult experience primary and primordial, he only does what all thinkers have done in the past; and while he is quick to recognize and denounce the practice in others, he fails to catch himself in the same process of "totalizing too fast."

Take, for example, his reference to ". . . that solitude that accompanies us from the moment of birth" and the assertion which follows it in the Questions, that: "Each one lives his first years distracted and bewildered as a profound and solitary reality."<sup>85</sup> This may have been true of Sartre, perhaps even of his peers--but not everyone, not even everyone in advanced capitalism, would confirm this description of their lived experience of their "first years." What

demands explanation and phenomenological comprehension is how this very idea itself originates; especially when, as a matter of fact, each "man" actually begins life in positive symbiosis with an other--with his mother--and must internalize these reproductive relations of togetherness and participation; first, before he internalizes the separations and isolations contingent upon the productive relations of capitalism.

As I have shown in chapter IV, Merleau-Ponty challenges this assumption--of humanity's "essential" estrangement from others--systematically; by revealing (phenomenologically), being-with-others as primary and primordial, and the consciousness of self as separate and solitary, as a secondary and therefore historical phenomenon.

2. Sartre's description of matter, as essentially other, alienating and antagonistic, can be similarly explained and discredited. For, only someone who identifies subjectivity and freedom with consciousness. (as Sartre, the male middle-class intellectual, not unsurprisingly, does) would perceive the materiality of human existence as alienating.<sup>86</sup>

While the experience of productive work as alienating is more a consequence of capitalism than a cause, and should not therefore be offered as primordial and foundational of the historical dialectic which produced it.

3. Sartre's view of scarcity, as the material base of antagonistic and alienating social relations, likewise

universalizes the socio-historically specific--in fact converts scarcity into an abstract universal, as we argued in chapter I. The appeal to scarcity, as a material justification for, or sufficient condition of, economic and political oppression and exploitation, should rather be seen as an ideological ruse of the privileged class; mystifying and reifying real social relations of inequality, which alone make of scarcity, real or artificial, a condition of social conflict and alienation. Marxists, therefore, should take great pains to demystify this notion before incorporating it into their own arguments. Sartre is not alone in his failure in this respect.

4. Finally, the critique we developed in the last chapter, of Marx's conception of history, freedom, need, and nature, as phallogentric and ethnocentric, are equally applicable to Sartre, who, perhaps even more than Marx, identifies being human with being historical, and being historical with transcending natural and material limits on freedom.

This again reveals a certain nostalgia in Sartre for the kind of idealist tradition which takes Reason or Consciousness as the distinguishing feature of being human, and as something distinctly other than Nature itself. Sartre, for example, refers to the apodictic certainties of consciousness when he wants to indicate the comprehension intrinsic to praxis, and continues to insist in the Critique

as in Being and Nothingness:

. . . that the epistemological starting point must always be consciousness as apodictic certainty (of) itself and as consciousness of such and such an object.<sup>87</sup>

His uncritical acceptance of those certainties as fundamental and foundational truths suggests that, at least some of the time, he takes that consciousness to be both self-validating and untrammelled by the historical limitations of the concrete, i.e. of matter and social conditions.

We have indicated throughout this thesis, however, that Sartre's theoretical practice is not always consistent with his political principles--and for the most part his principles are laudable. Time and time again, especially in the Questions, he insists on the material basis of thought, for example, and provides us with the tools and insights for correcting his own excesses and limitations:

. . . the idea must be considered to be both the objectification of the concrete man and his alienation.<sup>88</sup>

. . . works of the mind . . . reproduce in their profound structure the contradictions and struggles of contemporary ideologies.<sup>89</sup>

. . . the Idea is a process; it derives its invincible strength from the fact that nobody thinks it. That is to say, it does not define itself as the conscious moment of praxis--that is to say, as the unifying unveiling of objects in the dialectical temporalisation of action. Instead, it defines itself as a practico-inert object whose self-evidence, for me, is the same as my double

inability to verify it and to transform it in Others.<sup>90</sup>

. . . truth is a normative because fidelity to logical 'principles' is only a form of fidelity to the pledge.<sup>91</sup>

And this same awareness of the material and historical basis of ideas is echoed elsewhere:

We have another way of not knowing ourselves . . . we too are victims and accomplices of alienation, reification, mystification.<sup>92</sup>

True intellectual investigation if it is to free truth from the myths which obscure it, implies a traversal of research through the singularity of the researcher . . . One of the principal traps an intellectual must avoid in this enterprise is to universalize too fast.<sup>93</sup>

That Sartre, like Marx, does not entirely escape the mystifications of his own situatedness--no-one can--should not deter us from taking his work seriously and learning from it. For like Marx, Sartre also provides us with the necessary tools for perceiving those failures and correcting and transcending them in the on-going totalization of human history. A more complete and comprehensive understanding of Sartre's limitations in the Critique, of their material basis, and their conditions of reproduction by way of dialectical internalization and externalization, for example, would require another lengthy work: a concrete, specific, biographical inquiry into the particular mediations of Sartre's own existence--" . . . a traversal of research through

the singularity of the researcher"--as Sartre himself prescribes, the general parameters of which have been indicated in the above discussion.

Our present project, however, requires us to move on: to our final assessment of the value of Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology for an existential Marxism which aims to be material, dialectical, historical, concrete, and revolutionary--which is the subject of our next, and final, chapter.

## Chapter VII

Lévi-Strauss

The argument of this thesis has been that Marxism, existentialism, and structuralism offer mutually complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, modes of rendering social reality intelligible; and that each provides for the other a corrective and a complement for their respective and inevitable excesses, oversights, and limitations.

Sartre, in the Critique for example, emphasizes the indispensable foundational role of individual praxis ("praxis constituante") in the constitution of history ("praxis constituée) and social structure ("praxis-processus"); Marx, the equally necessary determining influence of objective material and social conditions (the practico-inerte, in Sartre's terms) on individual praxis; and Lévi-Strauss, the constraining effect of superstructures (objectified thought) on the whole of social existence, individual and collective alike.

I have suggested further, that contrary to popular expectations, Lévi-Strauss's structural approach to social reality is, in many respects (though not of course in all), actually more consistent with the recognized principles of Marxist practice than is Sartre's existentialism, despite the explicit political commitment of Sartre to

Marxism, and Lévi-Strauss's abrogation of explicit political concerns.

### Lévi-Strauss and Marxism

#### Structuralism as a materialism

I have argued, for example, that Lévi-Strauss's approach to anthropology is more thoroughly materialist than is Sartre's in the Critique. For, according to his structuralist principles, the intelligibility of social behaviour should never be sought for or located at the level of appearances--neither at the level of the event, nor at the level of consciousness--but rather at the level of the unconscious structures of thought (collective and rational), which are the conditions of possibility of both the events and our consciousness of them.

In all cultures, according to Lévi-Strauss, both individual praxis and collective practices are mediated by a conceptual scheme which is in some sense determining; whose structure in the last analysis owes nothing to events or consciousness, and everything to the neuro-chemical construction of the brain and the nervous system.

Lévi-Strauss's materialism is thus quite consistent with Marxism, in that it emphasizes: (i) the unconscious and material basis of thought; its form in the brain physiology, and its content in the material conditions of production;<sup>1</sup> and (ii) the necessarily hidden nature of

reality, which can never be wholly grasped at the level of phenomenal appearances. Like the eye in perception, the real, for Lévi-Strauss, is that which makes the appearances possible; it is the "instrument" of experience, which never itself appears as an object of that experience, i.e. as part of its phenomenal content. "It is the invisible in the visible," as Merleau-Ponty (or Wittgenstein) might say.<sup>2</sup> This foundational reality is systematically unavailable to us as an object of knowledge as long as we participate in it: for we cannot, as participants in our own society--as with language--both speak the message and know the code at one and the same time.<sup>3</sup>

#### Structuralism and the dialectic

Lévi-Strauss is much more thoroughly and consistently dialectical in his anthropology than is Sartre in the Critique. First, in his persistent refusal of the traditional dualisms and dichotomies of metaphysical thought from which, as we have seen, Sartre himself was never entirely liberated: the subject/object, praxis/process, analytic/dialectical, content/form, reason/matter, individual/social dichotomies, for example and most importantly, in his refusal of the Nature/Culture distinction itself.

Secondly, he is more thoroughly dialectical in his determination " . . . to discover the whole man, as revealed in the one case through his works, and in the other through

his representations."<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, in his focus on relations rather than elements. And fourthly, in his recognition of the necessary opaqueness and incompleteness of anthropological inquiry itself: of the "lack of hidden unity"<sup>5</sup> in the phenomenon ("man" and "society"), and of the "mutual exclusiveness of being and knowledge":<sup>6</sup>

I do not hope to reach a stage at which the subject matter of mythology, after being broken down by analysis, will crystallize again into a whole with the general appearance of a stable and well-defined structure . . . there does not exist, nor ever will exist any community or group of communities whose mythology and ethnography . . . can be known in their entirety. The ambition to achieve such knowledge is meaningless, since we are dealing with a shifting reality, perpetually exposed to the attacks of a past that destroys it and a future that changes it . . . As happens in the case of an optical microscope, which is incapable of revealing the ultimate structure of matter to the observer, we can only choose between various degrees of enlargement: each one reveals a level of organization which has no more than a relative truth and, while it lasts, excludes the perception of other levels . . . in a subject such as this, scientific knowledge advances haltingly and is stimulated by contention and doubt. Unlike metaphysics it does not insist on all or nothing. For this book to be worthwhile, it is not necessary in my view that it should be assumed to embody the truth for years to come and with regard to the tiniest details . . . in science there are no final truths. The scientific mind does not so much provide the right answers as ask the right questions.<sup>7</sup>

#### Structuralism and history

Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is also historical, in that: (i) first, he recognizes the historicity of all thought,

including his own (as indicated in the above citation);<sup>8</sup> that superstructures are, for example, but " . . . faulty acts which have made it socially."<sup>9</sup> (ii) Second, he believes, with Marx, that specific cultural representations of the structure of the universe (e.g. totemism, myth, ritual) (a) reproduce, at the conscious level, social structures which are first lived; and (b) attempt to resolve at the level of ideas, contradictions and conflicts which are encountered primarily in the lived experience of everyday life, i.e. that:

. . . through their myths, their rituals and their religious representations, men try to hide or justify the discrepancies between their society and the ideal image of it which they harbour.<sup>10</sup>

(iii) And third, again with Marx, he believes that "man" himself is historical, i.e. that:

. . . men have made themselves to no less an extent than they have made the races of their domestic animals, the only difference being that the process has been less conscious or voluntary.<sup>11</sup>

(iv) In addition, he repeatedly acknowledges the importance of history for anthropology in general, and for structural anthropology in particular:

When . . . one completely limits study to the present period in the life of a society, one becomes first of all the victim of an illusion. For everything is history: what was said yesterday is history, what was said a minute ago is history. But, above all, one is led to misjudge the

present, because only the study of historical development permits the weighing and evaluation of the interrelationships among the components of the present-day society. And a little history . . . is better than no history at all.<sup>12</sup>

Even the analysis of synchronic structures, however, requires the constant recourse to history. By showing institutions in the process of transformation, history alone makes it possible to abstract the structure which underlies the many manifestations and remains permanent through a succession of events.<sup>13</sup>

#### Structuralism and the concrete

As an empirical and positive science, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is also concrete. According to its principles, the internal structure of objective thought can never be postulated a priori, for example, or in advance of a specific and particular inquiry, but: " . . . can only be discovered a posteriori by ethnographic investigation, that is, by experience."<sup>14</sup>

And, although the structures as revealed are abstracted from the phenomenal appearances of a specific social practice, they are nevertheless like the labour-form of value disclosed by Marx in Capital,<sup>15</sup> no less real and no less concrete than the ideology and observable social practices which conceal them. Thus, the rigid antinomy between the abstract and the concrete, between the real and the ideal, is rejected by Lévi-Strauss, as it was by Marx:

Contrary to formalism, structuralism refuses to set the concrete against the abstract and to recognize a privileged value in the latter. Form is defined by opposition to material other than itself. But structure has no distinct content; it is content itself, apprehended in a logical organization conceived as a property of the real . . . if a little structuralism leads away from the concrete, a lot of structuralism leads back to it.<sup>16</sup>

#### Structuralism and revolution

Finally, and perhaps most surprising of all, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is, at least implicitly and potentially, revolutionary--though perhaps not intentionally so.

1. In the first place, his structuralism is not a determinism: the structures Lévi-Strauss describes are not, for example, "categories of stasies" as is often assumed by the opponents of structuralism. The structures of objectified thought, as revealed by Lévi-Strauss, change in response to changes in material and social conditions, and such changes pose questions to historians:

Structure itself occurs in the process of development . . . . It is ceaselessly forming and breaking down; it is life which has reached a certain degree of consolidation, and to distinguish it from the life whence it derives or from the life it determines amounts to dissociating inseparable things.<sup>17</sup>

But Lévi-Strauss has revealed that the transformations of structure are systematic and, therefore, in principle predictable: the nature of these mechanisms of change

pose problems for the structuralist and not the historian. Lévi-Strauss's contribution to human understanding lies in his disclosure of this particular aspect of social and historical reality.

Nowhere, however, are these structures presented as the blind determinants of praxis. They are, on the contrary, presented as its consequences, i.e. as the sedimentation of collective and multiple social praxes, which as the practico-inert, act as effective, unconscious, though no less real, constraints and limitations on subsequent praxes, individual and collective, within any given social formation.

2. Secondly, Lévi-Strauss's disclosure of the total and systematic nature of cultural practices and forms of thought (i.e. of social life), and of the relative autonomy and interdependence of both the elements of structure and the structures themselves within the larger ongoing totalization, gives additional support (though does not necessitate, of course) to the political direction of Marxism which emphasizes the need for a revolutionary strategy for social change, as opposed to some form of reformism, for example. Since it is the relation between the elements and not the elements themselves that has been shown to sustain the system and confer upon it its particular meaning,<sup>18</sup> so it is that system of relations which must be transformed, rather than the elements themselves, if radical social change is to be affected.

3. Thirdly, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism can act as a demystifying corrective to the excesses of the theoretical ethnocentrism and "evolutionism" of the traditional revolutionary politics and ideology of Marxism, which we considered in chapter V. First by demystifying the "history" of historical materialism, by disclosing it as a socio-historically specific system of representation comparable in form and function to myth. Its supposed continuity and the events it represents, both of which are constituted and selected by the historian, ". . . correspond to no kind of reality"; and like myth and all knowledge, it is obliged to employ a code to analyze its object. It cannot, therefore, be considered as the final explanandum where the intelligibility of human behaviour is in question.

. . . . history functions like a code since like all codes, historical events are like signs which are at least a priori arbitrary, since like all activities of the mind, history is ideological and determined by other, non-mental realities.<sup>19</sup>

History's code consists of classes of dates, ". . . each furnishing an autonomous system of reference" and constituting thereby the essentially "discontinuous and classificatory nature of historical knowledge."<sup>20</sup>

It is therefore, far from being the case that the search for intelligibility comes to an end in history as though this were its terminus. Rather, it is history that serves as a point of departure in any quest for intelligibility.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, by refusing the distinction between Nature and Culture, Lévi-Strauss offers a challenge to the conventional Marxist concept of historical progress, which, as we noted in chapter V, identifies being human with being free, and being free with the cultural "conquest" of nature and need, via an increasing technological mastery of material production.

It is precisely this separation of "man" from Nature and this emphasis on the cultural control of Nature, which, according to Lévi-Strauss, institutes and maintains the very alienation, exploitation, and oppression it is called upon to eliminate, and blocks any real progress in our organization of social as opposed to cultural relations.

The segregation of man outside the natural environment--of which he is morally as well as physically an inseparable part--his being forced by the modern forms of urban life to live almost entirely inside an artifice, constitutes a major threat to the mental health of the species.

So much more because this perversion of urban civilization due to industrialization, has transformed itself on the ideological plane into a philosophy and an ethic which lightheartedly comes to terms with the emergence of a humanity destructive of everything but itself--then, inevitably, of itself also, as soon as it does not possess any more 'glacis' to protect it from its own attacks. This philosophy, this ethic have gone so far as to glorify the breach between man and the other forms of life in the name of humanism, leaving man only self-love as a principle of thought and action.<sup>22</sup>

Traditional Marxist discussions of alienation, and their corresponding visions of 'free' social arrangements

and strategies for achieving these, have regarded alienation, together with exploitation and oppression, as rooted in relations of material production conditioned by scarcity and need. Lévi-Strauss's anthropology challenges this analysis, both as an accurate interpretation of historical "facts," and as an adequate founding theory; supporting my own contention (see chapter V) that the traditional view of history, alienation, and "man" himself, has its own ideological foundation, at least in part, in the mystified and reified social relations of capitalism and patriarchy.

Lévi-Strauss's empirical results, for example, suggest that scarcity is the basis of reciprocity and alliance, if not of culture itself, rather than the contingent condition of social antagonism and exploitation; and that primitive men are no less human, rational, or free than their "civilized" counterparts: no less "natural" and no less "cultural."

While his theoretical point of departure, i.e. the fundamentally material and irreducibly dialectical relationship between man and his world (between subject and object,<sup>23</sup> nature and culture<sup>24</sup>), in which each mirrors the other,<sup>25</sup> rules out the possibility of interpreting natural needs and natural conditions as essentially alienating or dehumanizing; and suggests, furthermore, that it is this very over-valuation of our (artificially and ideologically) separated "cultural" experience and needs, as opposed to our "natural" or "societal" existence as human beings, which has, under

the mystification of an ideology of humanism, alienated "men" from the fundamental material realities of their existence. After all, men have the nature, the needs, the culture, and the social relations they choose to have; they, like the rest of the human world, are as much created as they are given.

. . . natural conditions are not just passively accepted . . . they do not exist in their own right for they are a function of the techniques and way of life of the people who define and give them a meaning by developing them in a particular direction. Nature is not itself contradictory. It can become so only in terms of some specific human activity which takes part in it; and the characteristics of the environment take on a different meaning according to the particular historical and technical form assumed in it by this or that type of activity.<sup>26</sup>

4. Finally, Lévi-Strauss's anthropology is revolutionary though this time very much by default, in that it has considerably advanced our understanding of sexual inequality, its genesis, and its deep structure, by placing the exchange of women at the very foundation of society.

(a) First, his account suggests that sexual inequality can no longer be trivialized as a personal or "domestic" issue, and no longer thrust to the margins of political discourse as a superficial, superstructural, incidental, or accidental feature of social life; since it has been shown to be a structural necessity at the very core of social and cultural organization. The objectification of women for exchange is implicit in the incest

prohibition itself, which Lévi-Strauss presents as foundational and constitutive of both society (reciprocal social relations) and culture (the transformation of natural relations into rule-governed relations);<sup>27</sup> it is a rule, we are told, whose:

. . . first logical end . . . is to 'freeze' women within the family, so that their distribution, or the competition for them, is within the group, and under group, not private control.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, we are obliged to acknowledge: (i) the deep and determining structural importance of sexuality in society; and (ii) ". . . the profound difference between the social experience of men and women";<sup>29</sup> since it is after all women who are "frozen" and "distributed" by and for men, and not vice-versa.

(b) Secondly, and more importantly, Lévi-Strauss's conclusions support our own position, presented in chapter V, that the oppression and exploitation of women and the ideology which mystifies, reifies, and maintains it, has its material foundation, not in the organization of productive relations, as a traditional Marxist analysis of oppression would have us believe, but in the organization of reproductive relations which precedes them, both logically and chronologically.

. . . a human group must do more than apply its activity to reshaping the natural world in order to clothe, feed and warm itself . . . the needs

which are satisfied by economic activity even in the richest, Marxian sense, do not exhaust fundamental human requirements. A human group must also reproduce itself from generation to generation. The needs of sexuality and procreation must be satisfied as much as the need to eat, and . . . these needs are hardly ever satisfied by any 'natural' form, any more than are the needs for food. Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained . . . Sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained. Every society also has a sex/gender system--a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventionable manner.<sup>30</sup>

The sex/gender system, in all cases it seems, if Lévi-Strauss's analyses are to be believed, has instituted:

(i) heterosexuality, (ii) a sexual division of labour, and (iii) an obligation to marry. The universal subordination of women can be seen as a product of these systems of relationships; relationships organized specifically according to Lévi-Strauss, ". . . to institute a reciprocal state of dependency between the sexes."<sup>31</sup>

But a sex/gender system itself, could be neutral: there is nothing in the concept to suggest that the oppression of one or other of the sexes is inevitable. Thus the present subordination of women should be regarded as the product of the specific social relations which have hithertofore organized sex and gender.

Lévi-Strauss's work reveals the reality, profundity, and magnitude of the problem facing women; for he has shown that their oppression is rooted in sex/gender systems

which determine, and are in turn reinforced by, the whole of social life--its economic and political structures, as well as its organization of sexuality and reproduction. The elimination of female oppression, therefore, will require, not just economic and political reforms, but the radical transformation of the sex/gender system itself; a formidable project and one of truly revolutionary proportions.

The oppression of women is deep; equal pay, equal work, and all of the female politicians in the world will not extirpate the roots of sexism. Lévi-Strauss and Freud elucidate what would otherwise be poorly perceived parts of the deep structures of sex oppression. They serve as reminders of the intractability and magnitude of what we fight, and their analyses provide preliminary charts of the social machinery we must rearrange.<sup>32</sup>

#### Structuralism and the Demystification of Humanism

Ironically enough, even Sartre, in the course of his critique of Sociology in the Questions, at the same time acknowledges the importance of Sociology for his own project of existential comprehension. Sociological research, he tells us, ". . . does not contradict dialectical materialism," even when its ideas may oppose it, but rather guides to "a certain level of the concrete";<sup>33</sup> compels us to push the historical totalization to include the new information;

. . . to discover new mediations between concrete men and the material conditions of their life, between human relations and the relations of production, between persons and classes (or some totally different groupings).<sup>34</sup>

Thus, sociology " . . . reveals new relations" and " . . . demands that they be attached to new conditions."<sup>35</sup>

Lévi-Strauss's research reveals relations between "man," his thought, and his world, between Nature and Culture, if you prefer, which push the historical totalization of Sartre's Marxist existentialism to its very limit: for they challenge one of its foundational principles: its implicit "humanism."

By privileging history and the self-conscious subject of experience, Sartre's Marxism mistakes appearance for reality. It mystifies present social reality, by failing to criticize its most deeply rooted ideological assumptions (the importance and rationality of history, for example; the role of the individual as subject of his own history and determinant of his own destiny, etc.); and reifies a particular experience of social relations into universal truths about humanity in general (tying freedom to the elimination of scarcity, for example, and of " . . . work imposed by necessity").<sup>36</sup>

This obviously jeopardizes the revolutionary potential of Sartre's totalization, for if he is mistaken about the causes of alienation, and about the "meaning" of history and human freedom, he will be unable to arrive at an

appropriate strategy for eliminating the former, or realizing the latter. And although Lévi-Strauss does not concern himself explicitly with revolutionary strategy in his work, his analysis of the structures of dehumanization are suggestive.

For example, the significance of size and structure as determinants of levels of authenticity in society (which echoes Sartre's diagnosis of the alienation inherent in serial existence); and the correlation he perceives between cultural achievements (i.e. progress in man's control over things via writing and the thermo-dynamic machine, for example) and social entropy or disintegration (diminishing control over the organization of people), force us to re-evaluate our commitment to "progress" itself and to re-examine the notions of "need," "nature," and "freedom" which have supported that commitment.<sup>37</sup>

The great merit of Lévi-Strauss's anthropology is that it enables us to see Marxism and existentialism as aspects of the same discourse, of the same objectified thought; and that discourse itself as a process, and as the product of essentially unconscious determinants. It provides us with a point of view which is relatively external to the discourse in question, from which we can therefore, more readily perceive its blind spots.<sup>38</sup>

It is, however, a point of view only relatively external to the discourse of Marxism and existentialism;

for our access to the primitive mind and to primitive social reality is not direct but mediated, through Lévi-Strauss himself, who shares the same social reality as Sartre, and is therefore subject to the same ideological constraints. Lévi-Strauss is aware of this. The difference between the two is that the latter does not direct his gaze at himself (objectified in discourse), as Sartre does--which would be to trap himself in a series of reflecting mirrors--but at the discourse of the Other, that he might:

" . . . understand himself better; not as a purely contemplative intelligence, but as the involuntary agent of transformation conveyed through him."<sup>39</sup>

His efforts in this direction are not, needless to say, beyond criticism, and few anthropologists have been the occasion of as much controversy and argument as has Lévi-Strauss himself. Anthropologists have cast doubt upon the specifics of his empirical work, and social and political scientists and philosophers have challenged the broader political implications of his analysis. I have personal doubts about the appropriateness of these criticisms, however, many of which have been considered and countered at various points in the course of this thesis.

#### Lévi-Strauss and His Critics

Anthropologists, for example, tend to question the validity of the structures he reveals: pointing to the

apparent arbitrariness of his methods, the non-falsifiability of his conclusions, and the ambiguous ontological status of the structures themselves.

#### Arbitrary structures

Don Sperber,<sup>40</sup> for example, voices the first objection as follows:

. . . "perfect symmetries" are achieved only by ignoring some of the data and by re-describing the rest in terms of carefully selected abstract synecdoches.<sup>41</sup>

But surely a similar objection could be addressed to any anthropological research; which is necessarily selective in the collection and interpretation of data? One of the persistent arguments of this thesis has been that partiality is inevitable in research; and that this does not contradict the aspiration to truth (a truth which is always partial). Lévi-Strauss is well aware of this inherent limitation in all "knowledges" and all objectified thought, and constantly renounces any pretensions to completeness or finality for his work. Allowing for the possible excesses, exaggerations, and oversights of his descriptions, "the exciting suspicion" nevertheless remains, that:

. . . the fleeting shapes and contours one can glimpse through the most are those of a true terra incognita. It is not to belittle Lévi-Strauss's theoretical contribution to suggest that he may be first and foremost a discoverer of facts--the explorer of a mental continent

which he is not to be reproached for having failed to chart to the full.<sup>42</sup>

#### Non-falsifiable conclusions

The objection that Lévi-Strauss's conclusions are non-falsifiable also rests on a misunderstanding of his intentions: which is not to arrive at general empirical laws--to which alone the falsifiability criterion might be applicable--but to render intelligible the formerly unintelligible:<sup>43</sup> i.e. the principles and practices of primitive peoples. And there can be no denying that he has succeeded in this. He has made sense of a multiplicity of diverse and scattered phenomena which were previously inaccessible to Western rationality. In so doing, he has radically altered our perspective and increased our understanding, not only of the complexity and rationality of "primitive" cultures, but also of our own; minimizing the differences between us and emphasizing our common humanity.<sup>44</sup> This, again, is no mean achievement.

#### Idealist and reductionist

Lévi-Strauss does, however, frequently stray from the relatively secure terrain of interpretation, to the thornier path of speculative physiology--appealing to the neuro-chemical structure of the brain and the nervous system to explain the observed regularity of thought forms (binary oppositions, inversions, transformations, etc.). He has been accused of both "idealism" and "reductionism"

on this account.<sup>45</sup> Idealism, because he seems to be suggesting that the structure of the world is determined by universal thought forms; and reductionism, because he also seems to be suggesting that those thought forms are determined by the world, i.e. by physiological processes.

But neither objection applies, for both assume the mind/matter dualism, which Lévi-Strauss steadfastly refuses. As we have already shown in this thesis, the mind is as much part of the world, of nature, as is the body which speaks and thinks it, according to Lévi-Strauss. The relationship between the two (between mind and body, subject and object, consciousness and the world, or whatever the dualism at issue) is reciprocal, not mechanical; and neither one can be said to be primary or determinant of the other, for they occur together as one.<sup>46</sup> Far from reducing culture to nature, or ideas to chemistry, Lévi-Strauss, actually tries to transcend the dichotomy itself by integrating its two poles into a single anthropological "science."<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, he stresses that it is only the collective, universal formal<sup>48</sup> features of thought which will be ultimately explained in terms of brain structure; and not its content, which the historical dialectic determines in all its specificity and particularity. His account of objectified thought is, therefore, no more idealist and no more reductionist than is the standard physiological explanation of the structures of perception--figure/ground, colour,

perspective, etc.--in terms of the structure of the eye and the transmission of neuro-chemical messages to the brain. Those physiological structures undoubtedly determine what we see; nevertheless we do not scrutinize the eye or the brain when we want to understand our own or someone else's perceptual experience (unless that experience is aberrant, and lacks one of the "universal" structures, as in the case of colour blindness, for example). Just as,

. . . there may be a true sense in which a man's neurotic state may be determined in the last instance by his sexual nature, which in turn is determined by his sexual organs. But this does not make his neurosis any less 'real,' nor are we likely to understand it or cure it by prolonged scrutiny of the penis.<sup>49</sup>

And, similarly, although Lévi-Strauss locates the ultimate determining structures of thought in brain processes, it certainly does not follow, and Lévi-Strauss never suggests that it could, that we will understand thought any better by scrutinizing the brain.

Ambiguous ontological  
status of structures

Lévi-Strauss's structures have also been criticized because it is not always clear to what kind of reality they refer. They do not, for example, refer to structured social relations which are observable and conscious and therefore verifiable, but to the "models which are built up after it."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, these abstracted structures

are clearly meant to refer to real, though unconscious, determinants of thought and therefore of practices.

"What Lévi-Strauss calls the 'structure' of the society are the underlying principles on which it operates, which are real though they may be unobservable and unconscious."<sup>51</sup>

They are known by their effects, and discovered through a method which combines deduction with the observation of different sign systems.<sup>52</sup>

An arrangement is structured which meets but two conditions: that it be a system ruled by an internal cohesiveness, and that this cohesiveness, inaccessible to observation in an isolated system, be revealed in the study of transformations through which similar properties are recognized in apparently different systems.<sup>53</sup>

Like the Freudian unconscious, the real existence of these structures cannot be verified by conventional methods; neither empirically, by observation, since they do not appear at the level of phenomenal experience, nor theoretically, by deduction, since they do not exist at the level of conscious ideas either. Like the results of psychoanalysis, structures are the end-product of a two-stage process. Only the first of these, which consists in the preliminary observation of the facts, is empirical, objective, and analytical--therefore, repeatable and so verifiable. The second stage, which is much more important because it is there that the unconscious structures of thought are revealed and the facts made intelligible,

is both subjective and synthetic--therefore, it cannot be repeated and its conclusions cannot be confirmed by another.<sup>54</sup> This stage consists in the imaginative interpretation of those facts in accordance with a particular hermeneutic. And just as no two psychoanalysts (or, indeed, no two regular medical doctors) will arrive at the same diagnosis in the face of relatively unusual or complex symptoms, so we cannot expect two structuralists to agree on final principles. But this in no way invalidates their work; for each makes a contribution to the continuing totalization of the truth of human existence--and the more perspectives we have on social reality the more accurate, the more "truthful" will be our "totalization en cours."

The conclusions of Lévi-Strauss's interpretations should be evaluated, therefore, according to their capacity to render all the available and relevant facts intelligible. His achievement in this respect should not be underestimated. The totemic, mythological, and kinship systems of primitive people, which were previously mysteries to the Western observer, now make sense and the sense they make is suggestive: for it challenges some of our most treasured traditional Western preconceptions about rationality, freedom, progress, nature, need, and "man"--calling for a redefinition of "humanism," for example to include ". . . the reconciliation of man and nature in a generalized humanism,"<sup>55</sup> which no longer takes ". . . self-interest as its principle

and its notion,"<sup>56</sup> and entails changes in social practice and policy and not simply a transformation of ideology.<sup>57</sup>

#### Scientificity and objectivity

Of course, Lévi-Strauss, like Sartre, overstates his case, especially in his claim that structural anthropology is the only true science of man, and the only anthropology which can rightfully aspire to objectivity. The claim is based on his belief that scientificity and objectivity consist in the disinterestedness of the knowledge which is pursued and produced. Thus, there are, in his opinion:

. . . two strategic levels at which nature is accessible to scientific enquiry: one roughly adapted to that of perception and the imagination: the other at a remove from it . . . one very close to, and the other more remote from, sensible intuition.<sup>58</sup>

These "two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge"<sup>59</sup> correspond to primitive and modern scientific thought respectively. Primitive thought (totemism and mythology, for example) is as scientific and as objective as modern science, in Lévi-Strauss's opinion: (i) because they both share the same final cause, a "demand for order,"<sup>60</sup> for "organization" and "system,"<sup>61</sup> and "a desire for knowledge for its own sake";<sup>62</sup> and (ii) because they "require the same sort of mental operations"<sup>63</sup> i.e. "exhaustive observation and the systematic cataloguing of relations and connections."<sup>64</sup>

The difference between primitive and modern science, which accounts for the greater theoretical and practical productivity of the latter, lies in the kind of operators which are used by the respective systems. The elements by which the primitive organizes his universe are signs, for example species and parts of the body, which lie half-way between percepts and concepts; while modern science uses concepts only. Because mythological thought relies on the concrete for its operators, the scope of the science is limited; for the combination of the elements is pre-constrained and restricted by the fact that " . . . they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre."<sup>65</sup> The modern scientist, by contrast, organizes the universe according to concepts, which " . . . aim to be wholly transparent with respect to reality."<sup>66</sup> The engineer, for example: " . . . is always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization."<sup>67</sup> His concepts allow him to do this: because they are not tied to the concrete, they can open the set being worked on. While the primitive, like a bricoleur, always remains " . . . by inclination or necessity" within the set, within the constraints of the concrete. Signification can only reorganize the set; it, therefore: " . . . neither extends nor renews it and limits itself to obtaining the group of its transformations."<sup>68</sup>

Because the structural anthropologist studies societies of which he is not a member, and his purpose is intellectual rather than practical--to produce meaning rather than change, and understanding rather than control--he fulfills his first requirement of scientificity and objectivity, i.e., disinterestedness: the production of knowledge of, rather than knowledge for. And because he speaks from a position outside the system into which he is enquiring, and uses (abstract) concepts, rather than (concrete) signs to open up the set in question, he fulfills the requirement of modern science--and breaks codes, rather than invents new messages, and thus introduces genuine theoretical novelty into the processes of thought and understanding.

According to Lévi-Strauss, anthropology which is not structural may be scientific in the first sense, but not in the second. For, in failing to see social practices as elements of a larger structural system--i.e. as messages determined by a cultural code which is not itself observable as message--classical anthropology can only function as a "bricoleur" with respect to those systems, and shuffle their constitutive parts without ever cracking the code which is their condition of possibility as intelligible, coherent systems.

Sartre's anthropology can make no legitimate claim to scientificity at all on this account: (i) because he studies his own society, and (ii) because the knowledge

he produces of it is interested and practical, aiming not only to understand, but also to change society. It is knowledge for the satisfaction of particular concrete needs, and not knowledge of the unconscious structures determining those needs. Sartre takes up the messages of his own society and transforms them into new ones. But these are neither "scientific" nor "objective" conclusions, for they never transcend the structural limitations of the cultural codes of which they are an expression and variation.

Dogmatic, ideological and sterile

This demand for "scientificity" can be criticized on several counts. In the first place, to describe a method and a goal for anthropology is perfectly legitimate; and the particular goal and method stipulated by Lévi-Strauss has much to commend it: first, as a fruitful and productive mode of enquiry--it does render intelligible the previously unintelligible; and second, as a perspective from which to perceive the limitations of previous modes of enquiry--the historical and phenomenological, for example. But to equate that specific method and goal with anthropological science as such is both unnecessary and unjustifiable. It is both chauvinistic and arbitrary to presume that structural anthropology is the only scientific approach to social reality, and the only legitimate approach, as Lévi-Strauss implies in his critique of Sartre, and in comments like the following:

. . . the final aim of anthropology is to contribute to a better knowledge of objectified thought and its mechanisms.<sup>69</sup>

. . . the recovery of meaning is secondary and derivative compared with the essential work which consists in taking apart the mechanisms of objectified thought.<sup>70</sup>

Secondly, Lévi-Strauss's demand for scientificity reveals an uncritical acceptance of the bourgeois point of view which sees "science" as self-validating, objective, and therefore desirable as the only secure mode of access to the "truth." Lévi-Strauss's appropriation of both "science" and "anthropology" for his own particular breed of structural anthropology is, therefore, entirely unacceptable.

However, as I argued in the chapter on Marx, this struggle over "scientificity" is really a red-herring--from a Marxist point of view; it is but a mystification at the level of general and abstract ideas, of a more fundamental conflict which is specific, concrete, and personal, and concerns political practice rather than scientific or anthropological theory. For, Lévi-Strauss, by opting for science and objectivity and for the study of societies other than his own--for knowledge of rather than knowledge for--appears to some, to Sartre for example, to have opted out of his own society and out of his responsibility to it. "To choose between one truth and another is to

choose the future": because Lévi-Strauss does not explicitly study the dialectic of his own society, our society, he is suspected by those that do, of actually acting against it.

These suspicions about structural anthropology, as a perspective and a methodology, are augmented by its conclusions, which many perceive as being both theoretically and practically sterile. Glucksmann, for example, argues that they have "no counterpart in practice":<sup>71</sup>

In this view, society cannot therefore be acted upon purposefully since the social actors can never have a correct account of its workings . . .<sup>72</sup> Most of Lévi-Strauss's substantive propositions about primitive societies not only do not complement Marx's theory of infrastructure, but are profoundly anti-Marxist and anti-materialist. Both myth and kinship structure derive from the unconscious structure of the brain--man cannot create social structure, nor change history, and he must always be mystified by his own understanding of society.<sup>73</sup>

While Badcock, although disagreeing with this assessment of structuralism's practical consequences,<sup>74</sup> ultimately rejects it because of its theoretical sterility claiming that the "unintelligibility of the final terms," mind and nature (both of which reduce to "gratuitous arbitrariness"<sup>75</sup> in his opinion) leads only to a "theoretical cul-de-sac":<sup>76</sup>

Structuralist explanation as found in Lévi-Strauss do not lead anywhere; in fact, they lead absolutely nowhere because ultimately the mind and systems

of signs which it creates are arbitrary--that  
is devoid of meaning in final terms.<sup>77</sup>

Others see the search for and discovery of unconscious structural determinants of behaviour as an implicit denial of subjectivity and freedom and a refusal of history, and structuralism itself, therefore, as just the latest version of a (bourgeois) mechanical and deterministic materialism (Sartre, for example).

I think these suspicions about structuralism are justified; but I do not believe that they can be sustained in the specific case of Lévi-Strauss. My presentation of his structural anthropology in this thesis--as historical, dialectical, and at least implicitly revolutionary--goes some way to discrediting these criticisms. I have argued, for example, that Lévi-Strauss does not deny history, nor subjectivity, but rather tries to demystify them (as do Foucault and Althusser), by treating them as the products of social structure, instead of as its agents. Lévi-Strauss does not deny this agency, nor the reality of historical change. He simply shifts our perspective on them to reveal how they are constrained and determined, not only by the historical and material dialectic, but also by the hidden structures of ideology, of what he calls "objectified thought."

Nor does he maintain that ideology is static and unchanging; but rather that it changes more slowly than

perhaps we would care to admit. It changes in response to praxis, social action, and "parole" (messages); but the structure of discourse is such that it constrains individual praxis, so that it rarely challenges the system itself, but is, on the contrary, more often recovered, transformed, and contained by it.

. . . as code culture exists in a fully reversible, non-degradable environment in which repair and reorganization of the system is always going on. This repairing and reconstructing process is, in cybernetic terms, the exact equivalent to Marx's ideological processes--typically those of rationalization, justification and idealization.<sup>78</sup>

Because of the self-repairing and restructuring mechanisms internal to any ideology, radical ideological change is rare, and occurs only in response to dramatic changes in material conditions (as in the neolithic, agricultural, and industrial revolutions), rather than as the effect of the conscious intentions of individuals.

I have also suggested that Lévi-Strauss does have a commitment to the historical and dialectical totalization of his own society. He only disagrees (with Sartre, for example) about the best way of fulfilling that commitment; believing that knowledge of "man" is best acquired by looking into the distance,<sup>79</sup> rather than to "the hypothetical evidences of the self";<sup>80</sup> and by identifying with others rather than with oneself, or one's own society or history.<sup>81</sup>

Nor do his theoretical conclusions bring us "totally to a halt," "with the savage mind and its creation culture,"<sup>82</sup> as Babcock suggests; they rather challenge us to re-examine and redefine our own cultural "givens": for example, our ideas of progress and freedom, and especially our ideological bifurcation of nature and culture upon which these notions are based. Grounding culture in mind and mind in nature appears "unintelligible" only to those who have not yet thrown off the yoke of an idealism inherited from Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and the Church; to those who still crave a special status for humanity and a privileged being for "consciousness," thought, and Reason, allowing it to transcend the limitations and the material determinants of other mortal and worldly things.

In fact, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is no more sterile than linguistics, neurology, physiology, or psychoanalysis, for example, for which there is only one final term--human-being-in-the-world--and if this is seen as "unintelligible" for those who dream of a more rarified existence, then so be it, for they have their heads in the clouds.

Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss's conclusions do have a counterpart in practice: requiring us to ". . . respect other societies and change one's own,"<sup>83</sup> by ending the conquest of nature, for example, and dehistoricizing Europe--prospects which Poster maintains, render socialist practice

hopeless.<sup>84</sup> But they render such practice no more hopeless than do Sartre's conclusions about revolt. For both Lévi-Strauss and Sartre can be interpreted as injecting new hope into a tradition of failed socialist praxis, by extending our horizons and revealing to us additional material ground for a redefinition of both the aims and values of socialist practice, and therefore of the appropriate strategies for achieving them.

The ideological reflex  
of neo-capitalist society

A more telling criticism of the structuralist perspective, and especially of its systematic efforts to decentre the self-conscious subject from the stage of history, is that it amounts to no more than an ideological reflex of neo-capitalist society:

. . . in which the meaningful action and efficacy of individuals is denied and the structures of society presented as autonomous both in development and permutation.<sup>85</sup>

According to E. P. Thompson, for example, structuralism is a specific ideological response to the cold-war stasis;<sup>86</sup>

. . . the ultimate product of self-alienated reason--'reflecting' the common sense of the times--in which all human projects, endeavours, institutions and even culture itself, appear to stand outside of men, to stand against men.<sup>87</sup>

While:

The very fact of this ideological predisposition is itself a kind of guarantee that the ideas in question have some partial correspondence to the historical moment.<sup>88</sup>

This would indeed be the case, and a mitigating factor, were Lévi-Strauss ascribing structural constraints to the objectified thought of his own society. But he is not. And the accusation of "ideology" is doubly-damning in his case, for he attributes these structures to other societies. He can therefore be rightly suspected of both mystification, with respect to the ideology of others, and reification with respect to his own thought. For, it is indeed a real possibility that he (like Freud, perhaps) merely displaces onto others, without realizing it, the unconscious structures of his own thought--which he then discovers in the other, and declares to be a universal condition of being human.

For example, he maintains that mythological (like historical) thought operates with "closed" concepts which are incapable of introducing real novelty into discourse, or of rendering ideology intelligible in terms of its more fundamental and determining material reality; while the scientist (i.e. himself) uses "open" concepts which can break the code and thus disclose the fundamental material base of a particular discourse. But Lévi-Strauss's concepts are "open" only in relation to the objectified thought of others; and while this is significant for the understanding

of ideology as such, it nevertheless always remains the case that these same concepts are "closed" with respect to the discourse of his own society. And since anthropology is a moment of that discourse, it is obliged to constitute its object (in this case primitive thought) according to the rigours of its own ideology. So the objectified thought of the primitive which Lévi-Strauss reveals to us, may well be nothing more than a projection and reflexion of the objectified thought of neo-capitalism; and the society of primitive peoples, as revealed, ". . . established on the basis of a more profound relation which may be, for example, Colonialism"--after all, as Sartre suggested in the Questions.

For example, Lévi-Strauss attributes to primitive societies, and then to society and culture per se, an essentially patriarchal structure; thus reifying an historical process--the subjection of women, and mystifying (in an essentially phallogentric ideology) its historical origins by presenting it as an essential constituent of human culture as such.

This I believe is the most profound objection which can be made against structuralism, and it behoves us to take it seriously and maintain always a critical and sceptical attitude to its conclusions.

But I have argued a similar point against Sartre's existential Marxism: that it too could be nothing more

than the projection of his own specific sex and class experience onto humanity in general. The danger lies, I think, in the anthropological inspiration itself, i.e. in the desire to transform the knowledge we produce about men, which is necessarily partial, historical, and relative, into universal and transcending truths about man. Both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss fall into this "anthropology trap" (as did Marx before them). But neither should be dismissed for this, or for having succumbed to mystification. For mystification is not monolithic, and not an either/or, or once-for-all occurrence. As I argued in chapter V, even mystified thought alludes to reality albeit in an illusory and tangential way--and that is why it is important to study it. Likewise, "false consciousness" may well reflect the truth of its time: for its falseness consists only in the reification of an historical truth into a timeless truth, and the mystification of a partial truth into the whole of it.

We are all, at least partially, necessarily mystified in our perceptions and judgments about social reality. For there is no position outside discourse, outside thought, or outside culture from which we can realize any ultimate and final demystification of social reality. Constant vigilance is therefore our only option, and history our only consolation, for history alone will be the final arbiter of our truth.

## Conclusion

When one wants to study men, one must look around oneself; but to study man, one must first learn to look into the distance; one must first see the differences in order to discover the characteristics.<sup>1</sup>

The conclusions of this thesis with respect to the constitution of an adequate historical and structural "anthropology" are, therefore, as follows.

First, we must study neither men nor man, but social reality, i.e. men, women, and children in relation to each other and their shared world. Traditional studies of men's i.e. of mens' relations with other men, have falsified and mystified fundamental structures of past and present social reality and, as a result, efforts to intervene in that reality to change it, on the basis of this essentially phallogocentric understanding of it, have been unsuccessful and have only resulted in more of the same. Familiar structures of alienation, alteration, isolation, and oppression have continued to characterize social life as much after as before (male-defined, -engineered, -directed, -controlled) reforms, revolts, and revolutions. My examinations of Sartre's phenomenological descriptions of the structures of praxis and of Marx's understanding of the notions of "freedom" and "oppression" have disclosed some of the

limitations inherent in the unreflective assumption of the phallogocentric point of view, betrayed in an "anthropology" which has defined itself as the study of men (or man) and has traditionally realized itself, in philosophy and the positive sciences alike, very precisely as such.

We must eschew the study of man, not only for the reasons indicated above, but because the term "man," or equally "human nature" is an abstraction and refers to no knowable reality: human nature is not and never was; it only becomes, and human beings are only what they make of themselves. We do share a common condition, which is historical, material, social, and (self-) conscious; and a common existence which puts itself constantly into question, demands and produces meanings and values, and is always a project, and never a mere product of its particular historical, social, and material conditions. But it would be wrong to consider either the conditions or the existence as constitutive of an essence from which individuals (or "mankind") can be "alienated"—as both Sartre and Marx do in their assumption of that notion from the Hegelian tradition. For essences are only ideas; they are neither lived nor observed but are the product of contemplation and abstraction. They therefore serve to mystify rather than clarify human reality: first, by artificially isolating and abstracting from the concrete and complex "totalisation en cours," one of its conditions or

"existentiale," then by presenting that as the essential necessarily human and humanly necessary condition of existence. In doing so, the spokesmen (sic) of "alienation" have reified a concrete and historically particular experience, or appearance, of human privation (for example, "freedom"), by fixing that local and historical representation of a local and historical truth in the ideal and abstract category of an "essence"; thus obscuring and therefore falsifying the historical and particular nature of a changing human reality.

In chapter I, I suggested that the "alienation" in question, in Hegel, Marx, and Sartre, be considered as an historically specific (and male) experience (rather than an objective condition of "man," for example)--of isolation, alterity, and powerlessness, which is contingent upon the specific historical and social structures of capitalism in Western Europe, characterized as they are by their enormous size, and their hierarchies of power and functions.

Such a recommendation would not exclude a discussion of alienation under other specifications, to indicate other historically particular experiences: the experienced exclusion of men from the reproductive process, for example; or the experienced estrangement of native Indians, robbed of their land, their lives, their culture, and their history. Whether we cannot determine, nor even foresee, our own

future, and experience ourselves as more the products than the producers of our own social lives, for whatever reason, it would not be amiss to describe ourselves as "alienated," for we experience our existence as determined by and for others, and always elsewhere.

Finally, we must look both near and far in our efforts to understand ourselves and our own social reality and that of others; we must look at and around ourselves and into the distance. Neither perspective, alone, is adequate and each requires the other to complete and complement it, and to continue the process of demystification which is our only access to reality, and which can only be achieved collectively. All three thinkers have acknowledged this principle in their own way--though they may not always have lived up to it, as we have seen: Marx in his refusal of conscious representation as the final arbiter of truth; Sartre in his insistence on the dialectic between praxis and the practico-inert; and Lévi-Strauss, in whose work:

... the systematic will to identify with the other, goes hand in hand with an obstinate refusal to identify with the self.<sup>2</sup>

The feminist critique which has been indicated and recommended in this thesis attempts to fulfill these requirements of an adequate historical and structural anthropology. We examine neither men, nor man, for example, but men, women, and children in their concrete relations

with each other and the world, acknowledging rather than obscuring real differences of sex and age as significant variables in social and political life. We therefore focus on that which is most distant from traditional philosophical and political thought: on the "private," the "personal," and the "particular," traditionally excluded from humanly significant and significantly human discourse--where "human," "significant," "private," "personal," "particular," and "political" have, of course, been defined and prescribed by men, for men, to perpetuate and protect mens' privilege. In addressing these previously concealed (suppressed) social realities as politically, socially, humanly, and philosophically fundamental, we are actually looking near and far at the same time; for these realities which are the "other" (the distant) of traditional thought constitute our very existence as women; nevertheless, they have been systematically distanced from us throughout history because they have been appropriated, determined, and defined for us by the "other" of our own existence, i.e. by men.

In our efforts to re-appropriate our own experience of social reality and to demystify the traditional descriptions of it (by men), from which that experience cannot be separated, but from which it must nevertheless be liberated, we are often obliged to make leaps into the dark--in thought and in practice--for we must change the structures of our oppression, they will not change for

us; and we do not always land securely. This thesis could be considered as one such leap in the dark, and the security of landing has yet to be determined.)

## Notes

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique de la raison dialectique (Gallimard, 1960). (Précédé de Questions de méthode) Tome I, Théorie des ensembles pratiques. Quotations will be given in English in the text of this thesis, and taken from (1) Alan Sheridan-Smith, trans., Critique of Dialectical Reason (New Left Books, 1976); and from (2) Hazel Barnes, Search for a Method, translated from Questions de méthode (Vintage Books, 1963). The corresponding page reference in the French original will be given in the note. The French text will be referred to by the initials C.R.D., and the English by C.D.R. and Questions, respectively. (This is to avoid confusion: S.M. will be reserved for Lévi-Strauss's text, translated as The Savage Mind--see below).

<sup>2</sup> Sartre means by "anthropology" the "science of man" generally, and that is how the term will be used in this thesis. At this stage of the inquiry it denotes no particular specification of that science: Sartre's Critique, and our own examination of it, and of Lévi-Strauss's work, represent efforts to establish such a specification of anthropology: its constitution, scope, appropriate methodology, etc. In the course of this thesis an appropriate specification does emerge, but this was not available to us as a point of departure.

<sup>3</sup> The Savage Mind, translated from Claude Lévi-Strauss, "La Pensée Sauvage," (University of Chicago Press, 1966). Hereafter referred to by the initials S.M.

<sup>4</sup> This is a direct translation from the French "ensembles pratiques"; an expression coined by Sartre to denote human groups or collectivities as producers as well as products of their history. Individuals in such groups are united by their practice, rather than mere spatio-temporal location.

<sup>5</sup> "If anthropology is to be an organized whole, it must . . . on its own constitute itself as a structural and historical anthropology" (Questions, p. 169).

"Marxism appears today to be the only possible anthropology which can be at once historical and structural" (Questions, pp. 174-75).

6 "Marxism ought to study real men in depth, not dissolve them in a bath of sulphuric acid."  
(Questions, pp. 43-44)

"Thus the comprehension of existence is presented as the human foundation of Marxist anthropology . . . the foundation of Marxism, as a historical, structural anthropology, is man himself, in as much as human existence and the comprehension of the human are inseparable." (Questions, p. 176)

"In other words, the foundation of anthropology is man himself, not as the object of practical knowledge, but as a practical organism producing knowledge as a moment of praxis." (Questions, p. 180)

"Our intention is not, as is too often claimed, to 'give the irrational its due,' but, on the contrary, to reduce the part of indetermination and non-knowledge, not to reject Marxism in the name of a third path or of an idealist humanism, but to reconquer man within Marxism." (Questions, p. 83; C.R.D., p. 59)

7 "Praxis" (always with emphasis in the Critique) denotes individual human action, not as reaction, but as at one and the same time, activity and understanding, product and producer of the material and social reality in which it is situated.

" . . . free praxis is the negation of every particular given, in the course of a particular action, . . . it negates matter in so far as it reorganises it in its passive being in terms of a future objective originating in the satisfaction of needs." (C.D.R., p. 333)

The complex dialectical structure of praxis is examined in greater detail in the chapters which follow.

8 "Chance does not exist, or at least, not in the way it is generally believed. The child becomes this or that because he lives the universal as particular." (Questions, p. 59; C.R.D., p. 45)

"Against the idealization of philosophy and the dehumanization of man, we assert that the part of chance that can must be reduced to the minimum . . . . What we intend to show is that this Napoleon was necessary." (Questions, p. 83; C.R.D., p. 58)

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Aron, Histoire et dialectique de la violence (Gallimard, 1973), p. 220:

"A lire attentivement la Critique celle-ci tend effectivement à la même démonstration que l'Etre et le néant: la liberté survit en dépit de l'asservissement dans le pratico-inerte."

<sup>10</sup> Hence his insistence that: "Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry" (Questions, p. 56; C.R.D., p. 44).

that:

"Marxism lacks any hierarchy of mediations which would permit it to grasp the process which produces the person and his product inside a class and within a given society at a given historical moment." (Questions, p. 56; C.R.D., p. 44)

that Existentialism therefore:

" . . . intends without being unfaithful to Marxist principles to find mediations which allow the individual concrete--the particular life, the real and dated conflict, the person--to emerge from the background of the general contradictions of productive forces and relations of production." (Questions, p. 57; C.R.D., p. 45)

<sup>11</sup> " . . . it is the concrete man whom he puts at the centre of his research, that man who is defined simultaneously by his needs, by the material conditions of his existence, and by the nature of his work--that is, by his struggle against things and against men." (Questions, p. 14; C.R.D., p. 21)

"It must be made to pass through a process of mediation, one which will bring into play the concrete men who were involved in it." (Questions, p. 42; C.R.D., p. 37)

" . . . it is men whom we judge and not physical forces." (Questions, p. 47; C.R.D., p. 39)

- 12 "It goes without saying that this analysis is not enough and that it is but the first moment in an effort at synthetic reconstruction. But it is apparent also that the analysis is indispensable to the later reconstruction of the total structures." (Questions, p. 27; C.R.D., p. 28)
- 13 "We cannot conceive of this conditioning in any form except that of a dialectical movement (contradictions, surpassing, totalizations)."  
(Questions, p. 34; C.R.D., p. 32)
- " . . . what counts here is the synthetic view which gives life to the objects of the analysis."  
(Questions, p. 27, note; C.R.D., p. 27)

Notes

Chapter I

<sup>1</sup> P. Chiodi, Sartre and Marxism, trans. from Italian by Kate Soper (Harvester Press, 1976), p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Questions, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> See Istvan Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation (London: Merlin Press, 1970), for a detailed explication of this point.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, ed. by C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 83:

"Only in community with others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible . . . . In a real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association."

<sup>5</sup> "It is within this complex of dialectical relations that the possibility of the capitalist process constitutes itself as one of the possible historical moments of alienation." (C.D.R., p. 152; C.R.D., p. 224)

" . . . the possibility of these social relations becoming contradictory is itself due to an inert and material negation re-interiorised by man."  
(Ibid., note)

"The real problem--which we cannot go into here--relates not so much to the past, where recurrence and alienation have always existed, as to the future: to what extent will a socialist society do away with atomism in all its forms? To what extent will collective objects, the signs of our alienation, be dissolved into a true intersubjective community in which the only real relations will be those between men; and to what extent will the necessity of every human society remaining a detotalised totality maintain

recurrence, flights and therefore unity-objects as limits to true unification? Must the disappearance of capitalist forms of alienation mean the elimination of all forms of alienation?"  
(C.D.R., p. 307; C.R.D., p. 349, note)

6 "Negation is there in these fundamental relations of need and labour . . . . It comes to matter in praxis and, through the development of this praxis it turns back against the individual."  
(C.D.R., p. 334; C.R.D., p. 334)

" . . . the scandal is not as Hegel supposed, the mere existence of the Other . . . . It lies in suffered (or threatened) violence, that is interiorised scarcity." (C.D.R., p. 815; C.R.D., p. 752)

7 " . . . as long as the reign of scarcity continues, each and every man will contain an inert structure of non-humanity which is in fact no more than material negation which has been interiorised."  
(C.D.R., p. 130; C.R.D., p. 207)

" . . . all men are slaves in so far as their life unfolds in the practico-inert field and in so far as this field is always conditioned by scarcity." (C.D.R., p. 331; C.R.D., p. 369)

8 "praxis is inconceivable without need, transcendence, and the project." (Questions, p. 171; C.R.D., p. 106)

"Need, negativity, surpassing, project, transcendence, for a synthetic totality in which each one of the moments designated contains all the others."  
(Questions, p. 173; C.R.D., p. 107)

"Organic functioning, need and praxis are strictly linked in a dialectical manner; dialectical time came into being, in fact, with the organism; form the living being can survive only by renewing itself." (C.D.R., p. 82; C.R.D., p. 167)

"Thus, in so far as body is function, function need and need praxis, one can say that human labour, the original praxis by which man produces and reproduces his life, is entirely dialectical: its possibility and its permanent necessity rest upon the relation of interiority which unites the organism with the environment and upon the deep contradiction between the inorganic and

organic orders, both of which are present in everyone." (C.D.R., p. 90; C.R.D., pp. 173-74)

" . . . without the original tension of need as a relation of interiority with Nature, there would be no change." (C.D.R., p. 349; C.R.D., p. 384)

Sartre only follows Marx's example in attributing the primary foundation of dialectical activity to the living organism's concrete material and natural need to internalize the external world for its survival:

"The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself . . . the satisfaction of the first need . . . leads to new needs; and this production of new needs is the first historical act." (Marx and Engels, p. 49)

The irony of this position, as held by Sartre, however, is that the ultimate foundation of history, whose intelligibility is grounded in individual dialectical activity, is unintelligible basic, material, animal need (unintelligible in Sartre's own view).

9

" . . . alienation is at the base and at the summit; and the agent never undertakes anything which is not the negation of alienation and which does not fall back into an alienated world. But the alienation of the objectified result is not the same as the alienation at the point of departure. It is the passage from the one to the other which defines the person." (Questions, p. 99; C.R.D., p. 67, note)

10. See Chiodi:

"Sartre regards every human venture as an instance of the relentless struggle against scarcity, the disappearance of which would thus mean the disappearance of the human character itself."

(Chiodi, p. 20)

And the following:

"Whatever men and events are they certainly appear within the compass of scarcity; that is, in a society still incapable of emancipating itself from its needs--hence from nature--a society which is thereby defined according to its techniques and tools." (Questions, p. 133; C.R.D., p. 85)

" . . . the whole of human development, at least up to now, has been a bitter struggle against scarcity . . . scarcity is universal . . . in spite of its contingency, scarcity is a very basic human relation both to Nature and to men. In this sense, scarcity must be seen as that which makes us into these particular individuals producing this particular History and defining ourselves as men." (C.D.R., pp. 123-24; C.R.D., p. 201)

"History is born from a sudden imbalance which disrupts all levels of society. Scarcity is the basis of the possibility of human history." (C.D.R., p. 126; C.R.D., p. 203)

"I do not claim that the relation of reciprocity ever existed in man before the relation of scarcity, man being after all, the historical product of scarcity." (C.D.R., p. 131; C.R.D., p. 207)

"A man is a practical organism living with a multiplicity of similar organisms in a field of scarcity. But this scarcity, as a negative force, defines, in commutativity, every man and partial multiplicity as realities which are both human and inhuman." (C.D.R., p. 735; C.R.D., p. 688)

Sartre maintains that the truth of Marxism will remain unsurpassed and unsurpassable as long as man lives under the yoke of scarcity; quoting Capital III in support of his claim:

"The realm of freedom begins in fact, where that labour which is determined by need and external purposes ceases; it is by its very nature outside the sphere of material production proper." (Questions, p. 34; C.R.D., p. 32, note quoting Marx)

(Note the confusion of scarcity and need in these passages.) Sartre adds that we have no way of anticipating now what that freedom would be like, nor what philosophy would be appropriate to it:

"As soon as there will exist for everyone a margin of real freedom, beyond the production of life, Marxism will have lived out its span; a philosophy of freedom will take its place. But we have no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete

experience which allows us to conceive of this freedom or of this philosophy." (Questions, p. 34; C.R.D., p. 32)

11 Sartre even suggests this himself:

"Should we go back to Hegel who sees alienation as a constant characteristic of all kinds of objectification? Yes and no. We must recognize that the original relation between praxis as totalisation and materiality as passivity obliges man to objectify himself in a milieu which is not his own, and to treat an inorganic totality as his own objective reality. It is this relation between interiority and exteriority which originally constituted praxis as a relation of the organism to its material environment; and there can be no doubt that as soon as man begins to designate himself not as the mere reproduction of his life, but as the ensemble of products which reproduce his life, he discovers himself as Other in the world of objectivity; totalised matter, as inert objectification perpetuated by inertia, is in effect non-human or even anti-human. All of us spend our lives engraving our maleficent image on things, and it fascinates and bewilders us if we try to understand ourselves through it, although we are ourselves the totalising movement which results in this particular objectification." (C.D.R., p. 227; C.R.D., p. 285)

12 The same confusion of terms is assumed and repeated in R. D. Laing and D. G. Cooper, Reason & Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy 1950-1960 (New York: Random House, Pantheon Books) in their Synopsis of the Critique; an exposition described by Sartre himself as "... très clair et très fidèle de ma pensée" in the Foreword (p. 7). For example:

"The original totalising relation of this material being, a man; with the material world of which he is a part is defined as need. Need is an interiorization by the man-in-need of a lack in the exterior total field of satisfactions. Something is lacking, or missing or scarce." (p. 107)

These three terms--lacking, missing, and scarce--are not synonymous; to speak as if they are obfuscates rather than clarifies the dialectic of which they are significant, but specific, moments.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, Marjorie Grene, Sartre (New York: Franklin Watts, 1973), p. 36: ". . . it is the cogito with the idealism inherent in it . . . that fatefully controls Sartre's dialectical reasoning as well as his phenomenology."

and Chiodi:

"But Sartre cannot succeed in his task, because he wishes to accomplish it while remaining within the idealist logico-ontological locus--a locus which . . . constitutes the pure and simple impossibility of such a synthesis." (I.e. of existentialism and marxist materialism, Chiodi, p. xi.)

<sup>14</sup> C.D.R., p. 130; C.R.D., p. 207. " . . . tant que le règne de la rareté n'aura pris fin . . ." (see note 7 above).

<sup>15</sup> C.D.R., p. 334; C.R.D., p. 371.

<sup>16</sup> C.D.R., p. 66 (note); C.R.D., p. 154 (note).

"Moreover, in so far as our investigation proceeds from the simple to the complex, from the abstract to the concrete, from the constituting to the constituted, we must be able to settle, without reference to concrete history the incarnations of individual praxis, the formal structural conditions of its/alienation and the abstract circumstances which encourage the constitution common praxis . . . \*

This means: the dialectical investigation of alienation as a a priori possibility of human praxis on the basis of the real alienations to be found in concrete History." (C.D.R., p. 66)

\*Emphasis mine.

<sup>17</sup> Questions, pp. 171, 173; C.R.D., pp. 106, 107.

<sup>18</sup> C.D.R., p. 80; C.R.D., p. 166.

<sup>19</sup> C.D.R., pp. 81-82; C.R.D., p. 167. ". . . cette aliénation par la projection dans la matérialité ne doit rien à la rareté" (Aron, p. 61).

<sup>20</sup> "Il s'agit d'une traduction en langage biologique de la structure du pour-soi" (Aron, p. 42).

<sup>21</sup> C.D.R., pp. 124-251 C.R.D., p. 202 (emphasis added).

" . . . the discovery by the agent of the alienation of his praxis is accompanied by the discovery of his objectification as alienated. This means in fact that through a praxis which effaces itself before an inert, alienated objectivity, he discovers his being-outside-in-the-thing as his fundamental truth and his reality. And this being-outside constitutes itself (or is constituted) for him as practico-inert matter; either he himself, as a particularity, is roughly conditioned in exteriority by the whole universe, or alternatively, his being awaits him from outside, prefabricated by a conjunction of exigencies. In either case, human praxis is subordinated to the direct and lifeless exigency, the immediate aims appearing as the means of initiating praxis." (C.D.R., p. 229; C.R.D., p. 286)

"For those who have read Being and Nothingness, I can describe the foundation of necessity as practice: it is the For-Itself, as agent, revealing itself initially as inert, or at best, as practico-inert, in the milieu of the In-Itself. This, one might say, is because the very structure of action as the organisation of the unorganised primarily relates the For-Itself to its alienated being as Being in itself. This inert materiality of man as the foundation of all knowledge of himself by himself is, therefore, an alienation of knowledge as well as a knowledge of alienation. Necessity for man, is conceiving oneself originally as Other than one is and in the dimension of alterity. Certainly, praxis is self-explanatory (se donne ses lumières); it is always conscious of itself. But this non-thetic consciousness counts for nothing against the practical affirmation that I am what I have done (which eludes me while constituting the other). It is the necessity of this fundamental relation which explains why, as I have said, man projects himself in the milieu of the In-Itself-For-Itself. Fundamental alienation does not derive, as Being and Nothingness might mislead one into supposing, from some prenatal choice: it derives from the univocal relation of interiority which unites man as a practical organism with his environment."

(C.D.R., pp. 227-28, note; C.R.D., p. 286)

See also, the Critique (C.R.D.), pp. 212, 224, 234, 248, 383, 634.

22 " . . . we are men condemned to live humanly the condition of material things" (Questions, p. 104; C.R.D., p. 70).

"In transcending his material condition man objectifies himself in matter through labour. This means that he loses himself for the sake of the human thing . . ." (C.D.R., p. 170; C.R.D., p.238).

See also C.R.D., pp. 167, 168, 174, 212, 224, 266, 285, 286, etc.

23 " . . . the consequences of our acts always end by escaping us, since every concerted enterprise, as soon as it is realized, enters into relation with the entire universe, and since this infinite multiplicity of relations goes beyond our intention. If we look at things from this angle, human action is reduced to that of a physical force whose effect evidently depends upon the system in which it is exercised." (Questions, p. 47; C.R.D., p. 39)

See also C.R.D., pp. 99, 202, 234, 237, 283, etc.

24 C.D.R., pp. 220-21; C.R.D., pp. 280-81.

Sartre's argument here, that material unity is essentially alienating (separating), actually contradicts Marx, who constantly emphasizes man's essential materiality as a materiality which is neutral; which can unite positively as well as falsely:

" . . . from the start there exists a materialistic connection of men with one another which is determined by their needs and their mode of production . . . This connection is ever taking on new forms, and thus presents a 'history'" (Marx & Engels, p. 50).

25 " . . . in so far as scarcity in any form transforms separation into antagonism . . . Everything changes its sign when we enter the domain of the negative; from the point of view of this new logic the unity of men through matter can only be their separation . . . separation ceases to be a pure relation of exteriority and becomes a bond of lived interiority . . . for since matter unites men in so far as it binds them together and forces them to enter a material system, it unifies them in so far as they are inertia." (C.D.R., p. 221; C.R.D., p. 281 emphasis added)

26. " . . . conflicts--within a person or a group-- are the motive force of History . . ." (C.D.R., p. 15; C.R.D., p. 115).

27 "The upheaval which destroys the collective by the flash of a common praxis obviously originates in a synthetic and therefore material transformation which occurs in the context of scarcity and of existing structures." (C.D.R., p. 349 ff; C.R.D., p. 384 ff.)

28. "The cyclical process--which characterises both biological time and that of primitive societies-- is interrupted externally, by the environment, simply because the contingent and inescapable fact of scarcity disrupts exchanges." (C.D.R., p. 82; C.R.D., p. 168)

29 C.D.R., p. 348; C.R.D., p. 383..

30 For the most part it is made clear that Sartre regards simply being with others within the material world as sufficient for alienation to occur--regardless of the abundance or scarcity of resources for survival, or the satisfaction of needs:

" . . . the constituent dialectic (as it grasps itself in its abstract translucidity in individual praxis) finds its limit within its own work and is transformed into an anti-dialectic. This anti-dialectic, or dialectic against the dialectic (dialectic of passivity), must reveal series to us as a type of human gathering and alienation as a mediated relation to the other and to the objects of labour in the element of seriality and as a serial mode of co-existence. At this level we will discover an equivalence between alienated praxis and worked inertia, and we shall call the domain of this equivalence the practico-inert". (C.D.R., pp. 66-67; C.R.D., p. 154)

"What we call the dialectic of passivity, or anti-dialectic, is the moment of intelligibility corresponding to a praxis turned against itself in so far as it is reinstated as the permanent seal of the inert." (Note to the above.)

"Obviously alienation is a much more complex phenomenon and its conditions, as we shall see, are present at all levels of experience. Nevertheless, we must here indicate its ground. For

example, alienation exists as a constant danger within the practical group. But this is intelligible only in so far as the most lively and united group is always in danger of relapsing into the series from which it came." (Note to the above.)

"... the praxis of each resides in that of the Other, as its secret exteriority and its deep interiority." (C.D.R., p. 115; C.R.D., p. 193)

"Thus his own activity is turned against him and returns to him as Other through the social milieu. Through socialised matter and through material negation as an inert unity, man is constituted as Other than man. Man exists for everyone as non-human man, as an alien species." (C.D.R., p. 130; C.R.D., p. 206)

"Now at this level of positivity, that is to say, precisely at the level of objectification, worked matter can be seen in all its docility both as a new totalisation of society and as its radical negation. At this level the real foundations of alienation appear: matter alienates in itself the action which works it, not because it is itself a force nor even because it is inertia, but because inertia allows it to absorb the labour power of Others and turn it back against everyone." (C.D.R., p. 151; C.R.D., p. 224)

See also C.R.D., pp. 230, 234, 291, 351, etc.

For Sartre, as Aron rightly observes: " . . . dès lors que l'aliénation tient à la sérialité et à la matière, aucune révolution n'éliminera les causes dernières de l'aliénation" (Aron, p. 104).

31

"Suspicion appears within the group not as a characteristic of human nature, but as the behaviour appropriate to this contradictory structure of survival: it is simply the interiorisation of the dangers of seriality . . . the possibility of free secession manifests itself as a structural possibility of every individual praxis." (C.D.R., p. 419; C.R.D., pp. 438-39)

32

"Thus the ontological stature of the surviving group appears at first as the practical contrivance of a free, inert permanence of common unity in everyone. When freedom becomes common praxis and grounds the permanence of the group by producing its own inertia through itself and in mediated

reciprocity, this new statute is called the pledge (le serment). " (C.D.R., p. 419; C.R.D., p. 439)

33 Aron comments that Sartre's group-in-fusion " . . . a la nature épiphémère des instants parfaits" (p. 129); Chiodi remarks that, in Sartre: " . . . de-alienation has the temporal dimension of an instant; it is the zero point of the paradoxical confrontation between freedom and necessity" (p. 95).

34 " . . . in so far as the pledge is a guarantee against the future; inertia produced in immanence and by freedom, and the foundation of all differentiation . . . A pledge is mediated reciprocity . . . it involves the possibility that certain tasks involve the re-emergence of the multiplicity of alterity i.e. of exteriority . . . the pledge is an inert determination of the future; that is to say, this inertia is above all a negation of dialectic inside the dialectic . . . One element will remain non-dialectical: every member's common membership of the group . . . The group tries to make itself its own tool against the seriality which threatens to dissolve it; it creates a factitious inertia to protect it against the threats of the practico-inert." (C.D.R., pp. 419-21; C.R.D., pp. 439-40)

"The act of swearing . . . becomes in turn a regulatory and totalising praxis and I am synthetically united with others in the community as a quasi-object . . . My 'sworn faith' is reflected to me as a surety against my freedom . . . a new sort of alterity emerges . . . it is already the untranscendable, and therefore inert, negation of any possibility that I may change, regardless of the circumstances" . . . Thus I turn out to be Other than myself within my own free praxis simply because its untranscendability comes from . . . all the third parties who have sworn, are swearing, or are going to swear, although I entirely accept my pledge." (C.D.R., pp. 423-24; C.R.D., pp. 441-42)

35 Sartre has no way of conceptualizing a we-subject; the Critique fails to establish both (i) the real possibility of de-alienation, and (ii) the real possibility of authentic, free being and activity with others in a situation of genuine positive reciprocity. The group-in-fusion is at best sporadic and short-lived; and it is always merely a means for individual praxis and never a genuine collective subject:

" . . . it is always a means in relation to the final objective (which is complete victory)" (C.D.R., p. 418; C.R.D., p. 438).

36 Questions, p. 132; C.R.D., p. 85.

37 C.D.R., p. 132; C.R.D., p. 208.

38 " . . . in its fundamental way of being, human being becomes what it is in and out of its being-with-others. It is being with what is primary and being-alone, being against the world and others, that is negation, through philosophical contrivance, of that primary being . . . For-itself and for-others are both expressions and developments, of the fundamental structure of being-with-others-in-the-world . . . Without being-among-others there is no human reality of any kind at all." (Grene, Sartre, p. 157)

Grene notes that Sartre lacks any concept of "encounter" (such as can be found in Buber, Plessner, and Buytendijk, for example), as the "bodily-being-there" of an other; as experienced by a mother and child, or by sexual lovers, for example. These considerations are returned to in later chapters of this thesis.

39 "La conscience Sartrienne jovit de la même liberté que le Dieu de Descartes; elle n'a pas besoin des autres pour s'accomplir elle-même . . ."

"La liberté Sartrienne, en effet, n'admet pas de norme, pas plus que le Dieu de Descartes n'est soumis à une vérité . . . celle-ci n'obéit aux exigences de la matière ouvrée que sur le mode de l'aliénation" (Aron, Histoire, pp. 41, 269).

40 See Lévi-Strauss in the section which follows; also Grene: " . . . suppose, as Rousseau suggested, we find in facing nature the need to co-operate rather than compete" (Grene, Sartre, p. 247).

41 "Why, unless he himself shares this atomistic style of thought, must Sartre find competition for scarce goods, the source of social organisation? The truth is, I suspect, that when he thinks about society he really is a Hobbesian . . . This vision of human interaction arises inevitably out of--and only out of--a thoroughly molecular conception of the individual." (Grene, Sartre, p. 248).

42 Karl Marx, Early Writings, trans. and ed. by T. B. Bottomore (McGraw Hill Paperbacks, 1964), p. 197.

43 Ibid., p. 200.

44 " . . . the negation of the negation is not the confirmation of true being by the negation of illusory being. It is the confirmation of illusory being . . . its transformation into a subject . . ." (Marx, Early Writings, p. 211).

" . . . since this negation of the negation is still confined within the alienation, it is in part a restoration of these fixed spiritual forms in their alienation" (Marx, Early Writings, p. 216).

"Self-consciousness" that divorces itself from the world of objects (i.e. a consciousness whose centre of reference is the object-less abstract self) "does not oppose alienation but . . . affirms it . . ." (Mészáros, p. 171).

44 "And since I am to speak of existentialism, let it be understood that I take it to be an 'ideology'. It is a parasitical system living on the margin of knowledge . . ." (Questions, p. 8, C.R.D., p. 18).

45 "As soon as there will exist for everyone a margin of real freedom beyond the production of life Marxism will have lived out its span; a philosophy of freedom will take its place. But we have no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete experience which allows us to conceive of this freedom, of this philosophy." (Questions, p. 34; C.R.D., p. 32)

46 Marx, Early Writings, p. 26.

47 Marjorie Grene describes Sartre as "the man of the sixth floor" in this respect; and attributes the extreme abstraction and detachment of his philosophical perspective on "man" to his specific childhood experience--to the bourgeois four-year old of Words: " . . . up on the sixth floor, where he is himself, ruler, and creator, where he reads his books and writes his romances . . ." (Grene, Sartre, p. 18).

Sartre was literally cut off from the world around him as a child; in Paris but not of-Paris in any real material sense. Grene contrasts Sartre's relation to Paris with that of Joyce to Dublin, who, although an exile from his city, felt that he had never left it: Sartre, by comparison: " . . . has lived all of his life in Paris and one cannot imagine him elsewhere, yet his being of it is a looking down upon it, a detachment . . ." (Grene, Sartre, p. 19).

Greene maintains that it is this detachment which makes Sartre more a philosopher than an artist--a provocative thought, which unfortunately cannot be pursued here.

48 Mészáros, p. 242. Mészáros is particularly critical of twentieth century mystifications of alienation, in the arts, for example, where ". . . the alienated routine of bourgeois life" is presented as if it were the human condition per se. (He specifies T. S. Eliot's The Cocktail Party, as one example of this but many more offer themselves, including most of Sartre's imaginary works.) The glorification of individual autonomy in contemporary art, in Sartre, for example, is characteristic of this mystification:

"Facing the uncontrollable forces and instruments of capitalistically alienated productive activity, the individual takes refuge in his 'autonomous' private world. This he can do, because the hostile power of direct natural necessity which formerly united him with his fellow men now seems to be under control." (Mészáros, p. 258)

But this is a self-defeating strategy; a reaction rather than an action: ". . . clearly the cult of the individual--itself a product of alienation--cannot offer any remedy against alienation and reification" (Mészáros, p. 267).

49 "And so we end up in the paradox of a system which invokes the criterion of historical consciousness to distinguish the 'primitive' from the 'civilized' but--contrary to its claim--is itself ahistorical. It offers not a concrete image of history but an abstract schema of men making history of such a kind that it can manifest itself in the trend of their lives as a synchronic totality. Its position in relation to history is therefore the same as that of the primitives to the eternal past: in Sartre's system, history plays exactly the part of myth." (S.M., p. 254)

50 S.M., p. 249.

51 Ibid.

52 "The 'bricoleur' has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man, but, as the text makes clear, he is of a different standing from, for example, the English 'odd job man' or 'handyman.'" (Translator's note, S.M., p. 17)

53 S.M., p. 19.

54 S.M., p. 51. To what extent concepts can be "wholly transparent with respect to reality" is the subject of later chapters.

55 S.M., p. 21, note.

56 " . . . they (i.e. primitive societies) serve as illustrations of deficient modes of society-- the main deficiency being that they are cases of stagnation and non-historicity . . ." (K. Hartmann, "Lévi-Strauss and Sartre," J.B.S.P. Vol. II, no. 3, 37-45)

57 Questions, p. 167; C.R.D., p. 103, note.

58 "Thus man makes History, this means that he objectifies himself in it and is alienated in it. In this sense History, which is the proper work of all activity and of all men, appears to men as a foreign force." (Questions, p. 89; C.R.D., p. 62)

" . . . we rediscover in man his veritable humanity, that is, the power to make History by pursuing his own ends." (Questions, p. 164; C.R.D., p. 102)

59 "What we call freedom is the irreducibility of the cultural order to the natural order" (Questions, p. 152; C.R.D., p. 96).

60 C.R.D., p. 168.

61 "The cyclical process which characterises both biological time and that of primitive societies-- is interrupted externally, by the environment, simply because the contingent and inescapable fact of scarcity disrupts exchanges." (C.D.R., p. 82; C.R.D., p. 168)

"The only real difference between primitive synthetic temporality and the time of elementary praxis lies in the material environment which, by not containing what the organism seeks, transforms the totality as future reality into possibility. . . . praxis, in the first instance, is nothing but the relation of the organism, as exterior and future end, to the present organism as a totality under threat." (C.D.R., p. 83; C.R.D., p. 168)

62 C.D.R., p. 148; C.R.D., p. 221.

63 C.D.R., p. 126; C.R.D., pp. 203-204.

64 Ibid.

65 C.D.R., p. 485; C.R.D., p. 491.

66 C.D.R., p. 501; C.R.D., pp. 503-504.

67 C.D.R., p. 502; C.R.D., p. 505.

68 S.M., p. 251.

69 C. Lévi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, trans. by J. H. Bell, J. R. von Sturmer and R. Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 24 and passim. Hereafter referred to as E.S.K.

70 E.S.K., p. 51.

71 " . . . names always signify membership of an actual class or virtual class, which must be either that of the person named or of the person giving the name" (S.M., p. 185).

72 Lévi-Strauss is as much a Marxist as Sartre in this respect, and perhaps he is a better one. He considers his analysis of social systems as an investigation into the intelligibility of "superstructures" and fully acknowledges the "undoubted primacy of infrastructures," e.g.: "Man's conception of the relations between nature and culture is a function of modifications of their own social relations. . . ." (S.M., p. 117)

73 Lévi-Strauss, throughout all of his writings, emphasizes this " . . . intimate contact between man and his environment which the native is constantly imposing on the ethnologist" (S.M., p. 7). The totemic system itself is one way the native represents his universe; as a continuum, uniting men and their natural environment together, breaking down both tribal and biological frontiers, and creating the "rudiments of an international society" (S.M., p. 166).

"It is in this intransigent refusal on the part of the savage mind to allow anything human (or even living) to remain alien to it, that the real principle of dialectical reason is to be found . . ." (S.M., p. 245).

74 E.S.K., p. 32.

75 E.S.K., p. 59. Similar social rules apply in our own society:

"A bottle of vintage wine, a rare liqueur, a foie gras, pricks the owner's conscience with the claim of someone else. These are some of the delicacies which one would not buy and consume alone without a vague feeling of guilt." (E.S.K., p. 57)

76 The potlatch is a ceremonial institution of the Indians of Alaska and the Vancouver region, at which vast amounts of wealth, in the form of valuables, are given away and exchanged. This system of reciprocal gifts characterizes many primitive societies; it is accompanied by the ritual obligation of the recipient to accept and give in return. The goods obviously are not primarily perceived as economic commodities; often wealth is ritually destroyed, or thrown into the sea at these ceremonies, as ". . . vehicles and instruments of another order, such as power, influence, sympathy, status and emotion" (E.S.K., p. 54). The exchange of gifts at Christmas in our own culture can be seen as "a gigantic potlatch"; similarly, the "destruction" of wealth at gambling casinos provides another parallel. Note also, that in our society we "give" a "reception" (to receive is to give, and vice versa), and of course we always "give" dinner parties at which we share our more exotic or traditional foods (Lévi-Strauss's examples).

77 E.S.K., p. 54.

78 E.S.K., p. 52.

79 E.S.K., p. 37.

80 Of course, this is as true of our own society as it is of the primitive groups studied by Lévi-Strauss.

81 In ostensibly monogamous societies, like our own, men of status often take more than one wife: showing that they are the real "winners" within those economic systems. In our own society the rich, the powerful, and the influential (most notably film stars--and Henry VIII) have many wives. They "take" them consecutively, rather than simultaneously, to honour the rule; but nevertheless, their behaviour could be interpreted as revealing the posited basic polygamous tendency in men. Of course, the average man cannot afford more than one wife; but it is well known that he fantasizes other relationships and/or takes mistresses or occasional "lovers," which again would seem to give some kind of support to Lévi-Strauss's suggestions under review here. (What constitutes the material and historical basis of the proposed universality of polygamy is not discussed: it should not be assumed that it is founded in biology [in genitality or sexuality, for example]. Unfortunately, we cannot pursue this question here.)

82 E.S.K., p. 38.

83 Sartre has a somewhat unsophisticated concept of "reciprocity" which does not do justice to the ambiguities and complexities of the concrete social relations between individuals and groups, which include both a perceived opposition and a perceived correlation between self and other: each party facing the other as both subject and object. Exchange transforms what is essentially a "neutral" original spatial relation of mere juxtaposition, into one which can only be either cordial or hostile. Thus: "Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions" (E.S.K., p. 67).

Sartre's all-or-nothing attitude--freedom or alienation, reciprocity or serialization, etc., just does not reflect dialectical experience. This is returned to in the discussion of Consciousness in chapter IV.

84 I have in mind examples, like the North American Indians and the Inuit of Canada, urban Africans, etc.

85 C. Lévi-Strauss, Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss, ed. by G. Charbonnier, trans. by John and Doreen Weightmann (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 42. Hereafter cited as Conversations.

86 See Conversations.

87 Conversations, pp. 33 ff.

88 Ibid.

89 Conversations, p. 26.

90 Conversations, p. 61.

91 C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Scope of Anthropology," Inaugural Lecture, Chair of Anthropology, Collège de France, January 5, 1960. Trans. by Sherry Ortner Paul and R. A. Paul. Jonathan Cape, 1967. In this lecture, Lévi-Strauss comments upon the irony of Western humanism: ". . . that the very faction of humanity which produced anthropology should be the same one which made so many other men objects of execration and contempt" (in: C. Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, Volume II, trans. by Monique Layton (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 31, hereafter cited as S.A. II).

92 "The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things" (Marx, Early Writings, p. 121).

93 The Frankfurt School have made similar points in their critique of "instrumental reason"; that, for example: "The reification of consciousness was the price paid for the progressive liberation from material necessity" (Jürgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, trans. by Thomas McCarthy [Boston: Beacon Press, 1975], Introduction, p. xxi.)

94 Conversations, p. 41.

95 Ibid.

96 C. Lévi-Strauss, "Jean-Jacques?Rousseau, Founder of the Sciences of Man," in S.A. II, chapter ii, p. 41..

97 C. Lévi-Strauss, "Answer to Some Investigations," in S.A. II, chapter xv.

98 Ibid., p. 274.

99 "Our present inability to act is due, it seems to me, to the hugeness of the human mass within which we live, because even national groupings have been transcended and we are now turning more and more towards the creation of what is virtually a world civilisation, and it is this new order of greatness, this change of scale in the dimensions of human society, which makes humanity unmanageable." (Conversations, p. 52)

100 C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Place of Anthropology in the Social Sciences," in: Structural Anthropology, Volume I, trans. by C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), chapter xvii, p. 366. Hereafter cited as S.A. I.

101 Ibid., p. 367. (See also Weiner and Habermas.)

102 C.D.R., pp. 99, 100, 101; C.R.D., pp. 331, 334, 335.

"The unity of the collective object, therefore, becomes stricter, and its rigidity more flexible as the atomisation of groups develops. And as it (price) originally represents everyone's activity in so far as it is governed laterally, and at a distance by the activity of the Other, its collective character expresses the simplest form of alienation." (C.D.R., p. 292; C.R.D., pp. 337-38)

103 "Writing appeared in the history of humanity some three or four thousand years before the beginning of our era, at a time when humanity had already made most essential and fundamental discoveries; it appeared not before, but immediately after what is called the 'neolithic revolution' the discovery of those civilized skills which still form the basis of our lives: agriculture, the domestication of animals, pottery-making, weaving-- a whole range of processes which were to allow human beings to stop living from day to day as they had done in paleolithic times, when they depended on the gathering of fruit, and to accumulate." (Conversations, pp. 27-28)

104 The suppression of scarcity would not eliminate the demographic conditions of alienation either: size and density, for example; nor the structures of alienation contingent upon them: serialization, alterity, powerlessness, etc. Bureaucracy, institutionalization, and exterior-conditioning would remain, even in conditions of plenty.

105 Aron, Histoire, p- 250.

Notes

Chapter II

<sup>1</sup> The use of the capital 'h' in History reflects Sartre's own usage in the Critique, and will be maintained throughout the chapter as long as we are considering his account.

<sup>2</sup> For example:

"If there is to be any such thing as the Truth of History (rather than several truths even if they are organised into a system), our investigation must show that the kind of dialectical intelligibility which we have described above applies to the process of human history as a whole, or, in other words, that there is a totalising temporalisation of our practical multiplicity and that it is intelligible, even though this totalisation does not involve a grand totaliser." (C.D.R., p. 64; C.R.D., p. 152)

<sup>3</sup> A precise theory of ideology, of its constitutive structures and of the possibility of its transcendence, is developed in chapter V.

<sup>4</sup> See below, this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> "The sociologist, in fact, is an object of history; the sociology of 'primitive peoples' is established on the basis of a more profound relation which may be, for example, colonialism. Research is a living relation between men . . . Indeed, the sociologist and his 'object' form a couple, each one of which is to be interpreted by the other; the relationship between them must be itself interpreted as a moment of history." (Questions, p. 72; C.R.D., p. 52)

<sup>6</sup> "Everything we established in The Problem of Method follows from a fundamental agreement with historical materialism" (The opening sentence of the Critique: C.D.R., p. 15; C.R.D., p. 115).

" . . . we were convinced at one and the same time that historical materialism furnished the only valid interpretation of history and that existentialism remained the only concrete approach to reality." (Questions, p. 21; C.R.D., p. 24)

"Marxism is History itself becoming conscious of itself, and if it is valid it is by its material content, which is not, and cannot be, at issue here." (C.D.R., p. 40; C.R.D., p. 134)

7 James Gregor, A Survey of Marxism: Problems in Philosophy and the Theory of History (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 158.

8 "The point is to conceive the praxis and its results from two inseparable points of view: that of objectification (or of man acting on matter) and that of objectivity (or of totalised matter acting on man)." (C.D.R.; p. 225; C.R.D., p. 284)

9 "The plurality of temporalisations together with temporal unification (a synthetic unification of the antecedent by the consequent, a present unification of the new multiplicity through old frameworks) actually constitute the evolution of humanity as the praxis of a diachronic group, that is to say, as the temporal aspect of the constituted dialectic." (C.D.R., p. 666; C.R.D., p. 634 emphasis added)

10 " . . . it is the concrete man whom he puts at the center of his research, that man who is defined simultaneously by his needs, by the material conditions of his existence, and by the nature of his work--that is, by his struggle against things and against men." (Questions p. 14; C.R.D., p. 21)

11 "So, in a sense, man submits to the dialectic as to an enemy power; in another sense, he creates it; and if dialectical Reason is the Reason of History, this contradiction must itself be lived dialectically, which means that man must be controlled by the dialectic in so far as he creates it, and create it in so far as he is controlled by it." (C.D.R., pp. 35-36; C.R.D., p. 131)

" . . . men make History to precisely the extent that it makes them. This means that relations between men are always the dialectical consequence

of their activity to precisely the extent that they arise as a transcendence of dominating and institutionalised human relationships."

(C.D.R., p. 97; C.R.D., p. 180)

12 C.D.R., p. 19; C.R.D., p. 118.

13 Questions, p. 162; C.R.D., p. 101.

14 C.D.R., pp. 68-69; C.R.D., pp. 155-56.

"It must be proved that a negation of a negation can be an affirmation, that conflicts--within a person or a group--are the motive force of History, that each moment of a series is comprehensible on the basis of the initial moment, though irreducible to it, that History continually effects totalisations, and so on, before the details of an analytico-synthetic and regressive-progressive method can be grasped." (C.D.R., p. 15; C.R.D., p. 115)

15 "Marxist voluntarism, which likes to speak of analysis, has reduced this operation to a simple ceremony. There is no longer any question of studying facts within the general perspective of Marxism so as to enrich our understanding and to clarify action. Analysis consists solely in getting rid of detail, in forcing the signification of certain events, in denaturing facts, or even in inventing a nature for them in order to discover it later beneath them, as their substance, as unchangeable fetishized 'synthetic notions.'" (Questions, p. 27; C.R.D., p. 28)

16 "The open concepts of Marxism have closed in. They are no longer keys, interpretive schemata; they are posited in themselves as an already totalised knowledge. To use Kantian terms--Marxism makes out of these particularised, fetishized types, constitutive concepts of experience." (Questions, p. 27; C.R.D., p. 28)

"The totalising investigation has given way to a Scholasticism of the totality. The heuristic principle--'to search for the whole in its parts'--has become the terrorist practice of 'liquidating the particularity.'" (Questions, p. 28; C.R.D., p. 28)

" . . . it has ceased to live with history and . . . attempts, through a bureaucratic conservatism, to reduce change to identity." (Questions, p. 29; C.R.D., p. 29)

17 " . . . in no case in Marx's own work, does this putting in perspective claim to prevent or to render useless the appreciation of the process as a unique totality. When, for example, he studies the brief and tragic history of the Republic of 1848, he does not limit himself--as would be done today--to stating that the republican petite bourgeoisie betrayed its ally, the Proletariat. On the contrary, he tries to account for this tragedy in its detail and in the aggregate. If he subordinates anecdotal facts to the totality (of a movement, of an attitude), he also seeks to discover the totality by means of the facts. In other words, he gives to each event, in addition to its particular signification, the role of being revealing. Since the ruling principle of the inquiry is the search for the synthetic ensemble, each fact once established, is questioned and interpreted as part of a whole. It is on the basis of the fact, through the study of its lacks and its 'oversignifications,' that one determines, by virtue of a hypothesis, the totality at the heart of which the fact will recover its truth. Thus living Marxism is heuristic; its principles and its prior knowledge appear as regulative in relation to its concrete research. In the work of Marx we never find entities. Totalities (e.g. 'the petite bourgeoisie' of the 18 Brumaire) are living; they furnish their own definitions within the framework of the research."  
(Questions, pp. 25-26; C.R.D., p. 30)

18 Questions, p. 561 C.R.D., p. 44. Sartre continues:

"Marxism lacks any hierarchy of mediations which would permit it to grasp the process which produces the person and his product inside a class and within a given society at a given historical moment."

19 "It is men who do not avalanches" (Questions, p. 48; C.R.D., p. 39).

20 Questions, p. 47; C.R.D., p. 39.

21 Writing in the late 1950's Sartre was addressing his critique to the Stalinist Marxism of his contemporaries both inside and outside France. Its relevance and appropriateness to these cases is not at all in question. My concern is rather to reveal similar tendencies--towards idealism, and the overly hasty totalisation of experience--in his own thought, not to undermine the critique itself.

22 C.D.R., p. 64; C.R.D., p.152.

23 "Of course, this is a matter of formal intelligibility. By this I mean that we must understand the bonds between praxis, as self-conscious, and all the complex multiplicities which are organised through it and in which it loses itself as praxis in order to become praxis-process. However--and I shall have occasion to repeat this still more emphatically--it is no part of my intention to determine the concrete history of these incarnations of praxis . . . It is no part of our project to determine whether series precede groups or vice versa, either originally or in a particular moment of History . . . the only thing that matters to us is to display the transition from series to groups and from groups to series as constant incarnations of our practical multiplicity, and to test the dialectical intelligibility of these reversible processes. . . . In short, we are dealing with neither human history, nor sociology, nor ethnography. To parody a title of Kant's, we would claim rather, to be laying the foundations for 'Prolegomena to a future anthropology.'" (C.D.R., pp. 65-66; C.R.D., p. 153)

24 See page 78.

25 I.e. "constituted" and "constituting" praxis.

26 C.D.R., p. 787; C.R.D., p. 730.

27 " . . . there is such a thing as a group intelligibility as the transcendence of necessity towards a common freedom . . . the dialectical origin of the group lies in the passive unity of alterity in so far as it negates itself as passivity." (C.D.R., p. 324; C.R.D., p. 363)

28 "Thus, through the presence of the free actions of which it made itself regulatory, my own action took on a dimension of interiorised multiplicity" (C.D.R., p. 402; C.R.D., p. 425).

29 "From this moment on, there is something which is neither group nor series, but which Malraux, in Days of Hope called the Apocalypse--that is to say, the dissolution of the series into a fused group. And this group, though still unstructured, that is to say, entirely amorphous, is characterised by being the direct opposite of alterity. In a serial relation, in fact, unity as the formula

(Raison) of the series is always elsewhere, whereas in the Apocalypse, though seriality still exists at least as a process which is about to disappear, and although it may always reappear, synthetic unity is always here." (C.D.R., p. 357; C.R.D., p. 391)

See also C.D.R., pp. 382-83, 684; C.R.D., pp. 410. 648.

30 "The new action of the group is necessarily new in so far as the group is a new reality and its result an absolute novelty" (C.D.R., p. 398; C.R.D., p. 423).

31 "But the essential characteristic of the fused group is the sudden resurrection of freedom. . . . The explosion of revolt, as the liquidation of the collective, does not have its direct sources either in alienation revealed by freedom, or in freedom suffered as impotence; there has to be a conjunction of historical circumstances, a definite change in the situation, the danger of death, violence . . . against the common danger freedom frees itself from alienation and affirms itself as common efficacy. . . . Thus the common praxis, as the totalisation and struggle against a common praxis of the enemy, realises itself in everyone as the new, free efficacy of his praxis, as the free intensification of his effort; every freedom creates itself laterally as the totalisation of all freedoms, and totalisation comes to it through the others as a lateral dimension of its individuality, in so far as it is freely individual for them." (C.D.R., pp. 402-403; C.R.D., p. 425)

32 " . . . fused groups have presented us with the (methodologically) most simple form of totalisation. A group is not (or at least it dries up and ossifies, the more beings or inert materiality it contains): it constantly totalises itself and disappears either by fragmentation (dispersal) or by ossification (inertia). This totalisation does not produce itself . . . through differentiated organs: it occurs everywhere and through everyone; wherever one is, it happens here." (C.D.R., p. 407; C.R.D., p. 429)

33 "After the revolt society was no longer the same, the pre-history of the French proletariat gave way to its history" (C.D.R., p. 402; C.R.D., p. 425)..

34 C.D.R., p. 414; C.R.D., p. 435.

<sup>35</sup> C.D.R., p. 440; C.R.D., p. 420.

<sup>36</sup> C.D.R., p. 373; C.R.D., p. 403.

<sup>37</sup> C.D.R., pp. 644-46; C.R.D., pp. 616-17.

<sup>38</sup> C.D.R., p. 644; C.R.D., p. 616.

<sup>39</sup> And violent according to the Critique. This violence is both: primary, i.e. founded in the first praxis which totalises the natural, social, and material world as violent and anti-human (because of scarcity); and permanent, i.e. it remains as a necessary structure of praxis even when that praxis is free, that is, constituted by the fused group (at least as long as conditions of scarcity prevail--and we have seen that that may well be forever). I do not examine this theme of violence (and Terror) in any detail in this thesis: this is not because I consider it marginal or unimportant, but, on the contrary, because I find it so profound, complex, and provocative that a separate, specific, and comprehensive examination of the theme is called for. It suggests to me more than can be attempted in this thesis, and is the subject of my continuing and current research.

<sup>40</sup> "A philosophy is first of all a particular way in which the 'rising class' becomes conscious of itself. . . ."

"Born from the movement of society, it is itself a movement and acts upon the future. . . ."

"Thus a philosophy remains efficacious so long as the praxis which has engendered it, which supports it, and which is clarified by it, is still alive. . . ."

" . . . philosophy is one with the movement of society . . . ."

"And since I am to speak of existentialism, let it be understood that I take it to be an 'ideology.' It is a parasitical system living in the margin of Knowledge, which at first it opposed but into which today it seeks to be integrated" (Questions, pp. 3, 5, 7, 8; C.R.D., pp. 15, 16, 17, 18, and passim).

<sup>41</sup> I remind the reader that what constitutes "science" (and therefore "ideology"), has not yet been specified by the writer, and is still very much in question at this stage in the thesis. Sartre offers no such specification in the Critique, despite the fact that he aspires to establishing an anthropological science which is both historical and structural. Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, is very clear about the constitution of science and his view is presented next in the chapter. A critical and detailed discussion of Science and Ideology is postponed until chapter V.

42 The intelligibility and feasibility of such a scientific project is not, of course, self-evident. It is critically appraised in chapters V and VII (on Marx and Lévi-Strauss respectively). As a point of departure, however, it is at least as plausible as Sartre's existential perspective and is offered here, as persuasively as possible, ~~not~~ because it is thought to be correct, but as an alternative lens through which the limitations of Sartre's position can be brought into focus and rendered intelligible, in terms of structures and constraints not accounted for within that system itself.

43 S.M., p. 130.

44 It is unfortunate that structuralism, the study of superstructures, of discourse, so often restricts itself to the symbolic order, i.e. to the internal and intrinsic determinants (both synchronic and diachronic) of discourse while ignoring (or even denying) the dialectic between the symbolic and the social reality it symbolizes and which is its condition of possibility. The Althusserian structuralism of recent Marxist studies is an obvious offender in this respect: often systematically acknowledging as real only that which can be symbolized within the closed concepts of its so-called "scientific" discourse. Lévi-Strauss does not consider discourse to be closed in this sense, and it is important to realize this: he repeatedly acknowledges the fundamental determinacy of social and material factors "external" to the systems of representation which are the specific objects of structuralist analysis--as we shall see in our next chapter on the Dialectic.

45 S.M., p. 254.

46 Ibid.

47 To what extent this is possible, i.e. the transcendence of one's historical and subjective situation towards objective and scientific truth, is determined in chapter V.

48 C. Lévi-Strauss, "Confrontation over Myths," New Left Review 62 (1970): 68. Hereafter cited as "Confrontation."

49 S.M., p. 250.

50 S.M., p. 251.

51 S.A. II, p. 28.

53 Cf. M. Eliade, Cosmos and History; The Myth of The Eternal Return, trans. by Willard Trask (New York: Harper, 1959) for a discussion of primitive temporality.

54 S.M., p. 234.

55 R.H., p. 19.

56 R.H., p. 23.

57 Conversations, p. 27.

58 Cf. Eliade:

59 We should specify that it is the organization of men by men which is indicated here by the "class system"; women have always been a subordinate and exploited class (under patriarchy), but it is not being suggested that there is a necessary connection between this particular hierarchy between the sexes, and the emergence of Historical consciousness--although this possibility is seriously entertained in chapter V.

60 S.M., p. 251.

61 S.A. I, p. 16.

62 S.A. I, p. 17.

63 S.A. I, p. 18.

64 S.A. I, p. 21.

65 Ibid.

66 S.M., p. 257.

67 "Consequently, historical facts are no more given than any other. It is the historian, or the agent of history, who constitutes them by abstraction and as though under the threat of an infinite regress.

What is true of the constitution of historical facts is no less so of their selection . . . the historian and the agent of history choose, sever and carve them up, for a truly total history would confront them with chaos . . . Even history which

claims to be universal is still only a juxtaposition of a few local histories within which (and between which) very much more is left out than is put in. And it would be vain to hope that by increasing the number of collaborators and making research more intensive one would obtain a better result. In so far as history aspires to meaning, it is doomed to select regions, periods, groups of men and individuals in these groups and to make them stand out as discontinuous figures, against a continuity barely good enough to be used as a backdrop. A truly total History would cancel itself out--its product would be nought. What makes history possible is that a sub-set of events is found, for a given period to have approximately the same significance for a contingent of individuals who have not necessarily experienced the events and may even consider them at an interval of several centuries. History is therefore never history, but history for." (S.M., p. 257)

68 S.M., p. 258.

69 S.M., p. 260.

70. Ibid.

71 S.M., p. 262.

72 One of the arguments of this thesis is, that this choice--between explanation and information (between pre- and infra-historical inquiry and intelligibility) is a false one; forced upon us by a tradition of separative (phallogocentric and Historical) thought to which individualism and idealism are endemic, and to which Marxism, structuralism, and existentialism remain captive (see chapters V, VI, and VII); that a third way is available to us (as Sartre's own practice has indicated) which combines the specificity and concreteness of phenomenology with the objectivity of Marxism and structuralism: but only on the basis of a radical transformation of traditional modes of thought (and their representation of the problematic), in response to the emerging feminist consciousness and critique. All meaning is constituted against an horizon of "non-sense" (Merleau-Ponty); when new meanings emerge from the background the former configuration is completely transformed. The authentic voice of women, emerging from the horizon of traditional social, philosophical, historical, and political thought is effecting such a transformation and opening up a profoundly new future for human being generally.

73

"Ethnographic analysis tries to arrive at invariants beyond the empirical diversity of human societies; and . . . these are sometimes to be found at the most unforeseen points. Rousseau . . . foresaw this with his usual acumen: 'One needs to look near at hand if one wants to study men; but to study man one must learn to look from afar; one must first observe differences in order to discover attributes.'" (S.M., p. 247).

Notes

Chapter III

<sup>1</sup> C.D.R., p. 19; C.R.D., p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> C.D.R., p. 30; C.R.D., p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> C.D.R., pp. 84-85; C.R.D., p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> C.D.R., p. 81; C.R.D., p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> C.D.R., pp. 80-81; C.R.D., pp. 166-67.

<sup>6</sup> C.D.R., p. 45; C.R.D., p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> C.D.R., p. 84; C.R.D., p. 169.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> C.D.R., p. 85; C.R.D., p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> C.D.R., p. 51; C.R.D., p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> C.D.R., p. 29; C.R.D., p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> By "organic wholes" Sartre means human beings, and not the rest of what would normally be considered the organic world of plants and animals. This reflects a serious neglect in Sartre's philosophy of the biological dimension of existence; his existentialism, like Marxism, as we shall see presently, lacks an adequate theory of Nature. We can only presume, that for Sartre as for Descartes, the rest of organic life, cats and dogs, for example are machines, organized according to principles of mechanical-motion; incapable of self-movement, they are pulled or pushed into activity.

<sup>13</sup> All representations of reality are vulnerable to mystification, but not all of them are systematically so. A complete theory of mystification and the possibilities of its transcendence are developed in chapter V.

<sup>14</sup> John Hoffman, Marxism and The Theory of Praxis. A critique of some new versions of old fallacies. (New York: International Pubs., 1976), p. 61 (see also pp. 59, 60 and passim).

15 Hoffman, p. 108.

16 Hoffman, p. 60.

17 The emerging feminist critique of the history of philosophy and science--an essentially phallogocentric and phallogocratic History, Philosophy, and Science--forces this conclusion upon us. Sartre is not alone in his neurosis, which is rooted in the very general and characteristically male refusal (and repression) of certain central facts of life, that is of birth; facts which are consistently mystified (i.e. denied and reversed, as in all ideologies), but nevertheless alluded to in an allusive way in that mystification. These are: (i) the fact that men are born of women, i.e. of mothers, and neither make themselves, nor spring full-blown and "clean," as "rational" adults, from the forehead of the Father; (ii) the fact that men neither give nor control life, but rather their history reveals them as the masters only of death and destruction; (iii) the fact that men's real freedoms and constraints are rooted in nature and nurture, and not in Culture and Science as they would have us believe.

Men continue to repress these truths, and therefore to mystify them in their conscious representations of reality, and will continue to do so unless forced to do otherwise by the return of the repressed. The separation of Man from Nature, the specification of a Human Nature realized through man's own efforts, and the glorification of Reason as the author of this creation and the foundation of human Freedom, are traditional, and continuing ways of denying and mystifying the said historical facts. Sartre's compulsive Cartesianism should not, therefore, surprise us; we will discover similar "neuroses" (examples of false consciousness) in the thought of Marx and Lévi-Strauss in later chapters.

18 Hoffman, p. 97.

19 Hoffman, p. 13.

20 We would add that this view of matter as fixed and unchanging not only serves the interests of the exploiting class, but also that of the exploiting caste: in other words, it is not only part and parcel of bourgeois ideology, but also of the sexist ideology which cannot be separated from it. It is in the interests of all men to think of nature as eternal, for it secures for them the "natural" superiority of the male sex.

21 Langevin, referred to by Roger Garaudy in "False Prophet: Jean-Paul Sartre" in Existentialism Versus Marxism, ed. by George Novak (New York: Delta Bk. Dell, 1966), pp. 159-60.

22 See notes 17 and 20 above, and chapter V.

23 Marx, quoted by Hoffman, p. 111.

24 J-P. Sartre, "J-P Sartre répond," L'Arc, No. 30 (1966): 92: "Il n'est qu'un épiphénomène, et tout semble se passer en dehors de lui."

25 S.M., p. 130.

26 C. Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 17. Hereafter cited as M.M.

C. Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked, trans. by J. and D. Weighton (Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 111. Hereafter cited as R.C.

27 S.M., pp. 135, 153.

28 S.M., p. 145.

C. Lévi-Strauss, Totemism, trans. by R. Needham (Penguin Books, 1969), p. 163: "Meaning is not decreed: if it is not everywhere, it is nowhere."

29 S.M., p. 131.

30 See R.C.

31 R.C., p. 16.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 R.C., p. 65.

"We thus begin to understand the truly essential place occupied by cooking in native thought: not only does cooking mark the transition from nature to culture, but through it and by means of it, the human state can be defined with all its attributes, even those that, like mortality might seem to be the most unquestionably natural." (R.C., p. 164)

(Note the mention of death, but not birth.)

35 S.M., p. 127.

36 S.M., p. 126.

37 Totemism, p. 161.

It is possible to argue, that with Levi-Strauss we merely exchange one kind of dualism for another: the Cartesian bifurcation of matter and mind for the structuralist's bifurcation of the mind itself. This could be regarded as the ultimate in bourgeois and male mystification of reality: its final reification as the very possibility of thought itself. More of this later, in chapter VII.

38 E.S.K., p. 12.

39 E.S.K., p. 479 (also pp. 480, 481).

40 See Totemism, p. 98.

41 S.M., p. 55.

42 S.M., p. 95.

"The truth of the myth does not lie in any special content. It consists in logical relations which are devoid of content" (R.C., p. 240).

43 Totemism, p. 162.

44 S.M., p. 115 (also Totemism, p. 152; R.C., p. 316).

45 E.S.K., p. 114 (also pp. 49, 139).

"Endo-praxis and exo-praxis are never definable separately and in absolute terms . . . they can only be defined as complimentary aspects of an ambiguous relation of self and others" (S.M., p. 118).

46 S.M., p. 268.

47 See chapter I of S.M.: "Thé Science of the Concrete":  
" . . . the universe is an object of thought at least as much as it is a means of satisfying needs" (S.M., p. 3).

48 S.M., p. 18.

49 Interestingly enough, Frederic Jameson makes a similar observation about Sartre's mode of interpretation; of his treatment of Baudelaire, for example, with its hierarchy of mediations (as later outlined in the Critique):

" . . . even granting the priority of the economic in his thought, this particular model does not demand the priority of any particular series over any other, for they are all implicit in each other, taken separately . . .

Implied in this is a whole new type of logic as well, in which the static model of the relationship of universal to particular would be replaced by one in which each particular symbolically realizes in itself and in its own mode the totality of the universal in question." (Frederic Jameson, Marxism and Form. Twentieth Century Theories of Literature [Princeton, N.J., 1971], p. 221 including note.)

This "new type of logic" is not unlike what I have described as historical and dialectical materialism in the previous chapter. I believe it is exemplified, in part, by both Sartre and Lévi-Strauss with respect to different objects of inquiry, and that it can also be applied to their thinking as a critique; which to some extent defines the methodology and purpose of this thesis.

50 S.M., p. 219.

51 See chapters I and II, and especially Questions, pp. 30, 89, 164, and passim.

"The dialectic itself . . . appears as History, and as historical Reason only upon the foundation of existence; for it is the development of praxis . . ." (Questions, p. 171).

52 Questions, p. 99.

53 Questions, p. 148 (see also pp. 151, 155, 156, and passim).

54 S.M., p. 246.

55 S.A. I, p. 59 (see also Totemism, p. 67; E.S.K., pp. 75, 84, 93, 151, 220, 451, 491; S.A. I, p. 18, and throughout Lévi-Strauss's writing).

56 Totemism, p. 163; T.T., p. 56; S.A. I, p. 89; E.S.K., pp. xxx, 451; M.M., pp. 8, 13, 24; R.C., p. 10.

57 Quoted from Dialectics of Nature in E.S.K., p. 451.

58 " . . . the contrast of nature and culture would, be neither a primeval fact, nor a concrete aspect of universal order. Rather it should be seen as an artificial creation of culture, a protective rampart thrown up around it because it only felt able to assert its existence and uniqueness by destroying all the links that lead back to its original association with the other manifestations of life." (E.S.K., pp. xxix-xxx)

- See also S.M., p. 247; M.M., pp. 10, 24.
- 59 E.S.K., p. 220.
- 60 Rosen, p. 273.
- 61 L'Arc, pp. 59-60.
- 62 Rosen, p. 271.
- 63 S.M., p. 247.
- 64 L'Arc, p. 88.
- 65 See also Levin, p. 71.
- 66 S.M., p. 130.
- 67 S.M., p. 214.
- 68 S.M., p. 117.
- 69 S.M., p. 222.
- 70 Rosen, p. 81. We examine this question of freedom and subjectivity in the following chapter.
- 71 Rosen, p. 276.
- 72 L'Arc, p. 91. Sartre adopts the expression of Michel Foucault here. See for example Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith (Harper, Colophon Books, 1972), pp. 12, 13, 14.
- 73 S.A. II, chapter 2.
- 74 S.A. II, p. 35.  
The appropriateness of this distinction, between the study of man and the study of men, is considered later in the thesis.
- 75 Rousseau, cited by Lévi-Strauss in S.A. II, p. 35.  
"Man must recognize himself as a 'he' before daring to claim to also be a 'me'" (S.A. II, p. 39).
- 76 S.M., pp. 249-50.
- 77 C. Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, trans. by John and Doreen Weightman (Atheneum, N.Y., 1974), pp. 57-58. Hereafter cited as T.T.

78 T.T., p. 58.

This confrontation over methodology is the subject of our last three chapters which assess the respective contributions of Marx, Sartre, and Lévi-Strauss to the on-going project of rendering social reality intelligible.

79 S.M., p. 252.

80 Questions, p. 111.

"When I speak, I never say completely what I want to say and I often do not know what I say, given that my words are robbed from me and revealed to me as other than I intended. But the important thing is that these social facts are . . . the product of social activity of collective ensembles . . . language is a totalized and de-totalized result of the ensemble of human activities during a certain time. Language is imposed on each of us as a practico-inert." (J-P. Sartre, "Itinerary of a Thought," in Between Existentialism and Marxism, trans. by John Matthews [London: N.L.B., 1974] pp. 52-54.)

81 Rosen, p. 279.

82 We have not yet determined what is meant by "science," a normative term, which, like "democracy" is appropriated by wildly divergent groups to legitimize their practices. We examine it in a greater detail in chapter V.

83 L'Arc, pp. 94-95.

84 S.M., p. 245.

85 Ibid.

86 S.M., p. 251.

87 As I maintain in chapter VI, Sartre would be less vulnerable to critique if he expressed his own objections to analytic and scientific practice in terms of their denial and/or forgetfulness of their own situatedness within human projects and within history, rather than in terms of their rejection of dialectical Reason, an expression inevitably burdened with the baggage of idealism and Cartesianism.

88 S.M., p. 252.

89 Ibid.

90 S.M., p. 250.

91 S.A. I, p. 233.

92 S.A. II, p. 373.

93 S.A. II, p. 8.

" . . . the ethnologist . . . tries to reconstitute the meaning; he reconstitutes it, unwraps it. And then, after all, he is a man, so he tastes it" (Confrontation, p. 67).

"The study of myths raises a methodological problem, in that it cannot be carried out according to the Cartesian principle of breaking down the difficulty into as many parts as may be necessary for finding the solution. There is no real end to mythological analysis, no hidden unity, to be grasped once the breaking-down process has been completed . . . in seeking to imitate the spontaneous movement of mythological thought, this essay . . . has had to conform to the requirements of that thought and to respect its rhythms. It follows that this book on myths is itself a kind of myth. If it has any unity, that unity will appear only behind or beyond the text and in the best hypothesis, will become a reality in the mind of the reader." (R.C., pp. 5-6)

94 S.M., p. 47.

95 L'Arc, p. 89.

96 S.M., p. 95.

97 S.M., pp. 247-48.

98 The objection can be sustained however, and will be in chapter VII--though not for the reasons Sartre suggests. α

99 Likewise, I argue in defense of Sartre's Critique, as a political project, in chapter VI--though again, not for the reasons Sartre himself suggests.

Notes

Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup> The use of inverted commas here indicates that at this point I am only referring to the dualism "thought" and "being" and not assuming it; and talking about the contest over which is prior and not engaging in it. In the discussion which follows I reject the dualism in favour of a monistic materialism of which thought is a part; likewise the contest over priority: arguing that the relationship between thought and that of which and within which it is the thought, is a dialectical, ambiguous, and mutually determining and determined one, and that if anything at all can be said to be "prior" (in whatever sense is at issue--ontological, logical, chronological, or phenomenological) it is existence itself, the system "moi-autrui-le monde," the experience of which precedes the emergence of either "thought" (the internal and ideal), or "being" (external and material).

<sup>2</sup> In The Adventures of the Dialectic (London: 1974), Merleau-Ponty describes Sartre's thought as the "opposite of Marx's" and "the ruin of the dialectic" (pp. 124 and 98 respectively). According to Sartre meaning is seen as "wholly spiritual, as impalpable as lightning," and as "absolutely opposed to being which is absolute weight and blindness." See especially chapter 5, "Sartre and Ultra Bolshevism."

<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception. And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics, ed. by James Edie (Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 17: "We can only think the world because we have already experienced it . . ."

The Primacy of Perception hereafter referred to as Primacy.

" . . . radical reflection finally discovered behind itself, the unreflected as the condition of its possibility, without which it would have no sense." ("Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," in Primacy, p. 92)

See also Merleau-Ponty Phénoménologie de la perception (Gallimard, Bibliothèque des Idées, 1945), pp. i, ix, 141, 161, 225, 344, 379. Hereafter cited as Phénoménologie.

4 "Consciousness of oneself as a unique individual, whose place can be taken by no one else, comes later and is not primitive" ("The Child's Relation with Others," in Primacy).

5 " . . . even though consciousness constructs, it is conscious of making explicit something true anterior to itself, it continues a movement begun in experience" (Adventures, p. 138).

6 M. Merleau-Ponty, "Marxism and Philosophy," in Phenomenology, Language and Sociology, ed by John O'Neill (Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), pp. 178-79.

7 "Le monde . . . est le milieu naturel et le champ de toutes mes pensées et de toutes mes perceptions explicites . . . il n'y a pas d'homme intérieur, l'homme est au monde." (Phénoménologie, p. v)

8 "La pensée n'est rien d'intérieur, elle n'existe pas hors du monde et hors des mots." (Phénoménologie, p. 213)

" . . . my psyche is not a series of 'states of consciousness' that are rigorously closed in on themselves and inaccessible to anyone but me. My consciousness is turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things; it is above all a relation to the world." ("The Child's Relation with Others" in Primacy)

9 " . . . mon organisme, comme adhésion prépersonnelle, à la forme générale du monde, comme existence anonyme et générale, joue, au dessous de ma vie personnelle le rôle d'un complexe inné" (Phénoménologie, p. 99)

" . . . il y a toujours une dépersonnalisation au coeur de la conscience." (Phénoménologie, p. 159)

10 Phénoménologie, p. 548.

11 Adventures, p. 197.

12 Adventures, p. 204.

13 "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss," in Phenomenology, Language and Sociology, ed. John O'Neill, p. 120.

14 These are Merleau-Ponty's terms.

15 In this context "necessity" refers to the kind of necessary (or rational) connection and continuity which man "imposes" on the world. It does not refer to "necessity" as the antithesis of freedom, but to a necessity which is rather a function of freedom, i.e. to dialectical necessity:

16 "The Child's Relation with Others," in Primacy, p. 119.

17 "The Child's Relation with Others," Primacy, p. 153.

18 Phénoménologie, pp. 69, 198.

19 What follows is an historical hypothesis which can only be tested by examining history: there is, however, much evidence to support it. See for example Julian Jaynes.

20 Adventures, p. 38.

21 Phénoménologie, pp. ix, xii, xiv, 161, et passim.

22 See Sartre's discussion of "Marxism and Existentialism" in Questions.

23 Phénoménologie, p. 221.

24 Phénoménologie, p. 385.

25 " . . . la réflexion n'a jamais sous son regard le monde entier . . . elle ne dispose jamais que d'une vue partielle et d'une puissance limitée. . . ." (Phénoménologie, p. 74).

26 Phénoménologie, p. 52.

" . . . le seul logos qui préexiste est le monde même" (Phénoménologie, p. xv).

27 Social existence could be regarded as a "totality," like language, wherein " . . . phenomena give mutual expression to each other and reveal the same basic theme" ("The Metaphysical in Man" in Phenomenology, Language and Sociology, p. 165). Sartre, of course, would object to the use of "totality" here, suggesting as it would to him a non-dialectical, inert, inorganic, and falsely unified

object. "Totalisation" would better describe the human existence under discussion, and language as well, for surely only to "false consciousness" can language appear as a fixed totality?

28 Orthodox Marxist analysis would explain this stability more precisely, in terms of the absence of classes and class struggle in these societies. But I do not believe that this can be sustained in the face of the various other forms of exploitation and oppression (e.g. of women), which have characterized even non-historical societies; forms which cannot be subsumed under the terms of class struggle as predicated of capitalist society.

29 Adventures, p. 199.

30 Merleau-Ponty refers to ". . . la contingence ontique à l'intérieur du monde. La contingence ontologique, celle du monde lui-même . . ." (Phénoménologie, p. 456).

31 "Le monde est tout au dedans et je suis tout hors de moi" (Phénoménologie, p. 467)

32 Phénoménologie, p. 198.

33 Phénoménologie, p. 351.

34 Adventures, p. 30.

35 Primacy, p. 13.

36 Phénoménologie, p. 518.

37 "The meaning of my future does not arise by decree; it is the truth of my experience, and I cannot communicate it other than by recounting the history that made me become this truth." (Adventures, p. 197)

38 Phénoménologie, p. 201.

39 Phénoménologie, p. 198.

40 Phénoménologie, p. 466.

41 Phénoménologie, p. 514.

42 Adventures, p. 196.

43 Adventures, p. 41.

44 Marx, quoted in Fischer: Marx in His Own Words, (Pelican Books, 1973), p. 81.

45 Jonathan Culler, in Wolfson College Oxford, Structuralism: An Introduction, Wolfson College Lectures 1972, ed. by David Robey (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 22.

46 R.C., p. 12.

47 E.S.K., p. 491.

48 S.M., p. 247.

49 R.C., p. 341.

50 R.C., p. 340.

51 S.M., p. 222.

52 S.M., p. 248.

53 S.M., p. 219.

54 R.C., p. 10.

55 S.M., p. 248.

56 Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of The Human Sciences (Vintage Books, 1973), p. 208, hereafter cited as The Order of Things:

"The history of knowledge can be written only on the basis of what was contemporaneous with it, and certainly not in terms of reciprocal influence, but in terms of conditions and a prioris established in time."

57 Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. by Alan Sheridan Smith (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books Ltd., 1977), p. 104. Hereafter cited as Discipline and Punish.

58 Discipline and Punish, p. 128.

59 Discipline and Punish, p. 305.

60 The Order of Things, p. 308

61 The Order of Things, p. 387.

62 culler, in Wolfson, p. 27.

- 63 The Order of Things, p. 207.
- 64 The Order of Things, p. 168.
- 65 Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith (Harper, Colophon Books, 1972), p. 8. Hereafter cited as Archaeology of Knowledge.
- 66 The Order of Things, Preface, p. xxiii.
- 67 The Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 17.
- 68 L. Althusser, Reading Capital (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 180. Hereafter cited as Reading Capital.
- 69 " . . . men (plural), in the concrete sense, are necessarily subjects (plural) in history, because they act in history as subjects (plural). But there is no Subject (singular) of history." (L. Althusser, "Reply to John Lewis," in Essays in Self-Criticism, trans. by Grahame Locke [New Left Books, 1976], p. 94. Hereafter cited as Self-Criticism).
- 70 L. Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy, trans. by Ben Brewster (New Left Books, 1971), p. 41. Hereafter cited as Lenin and Philosophy.
- 71 " . . . there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects . . . the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology." ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Lenin and Philosophy, pp. 159-60)
- 72 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Lenin and Philosophy, p. 152.
- 73 Reading Capital, p. 111.
- 74 " . . . the principle of all existence is materiality . . . all existence is objective, that is, 'prior' to the 'subjectivity' which knows it, and independent of the subject." ("Reply to John Lewis," in Essays in Self-Criticism, p. 54)
- 75 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Lenin and Philosophy, p. 160.
- 76 "Reply to John Lewis," in Self-Criticism, pp. 52, 53.

77. Self-Criticism, p. 198.

78 "Reply to John Lewis," in Self-Criticism, p. 153.

Notes

Chapter V

<sup>1</sup> See chapter VI.

<sup>2</sup> This is not an easy principle to follow consistently, for it entails the complete re-evaluation and reinterpretation of the whole of philosophy itself, which defines itself in terms of the pursuit of universal, necessary and essential truths. Marx himself, coming to political economy as he did through philosophy, did not succeed in liberating himself completely from this metaphysical tendency--as is evident, for example, in his references to "man," to his "essential" nature, and to "species-being" as a definition of that "essence."

<sup>3</sup> ". . . il reste tout à faire: il faut trouver la méthode et constituer la science" (C.R.D., p. 33). The meaning and significance of this appeal to "science," in Marx, Sartre, and Lévi-Strauss is discussed in the remaining chapters.

<sup>4</sup> We shall be arguing in this chapter that historical materialism is, more than anything else, a political praxis, and that the debate in academic circles over its epistemological status (science or ideology? for example) mystifies more than it clarifies, by ignoring this, its most fundamental and distinguishing characteristic.

<sup>5</sup> Sartre repeatedly refers to Marxism as philosophy in Questions: as a "philosophical interpretation of man and of history," for example (p. 23).

<sup>6</sup> This principle is outlined below; it requires a theoretical inquiry to be material, historical, dialectical, concrete, and revolutionary.

<sup>7</sup> Engels, Introduction to Socialism: Utopian and Scientific in Feuer, pp. 53-54.

<sup>8</sup> Marx, Theses on Feuerback, no. xi, Feuer, p. 245.

<sup>9</sup> Engels expresses the general direction of the task as follows:

"To accomplish this act of universal emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. To thoroughly comprehend the historical conditions and thus the very nature of this act, to impart to the now oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions of and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish, this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletariat movement, scientific socialism.

<sup>10</sup> Marx, in The Poverty of Philosophy, quoted by Lukacs, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse. Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, trans. by Martin Nicolaus (Vintage Books, 1973), p. 347:

" . . . in the present bourgeois society as a whole, this positing of prices and their circulation etc., appears as the surface process, beneath which, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this apparent individual equality and liberty disappear."

"The worker, vis-a-vis his employer is not at all in the situation of someone who sells freely . . . the capitalist is always free to employ labour, and the worker is always obliged to sell it." ("Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," p. 83, a quotation from Buret in Early Writings.)

"To hire out one's labour is to begin one's enslavement; to hire out the material of labour is to establish one's liberty." (quoting Pecqueur, p. 96)

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul (Everyman's Library, 1974), Preface to 2nd. edition, p. lviii. Hereafter cited as Capital.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Marx to Engels, 27 June, 1867; from Marx and Engels Correspondence. See also Lukacs:

"The essence of scientific Marxism consists in the realisation that the real motor forces of history are independent of men's (psychological) consciousness of them." (p. 47)

- 14 Engels, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, in Feuer, p. 85.
- 15 Capital, p. lvii.
- 16 "Every substantial change that is of concern to knowledge manifests itself as a change in relation to the whole and through this as a change in the form of objectivity itself."  
 ". . . when the worker knows himself as a commodity his knowledge is practical. That is to say, this knowledge brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge."  
 (Lukacs, pp. 13, 169)
- 17 Martin Nicolaus, Foreward to Grundrisse, p. 24.
- 18 Hal Draper, Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), p. 12.
- 19 Capital, Preface to 1st. edition, p. 1.
- 20 Lukacs, p. 239.
- 21 Lukacs, p. 204.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 We therefore see neither contradiction nor discontinuity between the early and later Marx, between Marx the philosopher and Marx the political and economic scientist: for he is both at once, as his political praxis demands.
- 24 Capital, Preface to 2nd. edition, pp. lii-liii.
- 25 Althusser is a clear case in point.
- 26 Marx and Engels, p. 64.
- 27 Danny Goldstick, "Reading Althusser," Revolutionary World, Vol. 23/25 (1977): 110-32.
- 28 Marx himself is not consistent in his use of the term "ideology," appearing at times to equate it simply with "superstructure," (as in Goldstick's sense c), as in the following, for example:

"With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinction would always be made

between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic--in short ideological--forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out." (Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, in Feuer, p. 44, emphasis added)

This usage, however, could be seen, not so much as a deviation from the appropriate sense of "ideological" as indicated above, but as a systematic application of it to bourgeois superstructures, which, according to Marx's analyses, are as a matter of fact, necessarily ideological: not because they are superstructures, but because they are bourgeois, i.e. because they occur within the capitalist social formation which, it has been revealed, systematically mystifies and reifies the social reality in its representations of it.

This, however, could not be said of all those cases where Marx uses "ideology" as the equivalent of "superstructure"; for example, in the following:

"We set out from real, active men and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process." (Marx and Engels, p. 47)

29 "From this point of view, partisanship does not exclude objectivity and deeper penetration into reality" in James Lawler, The Existentialist Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner Publishing Co., 1976), p. 163.

30 Nicolaus, Foreword to Grundrisse, p. 44.

31 " . . . modern materialism sees in it the process of evolution of humanity, and aims at discovering the laws thereof" (Engels, Socialism, Feuer, p. 87)

32 " . . . as everything natural must have its origin so man has his process of genesis, history . . ." (Early Writings, p. 208).

33 Marx himself validates and justifies past excesses as follows:

" . . . human life needed private property for its realization, and . . . it now requires the

supersession of private property."

" . . . only through developed industry i.e.-- through the mediation of private property, does the ontological essence of human passions, in its totality and its humanity come into being; the science of man itself is a product of man's self-formation through practical activity."  
(Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, pp. 187, 189)

More recently, James Lawler, in The Existentialist Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote:

"Slavery is in fact more human than the earlier form of society since it recognizes at a minimal level the value of the 'other' . . . Slavery is the brutal form of the transition from brute to human existence." (p. 245)

This strikes me as a marvelous example of the mystifying and reifying potential of the approach to history which is in question.

<sup>34</sup> Mary O'Brien, "The Politics of Reproduction," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of York, Toronto, 1976, p. 54. Hereafter cited as "Politics."

"Fatherhood is a right, in other words a political phenomenon and it cannot, further, be enforced without entering into social relations with other men. Hegel is right when he claims that marriage is not a contract between a man and a woman; what he fails to notice is that marriage is fundamentally a contract between men: you acknowledge my right to the issue of this woman's body and I shall reciprocate." (O'Brien, pp. 237-38)

<sup>35</sup> "Politics," p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> This separation of public (male) from private (female) life, is, according to O'Brien, the generalized social form which attempts to mediate male estrangement from species continuity have consistently taken. It is also the material ground of all the other dualisms of male-stream thought: body and soul, animal and human, natural and cultural, material and ideal, etc.

<sup>37</sup> "Politics," p. vii: "Male estrangement from experienced genetic continuity also challenges men to develop alternative principles of continuity which they can control."

38 "Politics," p. 234.

39 "Politics," p. 201.

40 This thesis, p. 80

41 ". . . there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then that division of labour which develops spontaneously or 'naturally' by virtue of natural predispositions . . . Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. (The first form of ideologists, priests, is concurrent)." (Marx and Engels, p. 51)

We are inclined to argue, against Marx, that the division of labour within the patriarchal family was indeed "truly such," since it did coincide with the division of mental and material labour: the former appropriated exclusively by men, and women assigned to physical (and emotional!) labour only.

42 The analysis of social change which follows, in terms of population size, is not inconsistent with Marx's analyses in terms of change in the mode of production; it complements rather than contradicts such an analysis, by shifting its focus to a factor which Marx himself recognized as fundamental. In his discussion of the development of human social consciousness, from "herd-consciousness" to species-consciousness, he makes the following observation, for example:

"This sheep-like or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increase of needs, and what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population." (Marx and Engels, p. 51)

43 "By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying."

"The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, merely give expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge." (The Communist Manifesto, pp. 50, 56)

"The right to the undisturbed enjoyment, within certain conditions, of fortuity and chance, has till now been called personal freedom." (Marx and Engels, p. 86)

44 We have seen all too often how "revolutionary" leaders in the Third World have promoted the cause of Independence, Nationhood and Autonomy, in terms of the increased "freedom" available to their own people, who then expect to receive "free" radios, bicycles, trips to Europe, or whatever, when their foreign rulers have been ousted; how every North American high school student knows that we in the West have far more "freedom" than the citizens of Socialist states, because we are "free" to travel, own cars, and watch televisions with more than two tones, and more than one channel; and how feminists have promoted "Women's Liberation," only to be told by women themselves that they have more "freedom" in their traditional roles as wives, and mothers (that is, as consumers), than they would have by joining the men in the public world of work and social responsibility (that is, as producers).

Revolutionaries (Marxists and feminists) should, therefore, abandon the rhetoric of an essentially abstract freedom, which has become a debased coinage, and be more specific about their revolutionary values; values which are not attainable, nor even visible in many cases, within a patriarchal capitalist social formation.

45 We have seen in our own century how Socialist, as much as capitalist, regimes justify present social practices (e.g. gulags) as the essential historical means for the creation of a future "freedom."

46 "Historically men have used freedom, the highest value, to institutionalize the inequalities which have thitherto been the condition of freedom."  
("Politics," p. 180).

47 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, p. 213.

48 Marx refers to man's primitive "animal consciousness," his "herd-consciousness" and his "sheep-like or tribal consciousness" prior to the development of productive forces and the division of labour in Marx and Engels, p. 51 cited above in 42.

49 Marx and Engels, p. 61.

50 Early Writings, p. 163.

51 Early Writings, p. 189.

52 Early Writings, p. 126.

"Human emancipation will only be complete when the real individual man . . . has become a species-being; and when he has recognized his own powers as social powers" (Early Writings, p. 31)

53 Early Writings, p. 21.

54 Early Writings, p. 132.

55 Mary O'Brien's terminology, see "The Politics of Reproduction."

56 "Politics," p. 35. Mary O'Brien, "The Dialectics of Reproduction," hereafter cited as "Dialectics":

"Yet the mediative power of women's labour creates a value which might be called, tentatively, synthetic value. It is of a three-dimensional character. In the first place, it cancels the alienation inherent in the process of being born. Secondly, it affirms the unity of women and nature. Thirdly, it provides for women a continuous time-consciousness which stands in opposition to male time-consciousness." ("Dialectics," p. 239)

Men appropriate this value, created by women, when they appropriate women and children by institutional means:

"What is relevant is the notion of alienation of labour, for embedded in each infant is the alienated labour of the mother. Thus, the appropriation of the child is at the same time an appropriation of the mother's alienated labour. It is in this sense that paternal right is the right of the appropriator. Paternity may well have been man's first experience of the joys of getting something for nothing." ("Dialectics," p. 238)

57 "Human reproduction is a unity of doing and knowing, and it is in this unified sense that process changes historically and is differentiated genderically." ("Dialectics," p. 236)

58 "Politics," p. 23.  
Angela Miles, "The Politics of Feminist Radicalism: A Study in Integrative Feminism," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1979, p. 352:

"Just as the separation of politics and economics reflects the lack of human control in production, so the separation of the public and the private, or the political and the personal spheres reflects

men's lack of control over the bulk of their lives and over all the areas in which they are in connection with the collectivities of other human beings."

- 59 "Marx never perceives the alienation of the seed as a material alienation which sets up an opposition between men and children, men and women, and men and other men." ("Politics," p. 201)

These oppositions are mediated by male political praxis, which consistently takes the social form of the separation of the public and private spheres; which is, in turn, the source of other forms of alienation associated with patriarchy; forms which pre-date and function independently of capitalism. Not until patriarchy is overthrown therefore, will these oppositions be transcended and man fulfil himself as a species-being as defined by Marx.

60 If all private property were abolished, the patriarchal structures which oppress women would indeed disappear. My objection is, that the destruction of capitalist productive relations would not necessarily have the effect of eliminating all property relations, for it would not effect patriarchy at its most primitive level whereby all men control/own all women, i.e. at the level of the family, of reproductive relations. We, therefore, agree with Marx when he identifies freedom with the absence of property relations; but we do not believe that his analysis of property relations goes far enough, stopping, as it does with productive relations, and ignoring the relations of reproduction upon which they are built.

- 61 "This alienation is also the material ground of the so-called 'double-standard,' and it is the material base of the separation of public and private life. It is also, I would argue, the material ground of male-stream thought's essential dualism." ("Dialectics," p. 237)

62 Early Writings, p. 128.

- 63 "Human emancipation will only be complete when the real individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (forces propres) as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power." (Early Writings p. 31)

"Only in the community . . . is personal freedom possible" (Marx and Engels, p. 83)

<sup>64</sup> The integration of the natural and the human is a constant theme in Marx's early work and will be discussed later in this chapter. Communism, for example, is considered to represent:

" . . . the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is therefore, the return of man himself as a social i.e. really human being . . . communism as a fully developed naturalism is a humanism and as a fully developed humanism is a naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between, man and nature and between man and man." (Early Writings, pp. 155)

<sup>65</sup> Early Writings, pp. 165-66.

The reference to "self-creation" is, in fact, ambiguous: referring equally to the species, i.e. humanity, and individual men, both of which can be intelligibly described as alienated from themselves in capitalist productive relations. But self-mastery, self-creation, and self-determination at the level of the individual do not amount to freedom, but its antithesis:

"Where freedom is not based on the necessity of interrelationship, freedom appears to continually produce blind external necessity or fate from out of its own substance." (Lawler, p. 226)

<sup>66</sup> "Politics," p. 142.

<sup>67</sup> "Ideological understanding is precisely thought cut off from its roots in necessity, thought which has forgotten its origins" ("Dialectics," p. 229).

<sup>68</sup> "Politics," p. 141.

<sup>69</sup> Plato, Rousseau, Nietzsche, for example.

<sup>70</sup> Mathieu, in Jean-Paul Sartre, Roads to Freedom, trans. by Eric Suttan (Penguin Books, 1961) illustrates the truth of this analysis: he is the stereotypically Sartrean alienated man; consoling himself in his alienation with symbolic acts of freedom (e.g. sticking a knife in his hand). The material base for at least some of his experienced alienation is made evident in his response to Marcelle's pregnancy: totally estranged from the lived reality and concreteness of the process (of reproduction) he savours his moment of "freedom" in the face of it.

His freedom is, of course, entirely abstract: it is only the idea of paternity which he contemplates and experiences; while Marcelle, truly integrated into species generativity and continuity, has to make a concrete choice for or against a real and immediate maternity. It is significant that she, who knows what she is choosing chooses to continue the pregnancy, while Mathieu, for whom the drama is entirely ideal, chooses to stop the reproductive process from which he is excluded anyway.

71 Women suffer the consequences of these inversions and contradictions. For example, in their traditional roles as wives and mothers they are judged (by men) to be both more free, i.e. less alienated, than the men they serve, precisely because they are not "producing" man's second nature; and at the same time, to be less free, i.e. less essentially human, for the same reason: because they are bound to the creation of humanity's first nature, therefore less humanly developed, less self-made, less genuinely and distinctly human, than their male counterparts. What more could we ask for--than to be both more and less free? A veritable Catch 22!

72 It is clear to this writer that the traditional term "man" does not denote the species as such, i.e. all of human kind, but rather men in particular. For the remainder of the thesis; therefore, "man" will be replaced by men, or man/men. The original problematic--of establishing an historical and structural "science" of "man" will be reconsidered and re-evaluated in our concluding remarks.

73 Marx maintains that productive life is species-life: ". . . it is life-creating life"; and that in the type of life activity ". . . resides the whole character of the species" (Early Writings, p. 127). "The first historical act" he says, is the act of production for the satisfaction of life-needs: ". . . before everything else, eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing . . ." He does not count getting born, reproduction, as the "first historical act"; it is obviously not part of our species-life as far as he is concerned (Marx and Engels, p. 48).

"The satisfaction of the first need," he says, "leads to new needs; and this production of new needs is the first historical act" (Marx and Engels, p. 49). It is only at a later point that ". . . men who daily remake their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind," and the family (spontaneously) appears in history. Were these men never "made" by women? Marx's point of departure is as mystified as the bourgeois political economists he criticizes: it is the adult male individual,

intent on self-creation and doggedly forgetful that he was ever born, nurtured, and nourished by another. Intent on transcendence, he refuses to acknowledge: (i) his essential dependence on another human being, and (ii) the priority of that other in the project of human creation.

74 The ideology of the production of humanity, like the more general belief in history as progressive and emancipatory of which it is a part, has similarly mystified and therefore legitimized the oppression and exploitation, not only of women, but also of men; justifying, once more, the means by the end; for example:

. . . the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters . . . In the notion of the human race we found an abstract assumption of universality which served as a cover for the most realistic practices."  
(J-P. Sartre, Introduction to Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. by Constance Farrington [Grove Press Inc., 1977], p. 26)

95 Foucault maintains (e.g. in The History of Sexuality, trans. by Robert Hurley [Vintage Books, 1980]) that the traditional power attributed to the sovereign to decide life and death, is dysymmetrical, for no (male) sovereign really controls life; it is a right he may assume (according to O'Brien it is the first and most fundamental of essentially political rights), but it is one he can exercise only negatively:

"The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was formulated as the 'power of life and death' was in reality the right to take life or let live. Its symbol, after all, was the sword." (Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 136)

76 See note 72 above.

77 "Politics," p. 211.

78 "Politics," p. 224.

79 Early Writings, p. 155.

80 Early Writings, p. 164.

81 Early Writings, p. 128.

82 Sidney Finkelstein, Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature (New York: International Pub., 1968), p. 130. Finkelstein makes a similar point in his analysis of Sartre's Roads to Freedom: That freedom arises out of the recognition of necessity, and not from its (ideological) suppression--and hence the futility of Mathieu's search for freedom in the absence of necessity, in the purely gratuitous act:

"It is part of Sartre's realistic gift that we can glimpse from the story what Sartre himself does not accept; that freedom does rise out of the recognition of necessity, that the laws of reality must be known and obeyed so that reality can be commanded, and that Delarue's avoidance of 'necessity,' in this sense, accounts for the futility of his search for freedom." (Quoted in Lawler, p. 150)

Notes

Chapter VI

1 "Whatever men and events are, they certainly appear within the compass of scarcity; that is in a society still incapable of emancipating itself from its needs--hence from nature" (Questions, p. 132).

2 See chapter V for a detailed specification of the different senses of "science."

3 Mark Poster, Sartre's Marxism (Pluto Press, 1979), p. 133: ". . . the lacunae that Sartre found in Marxism, the lack of a theory of the person remains a fact of fundamental importance."

4 James Lawler, The Existentialist Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner Publishing Co., 1976), p. 106.

5 Lawler, p. 198.

6 E. P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p. 356.

7 J-P. Sartre, "Itinerary of a Thought," in Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 42, an interview given by Sartre in 1969 to the New Left Review and published in no. 58 (1969) of that journal.

8 Lawler, p. 8.

9 Lawler, p. 48.

10 " . . . toute cette objectivité se rapporte finalement à une réalité vécue" (C.R.D., p. 67).

11 Questions, p. 32.

12 Questions, p. 152.

13 C.R.D., p. 95.

14 J-P. Sartre, "Vietnam; Imperialism and Génocide," in Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 72; written

in December 1967 in his capacity as President of the International War Crimes Tribunal, published in New Left Review, p. 48. Hereafter cited as "Vietnam."

15 "Vietnam," p. 71.

16 "Vietnam," p. 73.

17 "Vietnam," p. 74.

18 "Vietnam," p. 77.

19 "Vietnam," p. 78.

20 Questions, p. 32, footnote.

21 "Vietnam," pp. 80-82.

22 "Vietnam," p. 73.

23 "The dialectical procedure to reintegrate existence (which is never known) as a foundation at the heart of knowledge . . ." (Questions, pp. 176-77).

24 As in " . . . exister, agir et comprendre ne font qu'un," for example (C.R.D., p. 548).

25 " . . . la conduite la plus rudimentaire doit se déterminer à la fois par rapport aux facteurs réels et présents qui la conditionnent et par rapport à un certain objet à venir qu'elle tente de faire naître." (C.R.D., p. 63)

26 See chapter III of this thesis.

27. "Existentialism, then, can only affirm the specificity of the historical event; it seeks to restore to the event its function and multiple dimensions." (Questions, p. 124).

"Nous refusons de confondre l'homme aliéné avec une chose et l'aliénation avec les lois physiques qui régissent les conditionnements d'extériorité. Nous affirmons la spécificité de l'acte humaine, qui traverse le milieu social tout en conservant les déterminations ep qui transforme le monde sur la base de conditions données." (C.R.D., p. 63)

"Il faut simplement rejeter l'apriorisme: l'examen sans préjugés de l'objet historique pourra seul, en chaque cas, déterminer si l'action ou

l'oeuvre reflètent les mobiles suprastructurels de groupes ou d'individus formés par certain conditionnements de base ou si l'on ne peut les expliquer qu'en se référant immédiatement aux contradictions économiques et aux conflits d'intérêts matériels . . . il faut passer par la médiation des hommes concrets, du caractère que le conditionnement de base leur a fait, des instruments idéologiques dont ils usent . . . Parce que le Marxisme concret doit approfondir les hommes réels et non les dissoudre dans un bain d'acide sulfurique . . . on perd le réel à totaliser trop vite et à transformer sans preuves la signification en intention, le résultat en objectif réellement visé. Et aussi . . . il faut se défendre à tout prix de remplacer les groupes réels et parfaitement définis . . . par des collectivités insuffisamment déterminées . . . ce sont des hommes qu'en juge et non des forces physiques." (C.R.D., pp. 36-39)

"Autrement dit les transformations conventionnelles et les définitions d'une pensée économique restent intelligibles tant qu'elles sont soutenues par le mouvement concret d'une dialectique humaine et historique." (C.R.D., p. 670)

28 "We must avoid idealist significations . . . an already lived History resists any a priori schematism . . . We shall insist on the ambiguity of past facts" (Questions, pp. 123-24).

29 "The existing man cannot be assimilated by a system of ideas" (Questions, p. 10).

"No dialectical sleight of hand can make alienation come out of it; this is why what is involved here is not a mere play of concepts but real History" (Questions, p. 13).

30 Existentialism, he tells us " . . . intends, without being unfaithful to Marxist principles, to find mediations which allow the individual concrete--the particular life, the real and dated conflict, the person--to emerge from the background of the general contradictions of productive forces and relations of production" (Questions, p. 57).

31 Questions, p. 131.

32 C.D.R., p. 51; C.R.D., p. 142.

33 J-P. Sartre, "A Plea for Intellectuals," in

Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 250; originally three lectures delivered by Sartre at Tokyo and Kyoto in September/October 1965.

- 34 Questions, pp. 128-29.
- 35 Questions, pp. 5-8.
- 36 See Chiodi.
- 37 Questions, pp. 12, 13, 14.
- 38 Lucien Goldmann, Power and Humanism (Spokesman Books, 1974), pp. 32-33.
- 39 Thompson, p. 200.
- 40 " . . . in the old problematic of the working class movement and Marxist thought, the hierarchy and discipline of the ruling classes, who organised and perpetuated exploitation, required an organised defense of the oppressed classes and of human values, centralised and hierarchised on the same model. . . It was, if you like, a struggle between two camps which both took organisational structures close to the military structure of traditional armies composed primarily of infantry. However two things struck me in the movement of May 1968 . . . the radical rejection of all organisation and discipline and the profound demand for freedom and spontaneity." (Goldmann, p. 35)
- 41 Mark Poster, Existential Marxism in Post-War France. From Sartre to Althusser (Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 395.
- 42 "The traditional schema of socialist thought: first, politics and the conquest of the state; then social and economic transformations is being replaced by an inverse schéma: transformations of the social and economic structure of immediate life (factory, university, commune etc.) leading in the end to a transformation of the political structures and of the state. The most important terms of socialist theoretical thought change their content and their nature: 'reform,' which was the opposite of 'revolution,' and signified adaptation to the existing system, becomes the first stage of the revolution, the road to the transformation of the system, and the principal current of modern socialism calls itself, in the West, revolutionary reforms." (Goldmann, p. 47)

43 In Between Existentialism and Marxism, pp. 118-137: "France: Masses Spontaneity, Party" was an interview-discussion with the Italian journal Il Manifesto, given in August 1969. Published in English in The Socialist Register 1970.

44 Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 125.

45 Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 128.

46 Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 129.

47 Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 131.

48 This is also the political emphasis of feminism. See Rowbotham et al, Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism.

49 "In the advanced capitalist countries therefore, we still have the problem of finding new forms of organisation which are capable of combining internal democracy and freedom with effectiveness in the struggle against the ruling classes. It would be right to think that I have no recipe to offer on this point. Nevertheless I should like to refer to a remark I once read in a work by Trotsky which seemed very important to me. The author was reflecting on why the proletariat needed centralist disciplined organisations in its struggle, while the bourgeoisie made its revolution in France with the much looser and less centralized organisations of Clubs and Sections. He replied . . . that the bourgeoisie, because it had first attained economic and social power, then acquired the mental frames of reference, the class consciousness which oriented its action spontaneously in a revolutionary direction. Between spontaneity and discipline there is a dialectical relation which makes the latter less necessary according as the former is more developed."

(Goldmann, p. 37)

50 Think for example, of the voting procedure in elections: this "collective" expression of social democracy is in reality a serial process, i.e. a procession of essentially alienated and isolated individuals, not acting, but functioning according to institutionalized roles and an exterior-conditioned consciousness.

51 " . . . it is impossible even for that part of the working class which is actually struggling, to

speaking of unification, save theoretically . . ." ("France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party," p. 123).

52 "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party," p. 120.

53 "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party," p. 123.

54 As Lucien Goldmann observes:

"I should like to tell the Trotskyist comrades that it is a little naive of them to state that the social-democratic and communist parties have become bureaucratized, but that they can succeed in building a centralist, hierarchic and truly revolutionary party. It is likely, even certain, that the German socialists, or the Russian Bolsheviks were inspired by equally good intentions and by an equally sincere socialist spirit as that of comrades today. Bureaucratization and the integration into existing society are not simply the outcome of betrayal or an evil will . . . but rather of a structural process which the Trotskyist party itself would certainly not escape if it became a mass party and found itself in an analogous situation." (Goldmann, p. 36)

55 "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party," p. 121.

56 Ibid.

57 "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party," p. 120.

58 "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party," p. 122.

59 J-P. Sartre, The Ghost of Stalin. (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1968), p. 75.

60 Sartre's account also tells us something . . . about reform from above, and about all attempts to revive group praxis and to restore more genuine revolutionary feelings from the hierarchy down," for, according to Sartre " . . . the ossified group cannot be renewed, it can only be replaced" (Jameson, p. 272).

61 Questions, p. 28.

62 Questions, p. 29.

"This method does not satisfy us. It is a priori. It does not derive its concepts from experience--or at least not from the new experiences which it

seeks to interpret. It has already formed its concepts; it is already certain of their truth; it will assign to them the role of constitutive schemata. Its sole purpose is to force the events, the persons, or the acts considered into pre-fabricated molds." (Questions, p. 37)

"The Marxist therefore is impelled to take as an appearance the real content of behaviour or of a thought; when he dissolves the particular in the Universal, he has the satisfaction of believing that he is reducing appearance to truth. Actually, by defining his subjective concept of reality, he has only defined himself." (Questions, p. 49)

63 Questions, p. 32.

"Marxism ought to study real men in depth, not dissolve them in a bath of sulphuric acid" (Questions, pp. 43-44).

64 Questions, p. 48.

65 Questions, p. 26.

66 Questions, p. 35.

"Existentialism refuses to abandon the real life to the unthinkable chances of birth for the sake of contemplating a universality limited to reflecting upon itself. It intends, without being unfaithful to Marxist principles, to find mediations which allow the individual concrete--the particular life, the real and dated conflict, the person--to emerge from the background of the general contradictions of productive forces and relations of production." (Questions, p. 57)

67 C.R.D., p. 568 ("... an indispensable moment of any operation, even in the practico-inert field of alienation.").

68 C.R.D., p. 540 ("at once an action and a process").

69 C.D.R., p. 789; C.R.D., p. 732.

70 Indeed, the central contradiction in the Critique is that between "the subjective will of men and its objectifications"; this is an "impotent contradiction," according to Lawler, since, at base, it is rooted in the fixed categories of metaphysical thought, and therefore incapable

of dialectical transcendence. (Lawler, pp. 87, 105).

71 "For Sartre, freedom can only be found apart from necessity, and the only necessity that truly affects man is the necessity that he makes for himself" (Lawler, p. 54).

72 "Just as existentialism attempts to present the semblance of dialectics while remaining on the terrain of metaphysics, so it attempts to present a semblance of materialism while remaining on the terrain of idealism" (Lawler, p. 87).

"The dialectical theory of nature rejects the rigid opposition of man as thinking being, to nature as totally deprived of thought. Such a concept would make of thought something of a miracle totally external to the material world" (Lawler, p. 44).

Sartre ". . . seeks to deny 'self-activity: to nature as a whole, in order to reserve that concept for man alone . . . But this means that human self-activity is cut off from nature and objective necessity" (Lawler, p. 185).

73 " . . . il faut insister sur ce fait capital que la Raison n'est ni un os ni un accident" (C.R.D.).

74 "A system is an alienated man who wants to go beyond his alienation and who gets entangled in alienated words; it is an achievement of awareness which finds itself deviated by its own instruments . . . an ideological system is irreducible; since the instruments, whatever they are, alienate the one who employs them and modify the meaning of his action, the idea must be considered to be both the objectification of the concrete man and his alienation." (Questions, p. 115)

"Thus the intellectual grasps his thought as being at once his and other. He thinks in the idea rather than the idea being in his thought; and this signifies that it is the sign of his belonging to a determined group (since its functions, ideology etc., are known) and an undefined group (since the individual will never know all the members nor even the total number)."

(Questions, p. 136)

75 This is, of course, both the virtue and the vice of phenomenology: it renders it concrete, historical, dialectical, and material, and at the same time relative and particular, if not "subjective." The self-evident

truths of phenomenology are no more vicious, however, than those of any other discipline or methodology; like every other mode of access to human phenomena, it is neither self-sufficient nor self-validating.

76 C.D.R., p. 803; C.R.D., p. 743.

77 "So far, we have been trying to get back to the elementary formal structures, and, at the same time, we have located the dialectical foundations of a structural anthropology . . . the reflexive investigation of this still formal project will be the object of the next volume."

(C.D.R., p. 818; C.R.D., p. 755)

78 C.D.R., p. 506; C.R.D., p. 506.

79 Questions, p. 177.

80 Jameson, "Sartre and History," p. 230.

81 "We must go further and consider in each case the role of the individual in the historic event. For this role is not defined once and for all: it is the structure of the groups concerned which determines it in each case." (Questions, p. 130)

"The object of existentialism . . . in this particular man in the social field, in his class, in an environment of collective objects and of other particular men. It is the individual, alienated, reified, mystified as he has been made to be by the division of labour and by exploitation, but struggling against alienation with the help of distorting instruments, and despite everything, patiently gaining ground . . . We demand of general history that it restore to us the structures of contemporary society, its conflicts, its profound contradictions, and the over-all movement which these determine."

(Questions, pp. 133-34)

82 C.D.R., p. 666; C.R.D., p. 633.

83 Poster, Existential Marxism, p. 83.

84 Lawler, pp. 110-11.

85 Questions, p. 63.

86 Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology does not make this identification. See chapter IV, Consciousness.

87 C.D.R., p. 51; C.R.D., p. 142.

88 Questions, p. 115.

89 Questions, p. 116.

90 C.D.R., p. 300; C.R.D., pp. 343-44.

91 C.D.R., p. 502; C.R.D., p. 504.

92 "Czechoslovakia: The Socialism that Came in from the Cold," in Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 107; written in 1970 as an introduction to a volume of interviews with Czechoslovak intellectuals edited by Antonin Liehm, entitled Trois Générations (Paris, 1970).

93 "A Plea for Intellectuals," in Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 249.

Notes

Chapter VII

<sup>1</sup> C. R. Badcock, Lévi-Strauss. Structuralism and Sociological Theory (London: Hutchinson V.P., 1975), p. 74:

"Let us take totemism as an example of this. Lévi-Strauss denies that this is 'the outcome of a conceptual game taking place in the mind.' Instead he maintains that totemism should be seen as an ideology which is purely superstructural to a social system whose infrastructure is a set of material relations of production. Hence the choice of totemism as a social structure is not fortuitous. Its causes are to be found in its relation to the means of production in aboriginal society--means of production which are, presumably, at such a low level of technological development that private property does not exist. Hence the relationship between man and nature obtrudes to such an extent that in totemism nature is made an ideological system for comprehending culture.

In the case of traditional Indian society, the greater development of the means of production makes the caste system possible and this can clearly be seen as an 'ideology' in the sense that notions about ritual pollution, caste commensality and occupational specialization obviously can be seen to function to justify and rationalize a certain system of production."

<sup>2</sup> Mephram, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> See Badcock, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> S.A. II, p. 358.

<sup>5</sup> R.C., p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> T.T., p. 411.

<sup>7</sup> R.C., pp. 5, 7.

As we shall see, like Sartre, Lévi-Strauss does not always live up to his own principles, and sometimes speaks as if scientific knowledge, for example, did " . . . embody the truth for years to come."

<sup>8</sup> He says, of The Raw and the Cooked, for example:

"It follows that this book on myths is itself a kind of myth. If it has any unity, that unity will appear only behind or beyond the text . . . It would not be wrong to consider this book itself as a myth: it is, as it were, the myth of mythology." (R.C., pp. 6, 12)

<sup>9</sup> S.M., p. 254.

<sup>10</sup> S.A. II, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> S.A. I, p. 353.

<sup>12</sup> S.A. I, p. 12 (emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> S.A. I, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> S.M., p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> "When therefore, human beings bring their labour products into relation with one another as values, it is not because they recognize that the things are no more than the material wrappings for this or that amount of homogenous human labour. On the contrary, exchanging labour products of different kinds one for another, they equate the values of the exchanged products; and in doing so they equate the different kinds of labour expended in production treating them as homogenous human labour. They do not know that they are doing this, but they do it. Value does not wear an explanatory label. Far from it, value changes all labour products into social hieroglyphs, to solve the problem of their own social product--for the specification of a useful object as a value is just as much a social product as language' is . . .

. . . . .  
In the chance and ever-varying exchange relations between products the labour time socially necessary for their production exerts its coercive influence like an over-riding law . . . Thus the determination of the magnitude of value by labour time

is a secret hidden away beneath the manifest fluctuations in the relative values of commodities. The discovery of the way in which the magnitude of value of labour products is really determined, removes from this determination the semblance of being purely fortuitous, but does not affect the material form of the process."

(Capital, pp. 47, 49)

For a reference to the "power of abstraction," see p. xlvihi, Preface to the First Edition, Capital.

16. S.A. II, pp. 115, 116.

17. Durkheim, quoted by Lévi-Strauss in S.A. II, pp. 17-18.

18. As in perception, for example:

" . . . the particular object which I see is not simply recognized by me by virtue of its own set of observable properties, but is constructed in vision on the basis of its relation to other objects";

as also in language:

" . . . each item is intelligible only by virtue of its relations to other actual or possible items, even though we are not explicitly conscious of these networks of relationships as we speak or hear a language." (Mepham, pp. 122, 124)

19. Badcock, p. 88.

20. S.M., p. 260.

21. S.M., p. 262.

22. S.A. II, p. 284.

23. See S.M., p. 222.

24. For example: " . . . the relation between man and his needs is mediated by culture and cannot be conceived of simply in terms of nature" (Totemism, p. 135).

25. S.M., p. 222.

26. S.M., p. 95.

27 "The incest prohibition is thus the basis of human society; in a sense it is the society" (S.A. II, p. 19).

28 E.S.K., p. 45.

29 Gayle Rubin in "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in Rayna Reiter, ed., Toward and Anthropology of Women (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 160.

30 Rubin, p. 165.

31 C. Lévi-Strauss, in "The Family," in H. Shapiro, ed., Man, Culture, Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 347-48.

32 Rubin, p. 198.

33 Questions, p. 73.

34 Questions, p. 76.

35 Questions, p. 74.

36 Questions, p. 34, quoting from Capital III.

37 According to Lucien Goldmann events closer to home have made similar demands; of May 1968, he comments:

" . . . it marks one of the most important turning points in the history of industrial societies and of the contemporary world. It is in relation to this turning point that the old words 'reform,' 'revolution,' 'socialism,' 'capitalism,' 'liberalism,' 'democracy' change their meaning and will only remain valid to the extent to which one gives them a new meaning." (Goldmann, p. 40).

38 P. Pettit, "Wittgenstein and the Case for Structuralism," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology Vol. III, No. I, pp.46-57:

"In his criticism of Sartre, Lévi-Strauss means that dialectical reason is the exercise of an ideological understanding of the society in which I live . . . this dialectical reason is ideologically conditioned in the sense that it is the logical working out of the ideological basis and not a critical reason; and because of that it is subject to further analysis by analytical reason."

39 S.A. II, p. 35.

"Hence, in ethnographic experience the observer apprehends himself as his own instrument of observation. Clearly, he must learn to know himself, to obtain, from a self who reveals himself as another to the I who uses him, an evaluation which will become an integral part of the observation of other selves." (S.A. II, p. 36)

40 John Sturrock, ed., Structuralism and Since, From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida (O.U.P., 1979), p. 40.

41 Synecdoche refers to the representation of the concrete by one of its abstract properties and is typical of totemic and mythical thought (according to Lévi-Strauss's analysis of it).

42 Sperber in Sturrock, p. 40.

43 "It's a problem one might say, of translation, of translating what is expressed in one language-- or one code, if you prefer, but language is sufficient--into expression in a different language." (M.M., p. 9)

"The question we asked ourselves was that of the meaning of the incest prohibition . . . and not that of its results, real or imaginary." (S.A. II, p. 19)

44 "Lévi-Strauss has remarked on more than one occasion that structural anthropology is a sort of myth. This is because, like history, it is a code whose purpose it is to resolve contradictions and to enable men to communicate with one another . . . structural anthropology is a code which when expressed as a message--an anthropological work like The Savage Mind--conveys information from primitive to modern culture in such a way that the society, in question sees its cultural codes become anthropological message, just as we, in the receiving society, see our cultural message become structural anthropological code. The coded information flows across the gap between civilized and savage, 'hot' and 'cold,' Western and colonial." (Badcock, p. 93)

45 Miriám Glucksmann, Structuralist Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought (London, 1974), for example, voices both objections; first describing Lévi-Strauss

as:

" . . . an idealist who sees actual social structures and cultural phenomena as mere instantiations of some platonic and essential structure of the mind, which is natural and universal."

Then, attributing to him a crude determinism on the basis of his radical materialism, assuming that because:

" . . . both myth and kinship structure derive from the unconscious structure of the brain--man cannot create social structure, not change history."

which is, of course, nonsense. (Glucksmann, pp. 13, 92)

46 See S.M., p. 247.

47 "For him mind and nature are ultimately one. Both are natural parts of reality, and if there is final truth in the mind in sense of there being an accurate picture of reality then this is only because the mind itself is a real and material object." (Badcock, p. 99)

48 "It would be far from my mind to try and reduce culture . . . to nature; but nevertheless what we witness at the level of culture are phenomena of the same kind from a formal point of view . . . We can at least trace the same problem to the mind that we can observe at the level of nature, though of course, the cultural is much more complicated and calls upon a much larger number of variables." (M.M., p. 10)

" . . . this mind of which Lévi-Strauss speaks is fundamentally structural . . . It is a purely structural, formal unconscious something which structures phenomena but does not fill them in the sense of giving them content . . .

Culture is by definition an arbitrary structuring of arbitrary signs and reflects not the positive content of the mind . . . But rather its form. Outer, material reality however determines the content and meaning of these codes by a Marxist materialistic determinism." (Badcock, p. 99)

49 Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p. 352.

50 S.A. I, p. 279.

- 51 Glucksmann, p. 34
- 52 The (structural) meaning of myths, for example, is " . . . not directly perceived but deduced, a reconstruction based on a syntactical analysis" (Confrontation, p. 66).
- 53 S.A. II, p. 18.
- 54 "Such forms of social existence cannot be apprehended simply from the ~~outside~~--the investigator must be able to make a personal reconstruction of the synthesis characterizing them; he must not merely analyse their elements, but apprehend them as a whole in the form of a personal experience--his own." (S.A. I, p. 373)
- "This empirical and subjective synthesis offers the only guarantee that the preliminary analysis, carried as far as the unconscious categories has allowed nothing to escape . . .
- The manner in which Mauss poses and resolves the problem in The Gift enables one to see, in the intersection of two subjectivities, the nearest order of truth to which the sciences of man can aspire when they confront the integrity of their object." (S.A. II, p. 8)
- 55 S.A. I, p. 274.
- 56 S.A. II, p. 41.
- 57 The "general humanism" which Lévi-Strauss calls for " . . . lies in a conception of man which places the other before the self, and in the conception of mankind which places life before men" (S.A. II, p. 37). It is clarified in greatest detail in his tribute to "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Founder of the Sciences of Man," originally presented in 1962 as a speech delivered in Geneva, at the ceremonies marking the 250th anniversary of the birth of Rousseau, and printed in S.A. II, pp. 33-43.
- 58 S.M., p. 15.
- 59 S.M., p. 13.
- 60 S.M., p. 10.
- 61 S.M., p. 13.
- 62 S.M., p. 14.

"Knowledge as systematically developed as this clearly cannot relate just to practical purposes."

(S.M., p. 8)

" . . . animals and plants are not known as a result of their usefulness; they are deemed to be useful or interesting because they are first of all known . . . science of this kind can scarcely be of much practical effect . . . its main purpose is not a practical one. It meets intellectual requirements rather than, or instead of, satisfying needs . . . Classifying, as opposed to not classifying, has a value of its own, whatever form the classification may take." (S.M., p. 9)

63 S.M., p. 13.

64 S.M., p. 10.

65 S.M., p. 19.

66 S.M., p. 20.

67 S.M., p. 19.

68 S.M., p. 20.

69 R.C., p. 13.

70 Confrontation, p. 66.

71 Glucksmann, p. 92.

72 Glucksmann, p. 90.

73 Glucksmann, p. 92.

74 "All that Lévi-Strauss in his Structural Positivism is claiming is that the principles and structures of codes remain the same but that the message varies. Thus Sartre has no need to fear that Lévi-Strauss is condemning Marxism to a fixed immutable message; he is not. He is merely saying that structural positivism, if I may call it that, does not apply to it any more than the principles of structural linguistics in any way compromise individuals' freedom of linguistic expression from the point of view of what they say." (Badcock, p. 82)

"The Marxist approach . . . applies only to infra-structures and although providing reductive explanations of social change, cannot address itself to the quite different question of the explanation of the structuring processes of ideological super-structures as such." (Badcock, p. 75)

75 Badcock, p. 97.

76 Badcock, p. 102.

77 Badcock, p. 100.

78 Badcock, p. 75.

79 "Rousseau foresaw this with his usual acumen: 'One needs to look near at hand if one wants to study men; but to study man one must learn to look afrom afar; one must first observe differences in order to discover attributes.'" (S.M., p. 247)

80 S.A. II, p. 36.

81 "Society does this in order to verify how 'unacceptable' it is itself. It recognizes that it is not at all a privileged form, but only one of these 'other' societies which have succeeded each other throughout the millenia, or whose precarious diversity still attests that--in his collective being also--man must recognize himself as a 'he' before daring to lay claim to also being a 'me,'" (S.A. II, p. 39)

" . . . a good deal of egocentricity and naivety is necessary to believe that man has taken refuge in a single one of the historical or geographical modes of his existence, when the truth about man resides in the system of their differences and common properties.

He who begins by steeping himself in the allegedly self-evident truths of introspection never emerges from them." (S.M., p. 249)

82 Badcock, p. 100.

83 Octavio Paz, Claude Lévi-Strauss. An Introduction (Delta Books, Dell, 1970), p. 97.

84 Poster, p. 330.

85 Glucksmann, p. 159, paraphrasing Lucien Goldmann.

86 Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p. 286.

87 Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p. 245.

88 Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p. 266.

Notes

Conclusion

<sup>1</sup> S.A. II, Rousseau quoted by Lévi-Strauss, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> S.A. II, p. 35.

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