The Returns of Alienation

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> We must consider one problem that surpasses in its importance all questions of detail. This is the question of alienation.
>
> Georg Lukács[1]

Prologue

As a preview, I will encapsulate the moral of my story: Those who assume that "alienation" is an outmoded concept after the deconstruction of humanism have overlooked four related factors:

- First, everyone knows that "alienation" was already banished from the party line of marxist-leninist discourse a long time ago. It was used only by unorthodox marxists like Lukács or Lefebvre or Marcuse; and at the same time it was misappropriated by existentialism.

- Second, this banishment accompanied the reaffirmation of what Engels had already called "authority" over the industrial factory system, in which workers would have to tolerate a great deal of non-participation in management or productive decisions in exchange for

more efficient output and less exploitation. Why? Due to technocratic necessities: the complexity of the modern factory system, the complexity of hierarchical bureaucracies. This reasoning became part and parcel of the Leninist practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the representation of the people by the Party above it which grew out of the vanguard.

- Third, by refusing to deal with the concept of alienation in Marx, the post-marxists are complicit with the theoretical continuance of these two factors above. Thus they are unable to critique effectively the growth of alienation today into new postmodernist forms.

- And last, the early-Marx texts on alienation do not posit an essentialist view of human nature. The "humanism" there is of the sort that is still viable today, after the poststructuralists' critiques. Ironically, the early Marx now seems more clear and more relevant after poststructuralism. I would like to revive our disgust with alienation. In order to do so, we need the concept. Fortunately, as I will try to show, the Marxist version of it is still useful.

I will have some harsh things to say about the giants of the Marxist tradition: Engels and Lenin. To me, they will still be giants even after my criticism. Yet such criticisms ought to be made in the ongoing project of trying to salvage a critical marxism from the historical ruin it is in--its present marginalization in intellectual circles; the visceral repulsion which most people have against any mention of it among those who survived so-called communist regimes. No one who has been paying attention to the abusive regimes which parade under the name of marxism can seriously attempt to reiterate a marxist orthodoxy without any critique of its theoretical impasses, its contradictions, its silences. It has never been enough just to say, "Well, there were Stalinist excesses... Or Maoist errors... Or the Cold War was responsible..." Or even that "these state capitalist regimes were never really marxist." The task for us now is to work through those theoretical impasses instead.

The definition of alienation that I continually gesture toward is found dispersed through Marx's early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. I tend to assume that my reader is already somewhat familiar with that usage. I will say more specific things about the import of certain German terms in those texts (*Wesen, Gattungswesen, Entäuserung, Entfremdung*) toward the end of this essay in two sections: "From Hegelian Dialectics" and "Toward a New Marxist Disalienation." Meanwhile, alienation in Marx has different aspects which nevertheless comprise a single complex. Alienation is a separation between human activity and its own products; it is also a situation where our products come back to us as something separate; it is a separation from active participation in the social production of values, from awareness, from oneself, from nature, from use-values, from the process of labor, from that work we do in order to produce ourselves; and it is a separation from each other. In Marx's analysis of capitalism, these aspects are all interdependent and due to the economic mode of

production, particularly where the proletariat is separated from the means of production and can survive only by externalizing and selling one's labor power into the ownership and management of the capitalist, who then separates out the "surplus" value of one's labor as profit, and sells back the result as a separate commodity, now coded as an exchange value that mystifies its origin. Nevertheless, I will suggest what everyone already knows--that this multifaceted and interdependent sense of alienation persisted among the working classes even after the chief communist revolutions in this century. I will recap some indications why this was so when I refer to Lenin and the Soviets. Alienation is not to be reduced only to economic exploitation if we cleave to Marx's early manuscripts. Alienation can conceivably be the result of other separations between our labor and its product--i.e., the lack of any participation in decisions about the labor process or about production in general or about how our communities are run. Today everyone continues to live under various regimes of generalized separation. Some of us know this, some of us feel this, and the rest do not-- because they have been alienated from the means of knowledge.

Informatization as (Dis)Alienation

In order to rethink how the current promise of global participation in the new media reawakens the old dream to overcome alienation, we need to reopen its theory. Debates around the ongoing "informatization" of society pivot on this old principle of alienation: on the one side, *disalienation*: new digital media and communication networks bear the bright dawn of new human contact. Dialogue becomes a global village; populist networks and open input allow a new "homestead" beyond the isolating effects of old monological media--a "virtual community" sprouts out of the ashes of modern alienated society. Infinite education is available to each according to his/her desires. Radical democracy is inexorably one step away.2 In this view, it is as though the historical development of technology has finally negated its own earlier negation of humanity, a dialectical turn of disalienation that is now redrawing the human face on the new screens of digital interface. The old analysis of alienated labor under industrial capitalism is here transcended by a labor of free participation under postindustrial new media. The production of information is apparently open to all, a work that develops human capacities rather than exploits and oppresses them.

The other side of the debate has it that such promises are another cruel illusion which obscures the continuity of exploitation and reification. In this view, alienation is actually increasing in pace with the growth of information technologies. Informational development is the latest commodity-form of capitalist expansion, a neo-colonization of everyday life with new technologies of separation, mediation, and consumption. The spectacle of information continues to perform the alienating effects of technocratic capitalism--to monopolize, technicize, commodify, and sell human potentials, thereby coopting and mystifying the production of human values. Information and its technology are still owned by a few, for which the majority work and consume without real choice. "Participation" is an ideological promise that in itself reveals what has been precluded. The promise of disalienation is a hoax, since it is fulfilled only by consuming, a re-consumption of that which has been expropriated in the first place. And by buying into

information technologies the production of which continues to rely on alienated labor, the ideology of information-as-disalienation again mystifies the underlying traces of capitalist production.3 Far from being a revolutionary break from the capitalist colonization of everyday desire, in this view the advent of digital networks simply extends that colonization into a virtual marketplace of virtual desires. The mystification of value and the reification of social relations into things (or images) simply speeds up along with the acceleration of circulation in new communications. It was Marx who first saw that the speed of circulation is an important factor of capitalist surplus-value, where production and circulation "intermingle, interprenetrate each other" (*Capital* Vol 3, p 57). And he noted that "the time of circulation is reduced principally by improved means of communication. In this respect the last fifty years have brought about a revolution, which can be compared only with the industrial revolution of the last half of the eighteenth century" (*Capital* Vol 3, 86). If the nineteenth century was revolutionary in communications, then our own informational development has redoubled this development. Thus the falsification and mystification of *value* that Marx struggled to expose should be accelerating.4

In sum, we can readily see in this polar opposition around the problem of alienation an update of the old political debate around the relative benefits and injuries due to capitalism. We can also catch echoes of old debates around the problem of technology as essentially alienating on the one hand, and on the other, as essentially liberating progressive potentials. In this essay, the pivotal principle of alienation is subjected to a reinterpretation. The term itself has fallen out of vogue, since it tends to imply the falsification of a given essence, the oppression of a universal human nature. All such terms have been profoundly rejected by poststructuralism. In his critical overview of postmodern aesthetics, Fredric Jameson regretfully notes that "concepts such as anxiety and alienation are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern" (14). Yet it is not enough to stop talking about alienation for it to go away. Thus, I will attempt to move through a rereading of "alienation" toward a delimitation of its use in the analysis of the mode of information, a use that does not depend upon the assumption of a prior essentialism. In order to do so, I will argue that the concept should be divided into two: divestment and disaffection. Somewhat like the semiotic division of the sign, this division avoids a necessary or natural connection between divestment and disaffection. But it will be enough to observe their frequent correlation.

Existentialist Appropriation

Since existentialism took over the theme of alienation and made it a matter of angst for the *human individual*, the older dialectical concept of alienation has faded into oblivion. Now that existentialism is gauche, that severe banishment of any work that emphasized individual freedom and consciousness-for-itself, the notion of alienation too has been eclipsed. Largely responsible for the appropriation and rearticulation of "alienation" in an existentialist milieu, *Being and Nothingness* almost singlehandedly transformed the notion from its dialectical meaning. In his history of the idea, Sartre recaps and then reworks the dialectical version of alienation from Hegel onward and then proceeds to give it a quasi-Heideggerian treatment. Alienation is now opposed to

"authenticity."[5] The postwar enthronement of Sartre led the concept of alienation to reside firmly within the concept of "existence." Anyone who has read a couple of modern novels is quite familiar with this existential version of alienation. From Camus to Salinger, alienated characters have been portrayed in existential contexts divorced from their position in the relations of production. What has been lost, though, is the earlier dialectical version of alienation. The decline and fall of existentialism, then, became the decline and fall of "alienation" too. One could then hear the dismissive phrase, "the politics of authenticity" bandied about as the institutional Left closed ranks against the cry of alienation.

Yet this loss of any theoretical reflection on alienation cannot be attributed simply to its appropriation by existentialism. Its most decisive defeat already took place within marxist discourse itself. In the course of establishing a post-revolutionary government, socialism somehow reversed its stance on alienation. It did this by asserting the regrettable but manageable necessity of alienation under the conditions of mass production and also of the Party's necessary authority while the country was in dire straits in its transition to higher communism. Hierarchically organized authority officially replaced the disalienating praxis of workers' participation and self-management. Where did this happen?

Marxism Made Authoritarian

> Every common interest was immediately severed from the society, countered by a higher, general interest, snatched from the activities of society's members themselves and made an object of government activity--from a bridge, a schoolhouse, and the communal property of a village community, to the railroads, the national wealth, and the national University....
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> -- Marx, *The 18th Brumaire Of Louis Napoleon*

Engels, and later Lenin, defended the principle of authority.[6] The dictatorship of the Party over the proletariat found its apology in this principle, thoroughly grounded in the practice of bureaucracy and modern factory production. Authority, hierarchy, and the need for submission and domination is inevitable given the current mode of production, they argued. And no foreseeable change in social relations could ever overcome this blunt necessity: "At least with regard to the hours of work one may write upon the portals of these factories: *Lasciate ogni autonomia, voi che entrate!*"[7] Abandon all autonomy, ye who enter here. This is the sign Engels imagines arching over the gateway into the modern factory, echoing the sign over the portal of Dante's Inferno. The worker must fit into an organized system of production, into a technique. Workers are Taylorized, and there is no other way for mass production to proceed than by this authority. In 1918, Lenin would praise the application of F. W. Taylor's system of training workers movements for maximum efficiency and strict repetition, the well-known "trained gorilla."[8] Engels had used the modern factory system of mass production as a direct analogy to argue against the "anarchist" call for workers' councils, for some local

autonomy, for participation, for self-management.9 Both Engels and Lenin reacted with this insistence on the necessity of central authority--in the essay as well as in policy. Marxism thus slowly devolves from an early principle of anti-alienation in relations of production all the way to its opposite. This can be seen in Engels' later use of the same terms from the notorious *Manifesto* of 1848, where the work under machine labor was portrayed as monotonous and increasingly alienating:

> Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful, and the more embittering it is.

How Engels came to convert this condemnation into a commendation is troubling. But in the end, he returned to the class from which he originated. Though Engels is certainly not wholly pro-alienation, since he admits that domination and submission in the workplace must be meliorated as much as possible, still it becomes impossible in his eyes, from the imagination of party dictatorship and from the position of technocratic production, to dream of autonomy or any ultimate disalienation, since the "automatic machinery of a big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalists who employ workers ever has been" (483). Unlike the cry against its despotism in the *Manifesto*, for the later Engels in 1874, this is simply a fact that must be accepted, and he uses it to denounce the calls for local autonomy and the end of authoritarianism. This moment in marxist theory, the turn from economics to technics, from proletarian control to technocracy, is henceforth the end of any critique of alienation. Submission to technique under hierarchical authority effectively prevents active participation in the social production of values. You do what you're told to do.10

Lenin, while announcing "all power to the soviets," the local workers' councils, remained primarily committed to an increasingly disciplined party which wielded central power. He would soon expropriate the soviets under the Soviet. It is no secret that this party, after the revolution, not only seized state power, but increased the reach and functions of the state. Lenin had written just before the revolution that while the State "is a power standing above society and 'alienating itself more and more from it,' it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this 'alienation.'"11 The historic irony is that what would become known later as Leninism--the theoretical dictatorship of the proletariat--was a practical dictatorship over the proletariat, a powerful State which was the embodiment of this alienation. Lenin himself had reservations about this development after a stroke forced him into retirement about a year before his death. In the December 1922 "Letter to Congress," and in what is otherwise known as Lenin's "Testament" and similar missives from this period, he expressed some dismay that the

new Soviet state had already become a power standing above society, alienating itself more and more from it; that it was becoming abusive, high-handed, overly gigantic, unable to inculcate socialist values. It is said that he privately recommended that Stalin not take over the leadership, recognizing the danger in Stalin's manner and the crudity of his theory. But the Party largely ignored this advice, and today we know the unfortunate result.

The philosophy of alienation was not deconstructed after the events of May 1968 as some believe; rather it was abolished by its own post-revolutionary betrayal as the technocrats consolidated power, culminating in the lethal apparatus of Stalinism. But Engels' early apology for authoritarianism, which openly contradicts its own pre-revolutionary goals while submitting itself to the logic of technocracy, is in embryo the later development, the moment when liberation began to resemble another form of slavery. Praxis stumbled from the forces of production to the production of force. Soon enough it was Lenin who could not maintain--without rationalizing--a theory of alienation as the separation of the people from the production of historical humanity, since it was his role to insist upon the Bosheviks' authority over thought and practice. After the 1917 revolution, whenever Lenin frequently dismissed, e.g., the Mensheviks as just bourgeois opportunists or whenever he announced the "elimination" of the "revisionists from the left" or whenever he clamped down upon workers' councils, he was engaged in a political struggle for the authority of the Party over the people, and for the centralization of the means of production over the local participation of workers. On the other hand, there were ideological battles against the more centrist socialists, especially in Germany, who preferred gradual reform and parliamentary participation. Where they also raised objections about the practice of authority, Lenin argued that,

> under capitalism, democracy is restricted, cramped, curtailed, mutilated by all the conditions of wage slavery, and the poverty and misery of the people. This and this alone is the reason why the functionaries of our political organizations and trade unions are corrupted--or rather tend to be corrupted--by the conditions of capitalism and betray a tendency to become bureaucrats, i.e., privileged persons divorced from the people and standing above the people. That is the essence of bureaucracy; and until the capitalists have been expropriated and the bourgeoisie overthrown, even proletarian functionaries will inevitably be "bureaucratized" to a certain extent.
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> According to Kautsky, since elected functionaries will remain under socialism, so will officials, so will the bureaucracy! This is exactly where he is wrong. Marx, referring to the example of the Commune, showed that under socialism functionaries will cease to be "bureaucrats," to be "officials," they will cease to be so in proportion as--in addition to the principle of election of officials--the principle of recall at any time is also introduced, as salaries are reduced to the level of the wages of the average workman, and as parliamentary institutions are replaced by "working bodies, executive and legislative at the same time."[12]

This is where Lenin clearly predicted his own post-revolutionary error. This description is of the ideal workers' councils. However its essential ingredient--viz., "the principle of recall at any time"--was not applied to the Soviet Party. Hence it simply devolved into a party of bureaucrats and officials wielding the old apparatus of state violence over the people through the secret police, the military, finally the gulag. Lenin exclaims that Kautsky is wrong; there will be no bureaucracy left after the revolution. But there was too often an enormous gap between his texts and his actions. Guy Debord critiques the irony of this moment too:

> Lenin, as a Marxist thinker, was no more than a consistent and *faithful Kautskyist* who applied the *revolutionary ideology* of "orthodox Marxism" to Russian conditions, conditions unfavorable to the reformist practice carried on elsewhere by the Second International. In the Russian context, the *external* management of the proletariat, acting by means of a disciplined clandestine party subordinated to intellectuals transformed into "professional revolutionaries," becomes a profession which refuses to deal with the ruling professions of capitalist society (the Czarist political regime being in any case unable to offer such opportunities which are based on an advanced stage of bourgeois power). It therefore became the *profession of the absolute management* of society.[13]

Despite Lenin's consistently optimistic promises about the communist revolution, many of those promises soon went sour in his post-revolutionary administration. Where he wrote glowingly that under "socialism all will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing," in fact this development was prevented by the Party. Within one decade, nobody would govern in turn, and nobody would become accustomed to the dictatorship of the top bureaucrat. At the later stage of Stalin, this devolution turned inward on itself: Stalinism is the application of bureaucratic force on its own membership.

It is all too easy for an armchair theorist to say, long after the fact, that the revolution eventually failed. This is not my purpose here, simply to reiterate the obvious. But today, the better part of a century after the Russian revolution, we have the privilege of hindsight about Stalinist genocide, the Lysenko scandal, the Gulag Archipelago, the dissolution of the USSR. Thus it is obvious to anyone that the higher stage of communist society was never attained in Lenin's country. Quite the opposite. Yet this should not prevent us from also recognizing Lenin's gigantic contribution to both Russian and world history. If Hegel's world historical heroes exist, then Lenin is surely one. He helped to lead Russia's desperate and nearly starving masses out of their centuries of feudalism and into a strong industrial nation. Lenin did so with the utmost ideals of human progress. But again, this goes without saying. My intention, rather, is to examine why the revolution began to fail almost immediately-- at the level of theory.

Its failure was its "practical" forgetting of the deeper philosophy about alienation. Part of that forgetting was in the cocksure defense of authority. The Party installed the principle of authority over every aspect of life, thereby reinstating the function of a power

external to and above the people, that is, the State. It did so with such thoroughness and eventually with such terror, that rather than the much vaunted withering away, it formed instead the rapid growth and rigidity of a totalitarian state.

Lately, it has often been suggested that this totalitarian practice was an expression of marxist totalism in theory; as though the complete imposition of power through terror was the natural outgrowth of a complete attempt to critique the origin, cause, and manifestation of class conflict and historical transformation. Whatever the merits of such current theory, which I cannot address here, allow me to point out that it fails to address the mechanisms of alienation--both those of totalitarianism and those of capitalist neo-liberalism. Hence it fails to move us any further in our surpassing of the conditions which it criticizes.

It is crucial that today we remember the results produced by this turn from disalienation toward pro-alienation, from participation to authority: Totalitarianism. It is not a philosophy of alienation that leads to totalism. It was instead the recuperation of alienation itself under the technocrats' authority that supported totalitarianism. The critique of alienation had to be buried so that an alienating mode of production could continue. Again, labor wound up separated from any genuine participation; the commodity produced again took precedence over labor as an alien power. The original meaning of "soviet" was a local workers' council. The term and its power was co-opted by the bureaucratic class. Hence we should ask ourselves now whether or not the continuation of this suppression of the concept "alienation" is at all aware of its complicity with totalitarianism; whether the postmodernist attempt to think without recourse to disalienation functions as an agreement with the judgment passed on alienation by the dictatorship.

Erasure of Early Marx

So it was that when Marx's youthful manuscripts on alienation were finally published, they were carefully rejected by the communist parties, who had long since learned to be more mature, hardened by the lesson in authority offered by Lenin, et al. Were they also hardened by their various commitments as party bureaucrats, forcibly representing the working class rather than giving in to its own immature demands for participation? A leading Marxist scholar and party member, Henri Lefebrve, translated Marx's rediscovered *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in the 1930s and commended those early manuscripts to the French Communist Party. As Greil Marcus tells the story, Lefebvre "was turned aside. The Soviet administrators of the canon deemed these early studies of alienation vaporous juvenilia, suppressed them, and Lefebvre went along, making his reputation in 1939 with *Le Matérialisme dialectique*. That was science" (145-146).14 Althusser's work, in favor since the mid-60s, belongs here too. By positing an "epistemological break" between the so-called "early" and "later" Marx, Althusser effectively banished the problem of alienation to a prescientific netherworld, which as a member of the French Communist Party was necessary. (The party had become one of the principle representatives of alienation, no doubt because they insisted on representing the proletariat by another class--the bureaucrat.) The break

this Althusserian reading posited, though, covered over a considerable amount of continuity. In the third volume of *Capital*, one that Althusser confessed that he had never read, Marx continued to use the "early" language:

> The relations of capital conceals indeed the inner connection [of the facts] in the complete indifference, exteriorization and *alienation* in which it places the worker in relation to the conditions of the realization of his own labor.15

In a booklength interpretation of the topic, Fritz Pappenheim emphasized the continuity of alienation which "was Marx's deepest concern and which became the central theme even of those of his writings which on the surface seem to deal exclusively with problems of economic history or economic theory" (83). This overarching concern throughout Marx's work has also been noted by Fredric Jameson, who views alienation as a cognate for "separation," "reification" and "commodification" (399):

> Marx's fundamental figure for social development and dynamics (a figure that runs through the *Grundrisse*, connecting the 1844 manuscripts in an unbroken line to *Capital* itself); that is the fundamental notion of *separation* (as when Marx describes the production of the proletariat in terms of their separation from the means of production--i.e., enclosure, the exclusion of the peasants from their land).16

Jameson passes from this figure of alienation throughout Marx to propose that it has become even more relevant today, not less, "for the diagnosis of postmodernism" (399). Nevertheless, Jameson's claim about the increasing relevance of the term has not been matched by other developments in theory so far.

And so it was also in 1965 that an article typical of the genre, "To Finish with Alienation," published in the journal *Esprit* was chosen for a fierce rejoinder by the Situationists.17 The article's author, J.M. Domenach, was a figure in the Christian left in France, a theological position that the Situationist rejoinder underscored by linking him to the "embarrassing vulgarity" of being a kind of *priest*, as opposed to believing his view that the term alienation was vulgarized. His essay is denounced as serving a "precise confusionism" much in the manner that revolutionaries have always denounced the ideology of clerics. And in that clerical tradition as a "valet of power's cultural spectacle," Domenach mistakenly tried to bury a contested term on the basis of the confusions to which the contest had led--"in order to 'return' to some simplified rationalism which never had the efficacity the nostalgic liberals now attribute to it" (184). What such moves forget is that the confusion over terms becomes greater as a result of a significant contest, a struggle over the meaning of words, and a struggle that grows increasingly prey to confusions as the importance of those words increases. I want to quote the Situationist's conclusion, as it is a brilliant moment in this contest, a conclusion that condenses a number of these themes into a keen and unanswerable formula:

> The *truth* of a concept is revealed not by an authoritarian purge, but by the coherence of its use in theory and in practical life. It is not important that a priest at the pulpit renounces the use of a concept that he would *never* have known *how* to use. Let us speak vulgarly since we're dealing with priests: alienation is the point of departure for everything--providing one departs from it (184).

From the point of view of modern history, it was the situationists who knew how to "depart" from alienation. Their attention to everyday life and their search for a new "Northwest Passage" into a revolutionary situation under contemporary conditions came together in a series of created crises, culminating in their major contribution to the near revolution that shut down France through most of May '68.18 And they realized that conceptual coherence was not due to an idealist rationality, but to its dialectical developments to and from praxis. Alienation was conceptually crucial because they had managed to create ephemeral situations (not representations) of disalienation. And to deny the concept of alienation would be to accept the general banalization of mass culture which repressed those situations.

Hence the most damning charge against Domenach is reminiscent of my miniature (and admittedly unfair) portrait of Engels above: "Domenach does not even want to 'finish with' the concept of alienation.... [he] wants people to stop talking about alienation so that they will become *resigned to it"* (183). This is precisely where the supposed sophistication of a theoretical rejection of alienation overlaps with and supports the more blunt suppression of the notion by the bureaucratic Party and the technocratic factory system. They ultimately wear the same style of resignation. Engels apologizes for its necessity and denounces the autonomists; Lenin constructs the dictatorship bureau and refuses the disalienation of proletarian participation in self-governing; and western socialists under the thumb of the Comintern follow suit by dropping the theory of alienation. Along with this general resignation, they all attempt to substitute the simpler notion of "exploitation" in place of the more troubling notion of alienation. To be exploited seems more obvious, and it is theoretically only possible under capitalism, not under socialism. This allowed the left to continually denounce the *exploitation* of workers on the basis of capitalism's expropriation of surplus-value, but to simultaneously avoid any question of the *alienation* of workers under totalitarian systems. In Engels' apology for authority, we can hear the sort of rhetorical question that would ask of the worker: "What do you mind of a little alienation so long as you are not economically exploited? For now we represent your interests for you!" But by the time later intellectuals got done with it, alienation could not even be admitted at all. It was a myth, a wisp of romantic imagining that had evaporated under modernization. We must acknowledge here that it was evaporated by the apologists of totalitarianism in which the masses are not present, but represented. That is, economically, culturally, politically represented by the class in the bureaucracy. Though of course the masses now had more access to the means of consumption since exploitation was lessened, the means of production were still not available to them. Yet being in the unenviable position where your life is produced for you, not by you, is as good a definition of alienation as any.

And so it was too that Regis Debray recently attacked Guy Debord, the late head of the Situationist International, author of *The Society of the Spectacle*, a chief instigator of the near revolution in France in May 1968, and marxist theorist of the pervasive alienation under postmodern conditions. Debray attacked Debord as one of the reigning Others who must be slain (in addition to semiotics) before Debray enthrones his own "mediology." Debray's dismissal of Debord begins and ends with this rejection of a so-called politics of authenticity for which "alienation" is an embarrassingly outmoded keyword.19

The Situationist Praxis of Disalienation

In their scintillating and vigorous defense of the Situationist Debord against Regis Debray's assault, T.J. Clark and Donald Nicholson-Smith succeed in turning the critique inside out.20 It is an interesting chapter in the history of "alienation". They acknowledge that while Debray has after all touched on several weaknesses, his assault is well worth a rejoinder because it exemplifies a much broader misreading of Debord; more important, it repeats the recuperated Left's rejection of revolutionary thought, which it replaces with empty reformisms and in Debray's case, another positivist sociology which interprets the past.21 Clark and Nicholson-Smith highlight what is still at stake for us:

> We shall never begin to understand Debord's hostility to the concept "representation," for instance, unless we realize that for him the word always carried a Leninist aftertaste. The spectacle is repugnant because it threatens to generalize, as it were, the Party's claim to be the representative of the working class (25).

Their defense remembers that it was just this, "continual pressure put on the question of representational forms in politics and everyday life, and the refusal to foreclose on the issue of representation versus agency" that made the Situationist praxis the "deadly weapon it was for a while" (29). Against the establishment (Left and Right) practice of representationalism as well as against an existentialist or Beat-mystic-adventurist "free subjectivism," the Situationist avant-garde pressed this dialectical opposition by negation and experimentation rather than falling back into one or other of the prevailing terms. They once defined the creation of *situations* as a "search for a dialectical organization of partial and transitory realities" that were ephemeral rather than a movement of "rationalist progress (which according to Descartes, 'makes us masters and possessors of nature')." The situation is not utopian so much as it is an experimental intervention in the process of subjectification; or as the Situationists wrote in the same editorial, it is "the practice of arranging the environment that conditions us. Whoever constructs situations, to apply a statement by Marx, 'by bringing his movements to bear on external nature and transforming it...transforms his own nature at the same time.'"22 This is the precise meaning of *production* in Marxism, the necessary work of producing ourselves as social beings. It implies neither the mastery of nature, nor a return to a prior nature that has been lost. Alienation is to be separated from the means of producing yourself. For Marx, human nature is paradoxical, because it is our difference from any nature. Culture and history begin where nature leaves off. Rather than a submission to nature or a repression

of nature, the production of human values is the transformation of ourselves in the transformation of nature. This does not imply, however, that social production is entirely open to free will; we only interact within a set of historical conditions. Marx summed up this dialectical complexity on the opening page of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in an oft-cited passage that will be worth quoting in this connection. Human beings, he reminds us,

> make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

The task for theory is to hold in mind this necessary tension between free production and unfree history. The task for praxis is to encounter tradition with critical activity. The Situationists had the sovereign audacity to lower production to the level of everyday life by making a variety of experiments with the circumstances history had transmitted to them--a move that inevitably discovered that a disalienation of production could be fleetingly constructed by negating the dominant forms of alienation. Sadie Plant also argues that the Situationist praxis of disalienation was aligned with "contingency" and a "distrust of all foundations, essences, and absolutes" (62). Hence, theory should not imagine that this was an unveiling of an *a priori* nature. Created situations were experimental and transitory. They were thought of as "passageways" rather than as destinations. Disalienation, then, was not a recovery from alienation so much as a *negation* of historically specific forms of alienated production.

In terms of the debate around the (dis)alienating effects of informatization, the leading Situationist, Guy Debord, referred to it--directly albeit cryptically--in his 1988 *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. I am not the only one to notice the continued usefulness of Debord's critique of the "spectacle" for the present spectacularization of new media technologies.[23] Meanwhile, the Situationist movement is justifiably criticized for putting a great deal of revolutionary weight on free subjectivity. Interesting enough however, they also noted this potential criticism and attempted to address it. Even at the most extreme articulation of subjective freedom there, in Vaneigem's sometimes jejune work from 1965, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, we find a certain canny disavowal of any reading which would emphasize a pure unfettered subjectivity. The notion of subjectivity there is primarily a dialectical negation of imposed "roles" which alienate since those who perform such roles do not have access to the production of roles (99-114). And the invention of a "radical subjectivity" was not some individual withdrawal into inner free-play ("You can't make it on your own"), but was discussed only in relation to a collective front in which consciousness-raising was the recognition of oneself in others who were also attempting to find something beyond their identification with roles. For even though roles have more and more become interchangeable, this process is itself the latest effect of power. Radical subjectivity could be lived only in direct engagement with the world, only as a working through of the objective conditions one is handed (90-92). So-called spontaneity was not the unveiling of a true self prior to its alienation. But it *was* a

dialectical means to creatively negate the expropriation of one's own identity through a process of experimentation. In Sadie Plant's view, radical subjectivity "is actually made possible by the development of capitalist forces of production and the contestation of the relations in which they arise. It is a free consciousness which emerges in the course of its daily resistance to the spectacular relations in which it arises and will decide its own nature in the process of their final contestation" (74). This is dialectics, not romanticism.

A Poststructuralist Reinterpretation of Alienation

It may be argued that I have framed this debate with coarse generalizations or that I have mistakenly confused two very distinct views of alienation here. Engels does not after all deny alienation. Indeed he affirms its existence precisely by arguing that authority must be exercised over the worker. It is merely unfortunate, a by-product of modern production. To argue that it ought to be reduced as much as possible under these conditions, as he did, is not the same as arguing that alienation is an indefensible category for theory. The latter position, the current rejection of alienation, is more radical than I have so far allowed. While it may be true in some unproven manner that the theoretical disavowal of alienation has an uncanny similarity in its effects as that practical abandonment of it by proto-stalinists, still we must admit that there are important differences yet to be acknowledged.

The reason "alienation" remains untenable is that it always depends upon the ground of a "true" self, of a primal unalienated nature beneath the artifices of power. Disalienation persists in this romantic daydream of some presence beyond representation. Yet today we know that this daydream cannot amount to much, since poststructuralism has shown the impossibility of presence and the omnipresence of discourse. Subjectivity cannot be unfettered and free, since it was always already predicated upon the structure of language and the conditions of discourses. The "natural" subject will always be indistinguishable from the cultural. Thus the whole theory of alienation becomes an embarrassing anachronism, a regression to the romantic juvenilia of a vaguely conceived Nineteenth Century Humanism.

In 1966, Foucault's fundamental "archeology of the human sciences," *The Order of Things*, created a stir by announcing the imminent disappearance of an epistemology grounded in the figure of "Man." The humanism of the human sciences was merely a recent epistemological formation, belonging to the nineteenth century. But Foucault saw the contemporary emergence of a new epistemological formation that would displace Man with Language, anthropology with textuality. (Today we have come to call this poststructuralism, but in 1966, Foucault's examples were largely the avatars of structuralism--Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Lacan.) In the entire history of Western culture, the one he recounts, Language and Man have been exterior to each other. Only one or the other could occupy a central place at the foundation of thought. Foucault explicitly included Marx in that nineteenth century episteme, implying that marxism too was vanishing along with its anthropological ground. "Marxism exists in nineteenth century thought like a fish in water" (262). Indeed, in Foucault's rather polemical instigations, Marx's thought was wholly enveloped by the episteme of "production" which replaced

the older eighteenth century focus on "exchange," as reflected in the shift from the analysis of wealth to political economy (252). Marx is in the same boat as Ricardo, and his critique of political economy is still grounded in the figures of production found throughout the shift away from the figures of exchange in the previous episteme. According to Foucault, this epistemic shift in the economic discourses cannot be explained by recourse to the base in capitalism--though he never explains why this is so.

What concerns me more directly is the radical historicizing of *humanism* in *The Order of Things*. Humanism was the central version of that nineteenth-century episteme with its "analytic of finitude." And thus marxist-humanism, which like the fish in water also cannot survive outside of it, would become the next historical victim of the fundamental break whose impending arrival Foucault adumbrated. This conclusion was taken to be a slap at Sartre, who reigned over intellectual life in France at the time, and who insisted that Marxism was still the unsurpassable horizon of all thought. In retrospect, it turned out to be more than some personal skirmish.[24]

We have traversed a received interpretation of poststructuralism and its rejection of the assumptions undergirding humanism. Unfortunately, it would take more than my little essay to complicate this poststructural consensus that circulates as a kind of sophisticated folklore, but I should suggest here that other readings are plausible. Moreover, I assume that the principle texts of poststructuralism are not so easily summed up in this general interpretation to which I have gestured so far. Derrida, e.g., succeeds in showing that presence cannot enter into representation, not that it doesn't exist. Readers who force deconstruction to that conclusion merely repeat, in form, the logical-positivist interpretation of Wittgenstein. They too overlooked the deeper sense of his conclusion: "About which we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent." This does not mean that everything that exists can be said, as the logical-positivists concluded. (Thus Foucault's "archeology of a silence" did not try to articulate the voice of Madness, though it did not therefor assume that it did not exist.) Likewise, the deconstruction of representations does not allow us to conclude that presence does not exist. It only strictly allows us to conclude that it does not exist in representation, that it is always deferred in the structure of differences, that re-presentation in itself is founded on the absence of what it re-presents, and thus has no ultimate foundation. It also permits us to state the contemporary moral of textuality: Representation should not pretend to seek its ground or center or guarantee in an *a priori* essence, truth, presence, nature. But it was Kant who had already argued that noumena are always already phenomena for consciousness, due to the categories of perception. The limit of reason was thus the limit of phenomenology. Derrida furthers this limit beyond the Kantian percept-concept pair toward the act of thinking itself, an act which relies on re-presentation. (Thus even the Kantian categories of cognition can no longer be taken as a priori, since they are constituted in language.) As for the omnipresence and omnipotence of discourse, one would still have to explain why Foucault himself went on from that epistemic analysis discussed above to later use the term "non-discursive" in his definition of a *dispositif* , and why he proposed to reintroduce an "aesthetics of existence" and a practice of ethical self-fashioning in his final works. This is most certainly not a return to humanism with its assumption of a true self, a real depth of authenticity beneath the layers of falsifying alienation--but it is an

interesting reworking of the *problematic of alienation*. The last Foucauldian turn in *The Care of the Self* has yet to be read in relation to the experiments of the situationists. Where Foucault began to wonder "why everyone's life should not become a work of art"--and this as a way out of the normalizing sciences--this is very much what the situationists attempted to do in their sublation of the "artwork" as museum object, along with the "artist" as singular genius. Beyond this avant-garde overcoming of the next stage in the historical development of the arts, "life itself will be a style."25 What Foucault called a "stylization" of existence shares with this situationist praxis a radical departure from the notion of a "lifestyle" that one consumes rather than produces. It was Debord who said that art "is a matter of producing ourselves, and not things that enslave us."26 In retrospect, the critique of normalization mirrored the critique of alienation in this regard: both moved toward a creative work on oneself. For Foucault, this was to update and transform an ancient practice; for Debord, this was to recreate the "psychogeography" of one's environment in order to experiment with the passage of time and the serious play of the production of everyday life, leading inexorably into collective experiments.

In sum, the current rejection of a philosophy of alienation on the grounds that it is incompatible with the success of poststructuralism does not quite stand up to sustained scrutiny. What has been overlooked is the return of the repressed in the form of revolutionary actions taken on the part of disalienation, actions which find no explanation in the theory which denies that alienation exists.27 And while it would be wise to deconstruct any logocentric appeal to a ground beyond representation, to the presence of something prior to the effects of culture, we must also be wary about lapsing into quietism as a result.

One way to avoid quietism is to think, along with Foucault, about the contestation of power, games of dominance and submission. In this view, alienation is the result of domination, not the falsification of a prior authenticity. Disalienation would not somehow be more "true to nature," but it would be a change in the balance of power relations. Against the powers of "normalization" we should not counter with something more true or real--that is, more normal. For that would simply be to repeat the dominant strategy. Instead, we should attempt to open up a space for the unthought and for differences. Contrary to the commonly found complaint that Foucault's version of power prevents any thought of resistance, a kind of rumor that one hears from those who have never wanted to resist power themselves, Foucault never ceased to speak about specific forms of resistance.28 His entire project is offered as a "tool kit" for oppositional movements which are already underway when he writes a history of their present.29

Foucault's works are specific genealogies of what Max Weber called the encroaching "rationalization" of all modern institutions--with its attendant separation of spheres into specialized activities. Weber's influence on Frankfurt School Critical Theory has to do with a broader application of "alienation" to social developments of administration and bureaucracies. C. Wright Mills contrasts this broader application by Weber with the Marxist focus on political economy:

> Marx's emphasis upon the wage worker as being "separated" from the means of production becomes, in Weber's perspective, merely one special case of a universal trend. The modern soldier is equally "separated" from the means of violence; the scientist from the means of enquiry, and the civil servant from the means of administration.... The series as a whole exemplifies the comprehensive underlying trend of bureaucratization. Socialist class struggles are merely a vehicle implementing this trend (50).

Whether alienation results from a universal administrative rationalization or from an economic expropriation of the means of production is not a question I would want to answer. I do want to raise the probability here that alienation can be caused by both. Moreover, today the two realms are difficult to distinguish since they have become interdependent. Capital accumulation--whether by the State or by private ownership--proceeds through increasing efficiency and new productions of technocratic rationality, while the technocratic development is dependent upon the fickle investment of capital. The postindustrial stage of an informational economy is only achieved through this interdependent process. Its attendant alienations, therefore, are likewise dual. It is for this very reason that Lyotard uses the phrase "capitalist technoscience" in his poststructuralist analysis of the postmodern condition.

Another way to avoid theoretical quietism in the face of oppression is to read the marxist texts on alienation in terms of its structuration in and through discourse and socioeconomic position rather than as a kind of primal romanticism. One could thereby rearticulate the theory of alienation for a poststructuralism by rereading the supposedly "young Hegelian" Marx of circa 1844. It is possible to see in those texts on alienation not so much an outmoded romanticism but rather a complexity that is rarely recognized. If not for Hegel, at least for Marx, the terms "essence" and "alienation" are not imagined as being somehow prior to social relations. Both are constituted by the dialectics of social discourse, by the relations of production.

From Hegelian Dialectics

In Hegel's case, this matter is too convoluted for a full treatment here. And the Hegelian dialectic is not one I wish to employ. Alienation for Hegel is a recurring moment of negation in a dialectical process along a teleological trajectory toward Absolute Spirit. Alienation would be a necessary moment in the sublation of older modes of consciousness. Marx, of course, rejected this brand of dialectics as being far too "abstract."[30] It is an exemplary form of idealism, which Marx supplants with a materialist dialectic. Alienation then becomes not a process of an abstract consciousness, but rather a lived effect of material conditions. But we should remember that even in its idealist moment in Hegelianism, any movement toward disalienation was not simply to recover some lost Eden of the true, natural, essential. Disalienation was literally a process of *negation* of a negation. The only positivity allowed was defined as a dialectical relationship which moved forward into new realms by negating a prior negation. Thus an image of dialectical alienation is much more difficult to conceive--considering the

comparative ease with which we imagine alienation as a wedge separating one from a prior truth, nature, essence. How can we depict the negation of a negation?

While we tend to assume that the term "essence" naturally leads to an intolerable essentialism (inexorably sliding down to universal definitions of who we should be), when Marx and Hegel used the term essence, or *Wesen*, it cannot be translated quite so easily as that. While I agree with the general view that the Hegelian teleology leads to a dubious and idealist totalism, nevertheless Hegel cautioned that in the daily language of Germany, *Wesen*

> frequently means only a collection or aggregate: *Zeitungswesen* (the press), *Postwesen* (the post office), *Steuerwesen* (the revenue). All that these terms mean is that the things in question are not to be taken singly, in their immediacy, but as a complex, and then, perhaps, in addition, in their various bearings.... This usage of the terms is not very different in its implications from our own.[31]

We cannot help but notice that the implications of essence here, which is neither immediate nor singular, but rather a "complex," a situated relationship that leads us away from the very "essentialism" that is everywhere attacked today. We also should notice that each of Hegel's examples is closer to the notion of "apparatus" than to essentialism. Each is a functioning ensemble of disparate laws, discursivities, buildings, customs, etc. If this is closer to the meaning of "essence," then we need to rethink the criticism of a certain "essentialism" which in fact refers to this "complex" of "various bearings."

Toward a New Marxist Disalienation

Drawing on this complexity of Hegelian phenomenology where being is always already composite, when Marx refers to the "*das Menschliche wessen*," it is not necessarily the essential humanism that is damned by poststructuralist thought. For it was Marx who also wrote that the "human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations."[32] This notion of essence deliberately moves it from simple location in a given nature or ultimate presence. It is positioned instead as the result of society, not as the origin of social values. We are, as Aristotle intoned, the political animal. Marx's criticism of Hegel's and even Feuerbach's essentialist *Gattungswesen* or "species-being" is a crucial move away from older abstract forms of humanism toward Marx's insistence upon the "practical activity" that characterizes socialized humanity. Marx used the term "species-being" in his manuscripts of 1844, but these are working notes on the way to his critique of Feuerbach.[33] This critique departed from an emphasis on abstract and universal theory grounded in Feuerbachian or "Young-Hegelian" notions of perception, individualism, civil society, and interpretation. In a dialectical overcoming, Marx introduced an analysis more attuned to praxis, everyday production, socialization, historical infrastructure, and the need for change. By overthrowing that essentialist and abstract humanism, Marx did not thereby lose sight of alienation. This radically new form of humanism was then already attuned to the current concerns of poststructuralism: the construction by and

through language, discourse, ideology, the politics of culture, in sum, the irreducible sociality of the human. Marx would soon reject the pure subject-as-consciousness: "Language is as old as consciousness. It is practical consciousness which exists also for others.... Consciousness is thus from the very beginning a social product and will remain so...."[34] "Essence" in this case is not constitutive but is constituted by "materialism" broadly conceived. Marx overcame the essentialist limitations of both historical idealism (Hegel) and unhistorical materialism (Feuerbach) by a dialectical critique of one through the other in the period around 1844 to 1845. The resulting historical materialism proved to be analytically potent enough that more than a century and a half later finds us still working out of its framework.

Having complicated the critique of essentialism as the ground of disalienation, the next step is to examine the term "alienation" itself. I am still treating such terms nominalistically, that is, as they have been articulated in specific discourses. Translation from the German here is fraught with misdirection, as Struik and Milligan point out. There are two different German words that can and do get translated as "alienation" in English: *Entäusserung* and *Entfremdung* (58-59). Translation distinguishes between these, sometimes, by using "alienation" for the former and "estrangement" for the latter. But generally the distinction is lost. *Entäusserung* implies "a sale, a transference of ownership, which is simultaneously a renunciation" and at the same time, a connotation of externalization from oneself (58). *Entfremdung*, though, implies more narrowly a notion of estrangement without the legal and commercial overtones of *Entäusserung*. Marx uses both terms, but translation into English often dissolves the two into "alienation." Translation, then, conflates these varied senses of externalization, separation, estrangement, and transference of ownership. In the conclusion, I will recommend that we again use two distinct terms in place of alienation: divestment and disaffection.

An Adequate Recomposition?

To my knowledge, the most thorough study of the topic was written by Richard Schacht, who critiqued the various discourses about alienation, up through Hegel and Marx, its psychological inflection in post-freudians Fromm and Horney, its existentialist uses, and its widespread yet diverse deployment throughout sociology. Whether or not there is some regularity in this dispersion of the discourses of alienation will have to remain an open question for now. Schacht tries to show that there is not, indeed, that several uses of the term seem incompatible. He sets out with a Wittgensteinian goal to learn whether or not the family of resemblances amid these many uses of the term will actually reveal that there is something essential underwriting them; that is, if the word "alienation" functions in a language game that the philosopher can leave as it is (5, 254-255). Moreover, Schacht eventually wants to purify and delimit the term, to lead it into a correct denotation for future use. His study moves from describing to prescribing. I suppose that would be an honorable and practical task, yet it is also destined to failure. It is by now too late to trim down an unruly and multifarious growth of this sort. By the year of his publication, 1970, the uses of the term "alienation," as Schacht's study reveals, were already as entrenched as they were inconsistent. The day for a singular dictionary

entry has already passed. Therefore, unlike Schacht, I do not wish to correct all prior uses of the term.35

On the other hand, since most prior uses of the term underscore a discontent that still remains today, it will not do to simply forget that the word was ever used in the past. I want to clarify how the concept can be defined in the context of contemporary theory. In doing so, I have tried to remain within the purview of poststructuralist suspicion about originary agency and universal essentialism. The task here is to find a way of talking about the persistence of alienation without lapsing into outmoded discourses that assumed a given nature which was distorted by alienations of whatever cause.

As I have pointed out earlier, the ideology of information tends to promise a new version of participation and engagement, of dialogue and connection--in sum, a new disalienation. We can read backwards from those promises to the lack and longings they address. When an ad slogan is effective, it reveals in its own calculated distillation the very lack it promises to flood with fulfillment. "Reach out and touch someone," then, can be read back as addressing a lack of contact, a need for a technique of contact. It explicitly depicts a technology of disalienation between mobile and dispersed family members who are out of touch. Many people today must feel as though everything is remote, as though even access to communication and dialogue are out of reach, for AT&T has produced a remarkable series of such ads. A more recent promise plays repeatedly through numerous channels: "It's all within your reach." This promise, and the lack it addresses, is preceded by a collage of happily connected groups of people--they are connected however only through the new media and conferencing technologies that AT&T is selling.

Directly opposite from this promise we find the criticism of informatization as a new phase of alienation. In extremis, Baudrillard equates the explosion of information with the "implosion" of the social. Reversing the instrumental definition of *entropy* in cybernetics, he suggests that it is not the decay of information that leads to disorganization, but rather the imperative superabundance of information, the over-solicitation of ubiquitous information, in all its multifarious inconsistency as noise, that leads to the decay of social coherence. Baudrillard likewise proposes that communication has become so overwhelmingly omnipresent that it is a kind of "ecstasy" which should be translated as spellbound, entranced, transported--hypnotically dissociated. Moreover, he extrapolates from this an "implosion" of mediated meaning that complements the "implosion of the social in the masses."36 Baudrillard wonders if sociologists ought to reverse the cybernetic equation of information loss (noise) with entropy. This does not necessarily pertain at the level of society, where social cohesion and the public sphere implodes in direct correlation to the massive influx of information flows. Informational excess in itself contributes to social entropy, not the other way around.

But how are we to define alienation and disalienation in this informational context? First, let me note that those opposed promises and criticisms are perhaps markers of a symbiotic system. The promise of disalienation addresses an existing desire for communication, yet this desire is one that is stimulated and even constructed by the fact

of a technocratic process that has led to an informational system, with the separations it has already introduced. "The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it as separate," Debord insisted. On the other hand, criticism of informational alienation itself depends upon the new possibilities of disalienation arising within the technologies of information. In this view, the effect of informational development is wickedly paradoxical: it connects people only by first disconnecting them, and it separates them only by informing them, informing them by connecting them with information. It seems to herald an era of universal and democratic participation in the production of information, but only through a kind of totalizing technocracy that has already precluded all prior forms of community. Everything is permitted, but only when it expresses itself as information. Yet new info-productions are made possible. This new horizon seems to stimulate infinite communication, but only by limiting other cultural possibilities. I can only hope to clarify how this paradox is manifested, but unfortunately, unlike some Moses of postindustrial deserts, I cannot lead us out of this circle. It will be more heuristic to treat informational developments dialectically.37

Divestment in the Infrastructure and Metastructure

The term "alienation" is fraught with etymological contra-dictions. To use such terms is to risk an inevitable inversion of one's intentions. Misunderstanding in this case results from reading the opposite sense of the term from the one the author assumed. In order to avoid this all-too-easy confusion, I want to recompose the term into two related concepts. These two are linked and yet they are not the "same." Their signification slides in relation to each other. I will translate "alienation" as *divestment*.38 And for the second sense of alienation as "estrangement" I will use *disaffection*. The former is a structural concept, a position in the relations of production. "Divestment" carries the economic overtone that I wish to sound out. The capitalist who controls the means of production (whether as baron or as State, as dictator or as corporation) is *invested* in production in every sense of the word. Conversely, the worker and consumer, separated from the means of production, are *divested*. Their interests are socioeconomically separate--accounted for only in a limited and secondary manner by those who are themselves directly invested in production. This is a structural term since it pertains even when individual workers and consumers are unaware of their divestment, especially when they confess to no particular feeling about it. Divestment need not be conscious nor felt. It is a placeholder in the political economy; it is a subaltern position in the socioeconomic relations of production. In the usual sense of power, divestment also effectively separates one from creative participation in self-management and decision-making. In the last instance, this separation is enforced either by the legitimation of private property or by hierarchies of authority. And the law always refers to the sword, as Foucault reminds us. On a more everyday basis, the mundane reproduction of this relation of production is maintained by conformity to custom. Nevertheless, this place of divestment often enough leads to discontent. When this discontent becomes felt and conscious, those who are divested become disaffected. "Disaffection" is therefore a term for the kind of alienation that has been personally realized, not just economically lived. We have accepted that "the personal is political" especially when disaffection results from divestment; when the divested directly correlate to the disaffected.

In sum, we need to posit two levels of alienation: the given socioeconomic position which is forcefully separated from the means of production (divestment), and the secondary frustration and discontent with this restricted position that leads to a dis-identification with the status quo (disaffection). Again, the first is objective and the second is subjective. And while it is not universally necessary (or "human"), the disindentification of the disaffected generally follows upon the structural position which dis-identifies people from their activity in cultural and economic production. We need not generate an intellectual theory to convince people that this should be so. Like Foucault's method and Marx's praxis, we simply need to join in with that voice from below that is already trying to speak.

In the current phase of the informatization of socioeconomic activity under late capitalism, these two levels of alienation also enter a new phase. For we can readily amplify these two levels, divested and disaffected, with two levels of the postindustrial informational forces of production: the base and the superstructure.

The first level simply continues the process of modern technocratic mass production, which has now shifted decisively toward informational technologies and services. This level is increasingly given over to the production of new media technologies and to the maintenance of a layer of expertise. Wealth, value, power, and participation is concentrated and centralized in the hands of a small class. Andrew Carnegie is replaced by Bill Gates, while William Randolph Hearst turns into Rupert Murdoch. The mill and the factory, trade in goods and the exports of raw materials still continues. But these older forms of capitalism are overshadowed and even converted to the support of transnational corporate entities devoted to the commodification of services, communications, media, and knowledges. Moreover, those older forms of mass production are increasingly permeated by information technologies: automated assembly lines, computer-assisted design, medical equipment to interpret bodily signals, programs to manage agribusiness, and so forth. The infrastructure still operates to contain and manipulate the masses; for the masses work to develop the output of the infrastructure. The individual working within this infrastructural project is hardly less *divested* than the worker in a nineteenth century steel mill. Hence, the base level continues to carry the classic alienation, the two levels of divestment and disaffection. Literary works have already explored the "poor clerk," a figure who works within the informatized infrastructure and who is conspicuously disaffected. We find this figure from the beginnings of bureaucratization (Gogol's "The Overcoat" and Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener"), to its institutional triumph (Kafka's K), and in recent tales about a class that Douglas Coupland calls "microserfs."

In the second level, at the superstructure of cultural production, we find again the dynamic interplay of both divestment and disaffection. Here an analysis will necessarily be less simple in order to pace the convolutions of culture. For there has never been anything like a simple reflection between infrastructure and superstructure. This correspondence stems from classical marxist theory, and its positing of a singular logic that connects the two levels as an objective socioeconomic reading of history leads to a number of problems. I should call this level something like a "metastructure" instead, in

order to mark its distinction from that reflective and deterministic logic. Cultural production is multifarious; its products oppose each other much as its producers are at odds. The *metastructure* contradicts itself since it sometimes reflects but sometimes opposes or deviates from the infrastructural level. While the ruling ideas might be the ideas of the rulers, this is not always the case. Sometimes the ruling ideas conflict with the ideological supports of the infrastructure.39 And the metastructure manifests a certain diachronic complexity--it contains the old and the new side by side. We will recall that Raymond Williams acutely designated three diachronic aspects as the "emergent, dominant, and residual." Yet even the emergent alone is marked by conflict and contradiction. Thus the metastructure is reflective of the infrastructure, but its mirrors are of the funhouse variety. The fundamental question to ask here, one so often forgotten, is about who has creative participation in symbolic production, e.g., in mass media, and who is objectively divested from production? Clever interpretations in Cultural Studies circles about the "discourse of fandom" and the poaching of subversive meaning by audiences should not lead us to forget that there is still an important difference between the producers and the consumers: divestment.

Beyond these somewhat preliminary suggestions, we should see that the problem of (dis)alienation remains immediately relevant to every pronouncement about the postmodernist Age of Information. It is this very contradiction at the center of the new informational discourses--as alienation versus disalienation--that generates the dialectic of our future. This leaves quite a lot of critical work still to be done. What are the new guises of alienation? What other alternative traditions of marxist theory were able to cultivate Marx's concept? How do the diverse postcolonial revolts against imperialism and neo-colonial capital approach the problematic of alienation? What forms of political practice and liberation help to overcome alienating structures today? One thinks here, for example, about how the Zapatistas' praxis is attempting to get around and beyond the Leninist strategy. Which authors provide us with the most revealing accounts of divestment and disaffection? How can we expose the traces of production amid the ideologies of postmodernist mass media? What tactics in everyday life are successfully disalienating? What new materialist forms of the cooperative production of values have emerged? Or...?

Notes

1 From his introduction to *History & Class Consciousness*, trans., Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, page xxii. This was composed years after he had published the famous essay on reification--which treated alienation only in its aspect of objectification and commodification. Since then, Lukács explains, he read the 1844 manuscripts and realized that he had conflated *Vergegenständlichung* (objectification or thingification) with alienation proper. A large degree of objectification and externalization is necessary, according to Marx. Lukács attempts to enlarge and correct

his own view of reification, because as he wrote, the "alienation of man is a crucial problem of the age in which we live...." (xxii).

2 Howard Rheingold in *The Virtual Community* and his edition of *The Whole Earth Catalog* is an exemplar of the "new media=disalienation" side. It is mirrored by innumerable advertising promises too. One should include the influential, eye-popping, techno-hip libertarian magazine, *Wired*. At about the same level of Rheingold's discourse, and diametrically opposed, is Theodore Roszak's *The Cult of Information*. It is mirrored by widespread cynicism about those same promises, and a suspicion among some intellectuals that the informatization of society actually exacerbates alienation. A roundtable debate between luminaries (John Perry Barlow and Kevin Kelly as pro-virtual community versus Sven Birkerts and Mark Slouka as con) published in the August 1995 issue of *Harper's* is an exemplary argument between the two camps over the (dis)alienation of new networks. "What Are We Doing On-Line? A Heated Debate About a Hot Medium." Such discussions are frequent in cafes and breakrooms. The topic of disalienation also appears in two interviews I conducted for *UnderCurrent* with Mark Poster and Richard Barbrook.

3 The sources of this view are numerous, but to mention an overview, Frank Webster's *Theories of the Information Society* is useful on the critical schools. A special issue of *The Monthly Review* on "Capitalism and the Information Age" contains interesting updates of marxist critiques in this regard (Vol. 48, n3, July-August 1996). See especially "Virtual Capitalism: The Political Economy of the Information Highway" by Dawson and Foster 40-58 and "World Wide Wedge: Division and Contradiction in the Global Information Infrastructure" by Golding 70-85.

4 To read the three volumes of *Capital* is to wander inside an enormous repetition-compulsion of quantification. Marx was compelled to go over this mystery of value incessantly in a scientistic attempt to rescue it from capitalist appropriation. Value must rest on some measurable foundation in that work, and Marx wears himself out attempting to prove, i.e., through formulas of surplus-value, that he can beat the political economy at its own language game. Whether or not he succeeded, the problem of value itself returns to haunt every page.

5 Toward the end of his career, Sartre shifted his articulation of "alienation" from its existentialist accent on inevitability back to a Marxist emphasis on relations of production in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. But this shift was too late and too little known for the general reception of existentialism that I am evoking here.

6 Engels' apology "On Authority" was first published in 1874. Lenin relied on this essay and on Engels in general in his optimistic prerevolutionary work on *The State and Revolution* of 1917. See pages 481-485 in the anthology edited by Lewis Feuer, *Marx & Engels: Basic Writings on Politics & Philosophy* Garden City: Anchor, 1959. Lenin did not apply the principle of authority there to anything beyond the need for the proletariat to seize state power--or more accurately to smash the bourgeois state apparatus--and for the consequent centralization of production in a collective and proletarian-controlled

economy. However, after the revolution, Lenin's actions contradicted his theory. It is common knowledge that after the revolution, Lenin was deeply involved in the steady increase of power of the Bolsheviks over local working class revolts, viz., the Kronstadt tragedy, and of the rapid growth of the Party's authority over all aspects of life in the USSR. Lenin's numerous statements to the effect that the Party was the real proletariat cannot hide the fact that the new postrevolutionary state was a power above the people, run by a class of separate bureaucrats, whose decrees were enforced by the military, the police, and the prisons. This is what Debord meant by the folly of "representation." The original "soviets" were local workers' councils which sprang up in revolutionary creativity, offering direct participation in civic, economic, and everyday life to the people. But these local movements were expropriated and then silenced by the new Soviet state which centralized all decisions. Moreover, Lenin pushed for the rapid industrialization of Russia by importing modern technology--and though he named this the capitalist forces of production, still he rationalized that under the Party-as-proletariat which ideally had the best interests of the workers in mind, those same forces of production would not bear the same "exploitation". The notion of "alienation"--originally a much broader concept--was quickly forgotten. Lenin openly praised the Taylorization of factory workers. In other words, Engels' old essay on Authority was perhaps too prophetic. Hierarchy, discipline, obedience, and technocracy supplanted all the optimism of those prerevolutionary theorists. The continued alienation of the common worker under Leninism was widespread even before Stalin took this to the next stage: the internalization of bureaucratic terror on itself. See notes below for more details about this history.

7 This citation from Engels' "On Authority" is from the translation online in the *Marx/Engels Internet Archive*, available at http://csf.colorado.EDU/psn/marx/. It is also from the translation by Robert C. Tucker, editor, *The Marx-Engels Reader*; New York: W. W. Norton and Co., second edition, 1978, pp 730-733.

8 Lenin wrote in "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" that Taylorism "...like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analyzing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc. The Soviet Rebublic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the acheivements of science and technology in this field. The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organization of administration with the up-to-date acievements of captialism." (qtd by Simon Mohun in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* ed., Tom Bottomore, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991, page 300). This text is also found in Lenin's *Collected Works* Vol. 27, page 259. The enthusiastic imposition of a Taylorized labor process from the central authority was already implied by Engels.

9 This argument became a recurring discourse; it rejects two extremes: on the one hand, the anarchists who simply want to smash the state, but have no plan for the creation of successful socialist society. They have no concrete grasp of the need for the future

authority of both proletarian violence to ward off reactionaries and for proletarian centralization of transportation, communication, and large scale economic production. The anarchists are an "infantile disorder" from the left. On the other hand, the argument is against the more centrist-leaning Social-Democrats. The latter wish to preserve the state in order to reform it. They believe in the effectiveness of parliamentary forms of democracy. But the Marxist-Leninist criticism insists that this is merely another form of bourgeois opportunism, and one that is afraid of a real revolution which would necessitate the creative destruction of the existing state apparatus as a prelude to a new proletarian society in which the economy was in the hands of all by being centralized in the name of all. At the highest stage of communist culture, this would lead, according to both Marx and Lenin, to every form of power being held in common, dissolved in a society where the state has withered away because it is neither separate nor distinct from the people. The separate spheres of bourgeois bureaucrats--juridical, legal, military, educational, etc., would be fused together in new forms of proletarian participation.

Obviously this vision was never realized. Instead, the sprouts of such post-revolutionary councils and communards were stamped out in the name of central control under the Party. Moreover, the Party itself was strictly hierarchical, culminating at the top in the figure of Lenin. The Kronstadt tragedy is one proper name we can give to this disaster. For more detailed histories and eye-witness accounts of the Kronstadt massacre, where proletarian power was violently crushed by the Bolsheviks and then falsified by Lenin, see the material collected online at http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/2163/bolintro.html and also at http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia.html.

10 It will be of interest here that Marx continued to use scathing descriptions of modern factory conditions in *Capital*: "The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is, as we have already shown, finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that mechanism, constitute the power of the 'master.' This 'master,' therefore, in whose brain the machinery and his monopoly of it are inseparably united.... The technical subordination of the workman to the uniform motion of the instruments of labour, and the peculiar composition of the body of workpeople, consisting as it does of individuals of both sexes and of all ages, give rise to a barrack discipline, which is elaborated into a complete system in the factory, and which fully develops the before mentioned labour of overlooking, thereby dividing the workpeople into operatives and overlookers, into private soldiers and sergeants of an industrial army...." (Marx, *Capital* Vol 1. Chapter XV "Machinery And Modern Industry" Section IV, The Factory). My point is simply that after the revolution, the attempt to forge a communist economy was "still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it comes" (to reappropriate Marx from a different context in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*). The thesis that Russia and China became State Capitalist regimes is reasonable when looked at from the factory floor's alienations, where workers have no council either about the labor process or about civic life in their communities. Those scathing descriptions of capitalism's exploitation

and alienation of the proletariat are applicable likewise to the centralized economies undergoing emergency industrialization.

11 From Lenin's *State & Revolution* chapter 1, part 1.

12 From Lenin's *The State & Revolution*, chapter 6 part 3, "Kautsky's Controversy with Pannekoek."

13 This is one of the many observations in Guy Debord's short, dense, brilliant chapter on the betrayal of the proletariat as historical subject, "The Proletariat as Subject and as Representation" in his *Society of the Spectacle* 1967. I would happily advise anyone interested in my topic to read this chapter before anything else, as I cannot do it justice here. It is available online at http://cs.oberlin.edu/students/pjaques/etext/debgsociespec/index.html and in a sometimes better translation at http://www.nothingness.org/si/debord/SOTS/sotscontents.html

Debord continues this critique: "In the numerous arguments among the Bolshevik directors, Lenin was the most consistent defender of the concentration of dictatorial power in the hands of the supreme representatives of ideology. Lenin was right every time against his adversaries in that be supported the solution implied by earlier choices of absolute minority Power: the democracy which was kept from peasants *by means of the state* would have to be kept from workers as well, which led to keeping it from communist leaders of unions, from the entire party, and finally from leading party bureaucrats. At the Tenth Congress, when the Kronstadt Soviet had been defeated by arms and buried under calumny, Lenin pronounced against the leftist bureaucrats of the 'Workers' Opposition' the following conclusion (the logic of which Stalin later extended to a complete division of the world): 'Here or there with a rifle, but not with opposition. . . We've had enough opposition.'"

14 To be fair, I should note that Lefebvre eventually resurfaced with innovative studies based upon his thorough grasp of the problematic of alienation, and for awhile was viewed as the marxist theorist opposed to Althusser in France. These works are still influential today: *Critique of Everyday Life* 1947, *Introduction to Modernity* 1962 and *The Production of Space* 1974; three notable titles among several dozen.

15 Qtd. in Struik 235. About Marx's "lifelong concern with alienation," Struik also points toward F. Pappenheim's *The Alienation of Modern Man* 83. Another well-documented argument for this continuous concern is in David McLellan's "Alienation in Hegel and Marx" in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol 1, 37-40.

16 Jameson then claims, peculiarly, that "there has not yet...been a Marxism based on this particular figure" of *separation* and its cognates--alienation, reification, commodification. This claim reveals that although Jameson cites Debord several times throughout his book on the logic of postmodern culture--always the same citation about the "image as the final commodity form"--he is not on familiar terms with Debord's marxism, which is the

contemporary theory of *separation*. One could start here with Debord's opening chapter, "Separation Perfected" and continue from there to his film, *The Critique of Separation*.

17 "Domenach Against Alienation" originally appeared in the samizdat journal, *Internationale Situationniste* #10 in 1966. It is translated and excerpted in Ken Knabb's anthology 183-184.

18 It is common intellectual folklore to wave away this claim for the Situationists as a kind of post-revolt myth that they somehow cultivated, but the documentation contradicts this disbelief and is more in favor of my assessment. All the major Situationist publications are dated well before May '68. Also, they helped incite and took a leading role in the near revolution, attempting to push it first from the university to the factory, and then internationally. See René Viénet's *Enragés & Situationists in the Occupation Movement* and Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* and Ken Knabb's anthology. The record of Situationist publications also shows that they predicted the revolt and for years deliberately sought for a way to bring it about, while all other major publications were busy announcing the end of ideology, the end of history, Party cooperation, the end of alienation, the inevitability of managed reform, the stupidity of situationist claims, etc. In fact, the Situationists knew that they had already succeeded in bringing the avant-garde to the next historic step in the late '50s and early '60s, and that they had only to wait.

19 Debray's dismissal of Debord appeared as "Remarks on the Spectacle" in the *New Left Review*, 1995.

20 In the Winter 1997 issue of *October*, a leading journal of art history, is on Debord and the Situationists. It contains five articles on the S.I. as an avant-garde and also a dozen new translations of short articles on art from the S.I. journals of the late '50s to early '60s.

21 Without space to do justice to their arguments here (which would have to be reproduced in their entire length at some fifteen pages), they contextualize Debray's attack in terms of his own itinerary through various incarnations of the old Left organs, point out his "bare-faced amnesia" about his own involvements, how his attack mirrors the pattern of silence and misreading in general, and then derive four "corollaries" for the underbelly of four of the generally pejorative propositions about the S.I. that Debray and the institutional Left has displayed. Most of these devastating implications turn on the Left's failure to overcome its own complicity with totalitarianism--Stalinist and Maoist--and the resulting impotence of retheorizations that led nowhere.

22 "Editorial Notes: The Sense of Decay in Art" in the Winter 1997 issue of *October* 106-107. Originally in the 3rd issue of the *Internationale situationniste*, December 1959. The same issue of *October* reprints a Situationist criticism "of an 'anthropology' that is no longer speculative but structural and operational," one that attempts to extricate "once more 'human nature'" 139. This strongly suggests that philosophies of human nature were not acceptable for situationist praxis.

23 A provocative though non-scholarly essay by William Brown on "The Spectacle of Information" drawing on Guy Debord is available online in a journal I edit, *UnderCurrent* at http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ucurrent/uc5/5-brown.html. And Sadie Plant's study of the Situationists, *The Most Radical Gesture*, explores their relationship to the ensuing domains of poststructuralism and postmodernism, but she does not mention postindustrialism, informatization, or Debord's comments on "disinformation." Timothy Luke does however in his *Screens of Power*, especially pp 130-131.

24 An interview with Foucault in 1968 discussed this debate. "Foucault Responds to Sartre," in *Foucault Live*.

25 Lucien Goldmann on art after the separation of the spheres is overcome, in the same issue of *October* 105.

26 "Theses on the Cultural Revolution." *October*, op. cit.

27 Sadie Plant argues this point at greater length in *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*.

28 This complaint about Foucault is found in Baudrillard's *Forget Foucault* and in innumerable echoes. Sadie Plant, e.g., picks this up: "The paradigms of alienation, domination, and repression on which the revolutionary project has always relied all presuppose some lack, absence, or constraint, in which power is conceived as a negative force which merely inhibits that which already exists. But Foucault's conception of power as a productive and enabling force challenged all notions of the negativity required by dialectical thought. There can be no perspective from which power can be opposed, since power produces all perspectives, including that of its own resistance" 119. To Plant's credit, she then proceeds to show that the Foucauldian conception of power does not lead to the impossibility of resistance.

29 Of course, unlike those critics who repeat such a gossipy (non)reading of "Foucault = irresistible Power," one ought to be able to show that his lifelong praxis involved multiple actions aimed at altering the balance of powers. All three biographies of Foucault in print provide this in abundance. I reviewed them for *SubStance* #75 133-136.

30 "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic..." in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 170-193.

31 Hegel qtd. in Struik's introduction to *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 59-60.

32 From Marx's *Thesis on Feuerbach*, VI.

33 The 1844 manuscripts must be read in tandem with the concurrent texts of *The Holy Family*, in particular on Proudhon, and also of *The German Ideology* and the "Theses on Feuerbach." For another instance, I bear in mind the description of alienation in *German*

Ideology: "The crystallization of social activity...into an objective power above us...." One source for relevant passages is the anthology by Easton and Guddat, 1967.

34 From *The German Ideology* in Easton and Guddat 421-422.

35 Schacht's book, *Alienation*, also has a number of other shortcomings which I want to avoid. While it is a useful critique of a vast and varied terrain, it fails to acknowledge a lesson of the new social movements, beginning with feminism that "the personal is political." Schacht criticizes works which try to overlap the personal and political as though they fail to make rational distinctions. But alienation is one of the principle connections between these spheres. He also seems to have an obstinately insufficient grasp of the psychoanalytic notion of pre-consciousness, and this leads him to a confusionist reading of Karen Horney, where he complains that alienation must be either conscious or unconscious, but not both. This misses the point of Horney's analysis of neuroses which are precisely both. He dismisses her work without mentioning the key concepts of inhibition and anxiety found in her major text, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, a book he does not read--unfortunately enough, since its lucid discussion of the relations between individual psychology and cultural patterns is one place to begin to comprehend the links between personal and political alienation.

36 See *The Ecstasy of Communication*, 1988 and also "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media and the Implosion of the Social in the Masses" published in Woodward, 1980. Baudrillard eventually sees this implosion as an ironically promising development. The resulting "silent majority" of inert masses is in his view a new resistance to propaganda. It is impossible to stir up fervent fascist beliefs, e.g., in an era of meaningless simulacra. This "passive-aggressive" theory has a point, but it is misses others: wholesale commodification and of course, alienation.

37 The dialectical approach here is to keep in mind both the positive and negative at once, or as Jameson phrases it, "as both catastrophe and progress all at once" (1991 47). This is the sense in which Marx saw the proletarianization of a working class occurring only by first passing through the exploitation of capitalist industry on its way to a revolutionary potential.

38 I am indebted to Walter Kaufmann for this translation, "divestment," which is derived from his lengthy supplement to Schacht's study (lii). Nevertheless, I disagree with the tenor and substance of his essay, which pretends to go beyond Schacht in concluding that alienation is inevitable, human, often beneficial. Kaufmann completely neuters the critical force of this concept by framing it as plural and pragmatic. Preferable to Kaufmann's essay is Pappenheim's argument in *The Alienation of Modern Man*, especially pp. 105-136.

39 Perhaps Daniel Bell tries to deal with this contradiction in the metastructure in his *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, but he tends toward a conservative support of the rulers. My emphasis is closely aligned with Gramsci's argument that superstructures can

have a relatively independent logic and development. See, e.g., *Notebooks* II § 29, IV § 12, § 38.

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