CHAPTER THREE

THE FORMATION OF THE Episteme
A Study in Foucault's Intellectual Horizon
I. Introduction: From the ‘Epistemological Break’ to the Episteme

a. The Problems facing the Episteme

In the preceding chapter, I outlined the ‘epistemological break’ in European philosophy that leads to the possibility of what I have termed ‘tri-hierarchization’, and ended with how Darwin, Marx and Freud represent this break in the domains of physicality, materiality and mentality, respectively. There is, however, one major problem, a resolution of which is necessary to establish from this the episteme within which Foucault might work. This problem lies in the fact that while Darwin, Marx and Freud can operate singularly in their respective spheres, a true unveiling of tri-hierarchization would require a thinker to incorporate all the three domains in his or her dehierarchist analysis. In short, the three modes of thought that emerge in the mid-nineteenth century have the tendency to be reductionist, and it is only in bypassing this reductionism, especially manifest in the Marxist notion of materiality being the base which determines in the last instance the domains of mentality and physicality, that the episteme can be formed. I will label this fundamental problem as ‘reductionism’, and reserve it to show how it gets surpassed in a new form of political theory.

But before going into the more radical attempts at dealing with this reductionism, I will turn to two naïve reactions against it, one in the transcendental subjectivist and the other in the absolute objectivist direction—Phenomenology (as also Hermeneutics and Reception Theory) and structuralism (as also neo-positivism and analytical philosophy)—which both attempt to do away with reductionism but end up forming their own problematic systems of thought. Foucault shows, in a 1977 interview, how Phenomenology and reductionist Marxist thought worked hand in hand in the intellectual milieu of his youth:

...in our student days, people of my generation were brought up on these two forms of analysis, one in terms of the constituent subject, the other in terms of the economic in the last instance, ideology and the play of superstructures and infrastructures.

In a 1983 interview, Foucault shows further how the inadequacy of phenomenology to supplement Marxism led to the introduction of structuralism to attempt to do the same:

So, at first they tried to wed Marxism and phenomenology; and it was later, once a certain kind of structural thinking—structural method—had begun to develop, that we saw structuralism replace phenomenology and become coupled with Marxism... with the phenomenological spouse finding herself disqualified by her inability to address language, structuralism became the new bride.

I would study these two bodies of thought first to look into the ramification of the problem.

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b. *Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory*

Born in reaction to the chaos wrought upon European civilization by the implications of Marxist thought, phenomenology, in its ‘purest’ transcendental form is found in Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl shows in his *Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913) how knowledge is ‘apodictic’ to the subject who exercises directional ‘intentionality’ towards an object, performs an ‘epoche’ or the bracketing off of all other things in favour of the cognition of the intended phenomenon, and reaches the stage of a general ‘eidetic abstraction’ from the phenomenon itself. This is especially possible because for Husserl ‘reality’ is not given, but one that is constructed as a ‘Lebenswelt’, or a lived and subjectively intended world. It can be noticed how phenomenology regresses into a reductionism of the subject, and Foucault shows in a 1984 interview how his type of thought is at complete disjunction with this subjectivism:

> In the first place, I do indeed believe that there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere, I am very sceptical of this view of the subject and very hostile to it. I believe, on the contrary, that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty...on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment.

The last point that Foucault makes, that subjectivization is always in relation to cultural and historical constraints, is what leads to the hermeneutic revision of Husserlian phenomenology, but before taking up this mode of thought, it would be worthwhile to reserve the term ‘subjective intentionality’ as the major problem in phenomenology to be taken up later.

The lack of historicity in phenomenology leads Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) to supplement this transcendental thought with the claim, in *Being and Time* (1927), that ‘reality’ is not the Lebenswelt, but rather the ‘given’ or the ‘Dasein’. For Heidegger, the true meaning of ‘Being’—is hidden within this Dasein, and the only way in which the individual ‘being’ can access this knowledge is through a ‘hermeneutic’ removal of the layers of the Dasein, and get absorbed into the supernal Being. Though Foucault says in a 1984 interview,

> For me Heidegger has always been the essential philosopher. I began by reading Hegel, then Marx, and I set out to read Heidegger in 1951 or 1952... I still have here notes that I took when I was reading Heidegger. I’ve got tons of them! And they are much more important than the ones I took on Hegel or Marx. My entire philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger.

it can be observed how hermeneutics is a reductionist reactionary philosophy that reduces all complexities of human existence to a superior and ideal Being, and therefore, I would mark the term ‘relations of being’ as the key problematic of this school of thought.

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While the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations and the role of the receiving 'being' is raised within hermeneutics itself, it is within reception theory that this attempt at subjectivizing knowledge gets its full form. Roman Ingarden (1893-1970), considered the founder of reception theory, says in his *The Literary Work of Art* (1931) that a text is normally full of 'indeterminacies' and it is the task of the receiver or the reader to fill in these gaps to actualize the text and bring out its 'real' intended meaning. It is clear that here the reader's task is thought to be subservient to the author, and the whole act of reception is aimed at bringing out the ideal authorial meaning. The major problematic term in this theory, which I would reserve for future use, is the category of 'passive reception'. All the three forms that the first subjectivist form of reaction to reductionist Marxism takes have been thus shows to be themselves fraught with problems, and Foucault shows, in a 1983 interview, that these shortcomings lead on to the other extreme reaction—that involving structuralism:

So I would say that everything that took place in the sixties arose from a dissatisfaction with the phenomenological theory of the subject, and involved different escapades, subterfuges, break-throughs, according to whether we use a negative or a positive term, in the direction of linguistics...

Therefore, I discuss structuralism and its equivalent formalistic objectivist forms next.

c. *Structuralism, Neo-positivism, Analytical Philosophy*

Foucault notes in a 1982 article that the automatic way out of the phenomenological privileging of the subject was a two-pronged reaction, embodied in the formalistic and objectivist structuralism and logical positivism, and how his thought is equidistant from both:

...let me say that there were two possible paths that led beyond this philosophy of subject. The first of these was the theory of objective knowledge as an analysis of systems of meaning, of semiology. This was the path of logical positivism. The second was that of a certain school of linguistics, psychoanalysis, and anthropology—all grouped together under the rubric of structuralism. These were not the directions I took.

The first of these two reactions, structuralism, originates from Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), where through an immediate analysis of language, the means are provided for an overall formal ‘structural’ analysis of other forms of human and social sciences, to be taken up later by the likes of Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992) in the domain of literary analysis, Claude Lévi-Strauss (b.1908) in the domain of anthropology, and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) in the domain of psychoanalysis. The problem of structuralism lies in its ahistoricism and ultra-formalism, and Foucault has no qualms in declaring himself an ‘anti-structuralist’, in a 1977 interview, precisely on this ground:

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One can agree that structuralism formed the most systematic effort to evacuate the concept of the event, not only from ethnology but from a whole series of other sciences and in the extreme case from history. In that sense, I don't see who could be more of an anti-structuralist than myself?7

Talking in the same vein, Foucault shows in a 1983 interview how the structuralist method was quite inadequate beyond its immediate scope of linguistics and comparative mythology:

First, none of the protagonists in the structuralist movement—and none of those who, willingly or otherwise, were dubbed structuralists—knew very clearly what it was all about. Certainly, those who were applying structural methods in very precise disciplines such as linguistics and comparative mythology knew what was structuralism, but as soon as one strayed from these very precise disciplines, nobody knew exactly what it was.8

Foucault locates structuralism within the paradigm of ‘formalism’, and thus makes it at par with other objectivist trends that undermine both subjectivism and contextual criticism:

That is how I would situate the structuralist phenomenon: by relocating it within the broad current of formal thought...I would like to reassess the history of formalism and relocate this minor structuralist episode in France—relatively short, with diffuse forms—within the larger phenomenon of formalism in 20th century, as important in its way as romanticism or even positivism was during the 19th century.9

The identity of structuralism with formalism leads to logical philosophy. The two forms of this philosophy are the logical positivism of the neo-positivists and the analytical philosophy of the logical analysts. Both logical positivism, practised by the Vienna Circle of Rudolph Carnap (1891-1970) and by A. J. Ayer (1910-1989), and logical analysis, represented by Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947), claim that subjective empiricism leads to a limited truth, the real truth lying as irreversible mathematical formulae under idiosyncratic empirical perceptions. Thus, logical analysis is also ahistorical and, like structuralism, relies on a formal linguistics for its model of knowledge. The problem entailed in this objectivist reaction can be summed up in the term ‘ahistorical formal linguistics’.

Foucault notes, in a 1982 article, that he is neither a structuralist nor an analytical philosopher precisely because of this ahistoricism, as for him reality is essentially historical and political:

Let me announce once and for all that I am not a structuralist, and I confess, with the appropriate chagrin, that I am not an analytic philosopher...But I have tried to explore another direction. I have tried to get away from the philosophy of the subject, through a genealogy of the modern subject as a historical and cultural reality. That means as something that can eventually change, which is of course politically important.10

This political turn truly defines the episteme under discussion, and now I would take it up.

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9 Ibid., 18-19.
d. The ‘Political’ Resolution of the Problem

I have reserved five terms which appear as problems towards forming the episteme within which Foucault can formulate the category of tri-hierarchization. Whereas neither Marxist (or Darwinian or Freudian) reductionism, nor the subjectivist and objectivist reactions to the same in the form of phenomenology (and hermeneutics and reception theory) and structuralism (and logical analysis), can characterize this episteme, I will name at least six authors in the same period (i.e., the early twentieth century) who modify the very five problems thrown up. The first point of reductionism is suitably modified by Lenin, who introduces the notion of thought in political practice, by Gramsci, who defines and determines the role of the intellectual in revolutionary politics, and by Althusser, who breaks through the over-determining role assigned to the economic base to show how ideology itself has a material existence. The second point of subjective intentionality is debunked by Althusser, when he shows how it is the dominant ideology that ‘interpellates’ individuals as subjects, subjectivity thus being conditioned and not transcendental, and Breton, for whom even the ‘automatist’ artistic act is rooted in a deep politics. The third problem of the unidirectional relations of being is altered by Sartre, who shows how the being is always in a two-way dialectic relationship with the other, rather than subjecting itself to a meek absorption into a superior Being. The fourth category of passive reception is radicalized by Sartre again, when he shows how authorial intention notwithstanding, the reader can radically appropriate a text, and also by Bakhtin, who shows how a resistant reading of dominant ideological texts is possible. The final point of an ahistorical formal linguistics is done away with by Bakhtin, who shows that formalism and linguistics cannot be free from socio-political and historical considerations. It is these six authors—Lenin, Gramsci, Althusser, Sartre, Breton and Bakhtin—whom I credit with setting the episteme and it is their works that I will now discuss.

I will just issue two clarifications before I embark on the project. First, these six authors do not comprise an exhaustive list of thinkers who framed the Foucauldian episteme, but just the six whom I have read and thought were very important. Secondly, the fact that I have characterized this episteme as one where the over-determining Marxist reductionism is done away with, and a multiplicity of political forms is introduced, should not qualify it as the fad called ‘post-modernism’, because one should not forget how Foucault purposefully dissociates himself from this so-called ‘post-modernity’, when he says in a 1983 interview, ‘What are we calling post-modernity? I’m not up to date.’11 It is with these two precautions in mind that I will now proceed to discuss the six authors I have already mentioned.

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II. Lenin, Intellectual Political Practice, and Imperialism  

a. The Leninist Conception of Non-Reductionist Marxism  

The contribution of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924) to twentieth-century political thought and practice is not restricted to his orchestration of the October Revolution and establishment of the first Communist state, but also comprises how he provided the potentially reductionist Marxist thought the status of a philosophy, an ideology, beyond absolutist economism. This is clear in a 1913 article, where his doctrinaire claims about the 'omnipotence' of Marxism are justified only in relation to its philosophical antecedents:

The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. It is comprehensive and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defence of bourgeois oppression. It is the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism.  

For Lenin, Marxian philosophy is not reducible to any unilateral deterministic schema, and in a 1914 article he shows, how the Marxian innovation of dialectical materialism is one that operates through discontinuities and conflicts rather than in a linear evolutionist mode:

Dialectical materialism...is far more comprehensive and far richer in content than the current idea of evolution is...a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; "breaks in continuity"; the transformation of quantity into quality; inner impulses towards development, imparted by the contradiction and conflict of the various forces and tendencies acting on a given body, or within a given phenomenon, or within a given society....

Carrying his argument further, Lenin shows, in a 1915 article, how reductionist attempts at conceiving a rectilinear movement of human knowledge are not true interpretations of Marxian thought but rather idealist misappropriations of the same. He says,

Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral. Any fragment, segment, section of this curve can be transformed (transformed one-sidedly) into an independent, complete, straight line, which then (if one does not see the wood for the trees) leads into the quagmire, into clerical obscurantism (where it is anchored by the class interests of the ruling classes). Rectilinearity and one-sidedness, woodenness and petrification, subjectivism and subjective blindness—voila the epistemological roots of idealism.

In his Materialism and Empirio-criticism (1909), Lenin shows how the reductionist and anti-dialectical 'empirio-critical' doctrine of Ernst Mach (1838-1916) and Richard Avenarius (1843-1896), which is followed by the Russian Machists, like Bogdanov and Lunacharsky, tends towards subjective idealism and fideism. Stating how philosophy itself is always 'partisan', he shows the reactionary class-role of such reductionist empiricism:

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...behind the epistemological scholasticism of empirio-criticism one must not fail to see the struggle of parties in philosophy... Recent philosophy is as partisan as was philosophy two thousand years ago. The contending parties are essentially...materialism and idealism... The objective, class role of empirio-criticism consists entirely in rendering faithful service to the fideists in their struggle against materialism and historical materialism in particular.15

Thus, Lenin provides Marxian thought with two important modifications: on the one hand, he shows how Marxism is above all a 'philosophy', which cannot be reduced to an economic doctrine; on the other, he shows how Marxism proposes a non-linear, discontinuous, dynamic version of reality, as opposed to reductionist attempts to unidirectionalize the same. It is clear how this brings one close enough to the most important features of the Foucauldian episteme.

b. Ideology and Revolutionary Practice

For Lenin, thought has a definite function in revolutionary practice, as opposed to the reductionist attempt to treat ideology as useless and as 'false consciousness'. In his What is to be Done? (1902), Lenin says very clearly, ‘Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.’16 In the same text, Lenin shows how the reductionist belief that a labour movement can emanate independent of any ideology is a 'profound mistake':

All those who talk about "overrating the importance of ideology", about exaggerating the role of the conscious element, etc., imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers "wrest their fate from the hand of the leaders". But this is a profound mistake.17

Lenin makes a very strong case for intellectual involvement in revolutionary practice when he shows that the necessity for ideology in revolution and yet the absence of any working class ideology calls for the appropriation of enlightened bourgeois ideologies, like socialism:

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is—either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a "third" ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.18

In fact, for Lenin the true possibility of the revolution lies in arming the working class with, not just proletarian, but a 'general literature’ to allow them to create their own ideology:

This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology... But in order that working men may succeed in this more often, every effort must be made to raise the level of the consciousness of the workers in general; it is necessary that the workers do not confine themselves to the artificially restricted limits of "literature for workers" but that they learn to an increasing degree to master general literature.19

17 Ibid., 149.
18 Ibid., 150-51.
19 (footnote in) Ibid., 150.
In the Leninist interpretation of Marxian thought, therefore, revolution lies not in reductively denying superstructural elements like knowledge and culture, but in cultivating these very categories and creating the ‘consciousness’ and ideological field for their possibility. Accordingly, Lenin can ‘dream’ of the first step towards revolutionary politics in starting a newspaper for the working class, the weapon to enhance the consciousness of workers:

And if indeed we succeeded in reaching the point when all, or at least a considerable majority, of the local committees, local groups, and study circles took up active work for the common cause, we could, in the not distant future, establish a weekly newspaper for regular distribution in tens of thousands of copies throughout Russia... That is what we should dream of.20

Thus, Lenin upturns one of the fundamental problems of dogmatic and reductionist versions of Marxism by making the superstructural category of knowledge the basic category in revolutionary practice. It should be noted, however, that this does not make Lenin compromise on the primary materialistic requisite of Marxian praxis, and he shows in Materialism and Empirio-criticism, how practice of knowledge can be anti-idealistic:

The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge. And it inevitably leads to materialism, sweeping aside the endless fabrications of professorial scholasticism. Of course, we must not forget that the criterion of practice can never, in the nature of things, either confirm or refute any human idea completely. This criterion too is sufficiently “indefinite” not to allow human knowledge to become “absolute”, but at the same time it is sufficiently definite to wage a ruthless fight on all varieties of idealism and agnosticism.21

Now I will turn to how Lenin attacks reductionist and dogmatic modes of Marxist practice.

c. Economism, Terrorism and the Orthodox Marxists

The Leninist attack against reductionism in Marxist practice should not be seen as a licence to all ‘freedom’ of criticism, because as Lenin says in What is to be Done?,

“Freedom” is a grand word, but under the banner of freedom for industry the most predatory wars were waged, under the banner of freedom of labour, the working people were robbed. The modern use of the term “freedom of criticism” contains the same inherent falsehood.22

This attack against free criticism is based, however, on two anti-reductionist principles themselves, the first being that free-thinking is often free of all theoretical thinking:

Thus, we see that high-sounding phrases against the ossification of thought, etc., conceal unconcern and helplessness with regard to the development of theoretical thought. The case of the Russian Social-Democrats manifestly illustrates the general European phenomenon...that the much vaunted freedom of criticism does not imply substitution of one theory for another, but freedom from all integral and pondered theory; it implies eclecticism and lack of principle.23

20 Ibid., 254.
23 Ibid., 137-38.
The second reason is that, for Lenin, attempts at a freedom of criticism itself leads to the reductionist economism, and a disregard for strategic revolutionary organization:

The turn towards "criticism" was accompanied by an infatuation for Economism among Social-Democratic practical workers... the majority of the economists look with sincere resentment (as by the very nature of Economism they must) upon all theoretical controversies, factional disagreements, broad political questions, plans for organising revolutionaries, etc.\(^\text{24}\)

Thus, Lenin shows how the two modes of reductionist Marxist practice, one that is anarchist and terrorist and ignores all forms of ideology altogether and the other that is reductively economist and ignores necessary ideological strategies, both rely on a certain 'spontaneity' and lack the ability to lead working-class movements towards the revolution. He says,

The Economists and the present-day terrorists have one common root, namely, subservience to spontaneity... At first sight, our assertion may appear paradoxical, so great is the difference between those who stress the "drab everyday struggle" and those who call for the most self-sacrificing struggle of individuals. But this is no paradox. The Economists and the terrorists merely bow to different poles of spontaneity; the Economists bow to the spontaneity of "the labour movement pure and simple", while the terrorists bow to the spontaneity of the passionate indignation of intellectuals, who lack the ability or opportunity to connect the revolutionary struggle and the working-class movement into an integral whole.\(^\text{25}\)

Having shown how Lenin attacks reductionist interpretations of Marxism, I would end this section of the chapter with a passage, where Lenin, at his ironic best, says, just after claiming that to publish a working-class newspaper is his 'dream', that he might be under attack from orthodox Marxists because they do not believe in the category of dreaming! He says,

"We should dream!" I wrote these words and became alarmed. I imagined myself sitting at a "unity conference" and opposite me were the Rabocheye Dyelo editors and contributors. Comrade Martynov rises and, turning to me, says sternly: "Permit me to ask you, has an autonomous editorial board the right to dream without first soliciting the opinion of the Party committees?" He is followed by Comrade Krichevsky, who...continues even more sternly: "I go further. I ask, has a Marxist any right at all to dream, knowing that according to Marx mankind always sets itself the tasks it can solve and that tactics is a process of the growth of Party tasks which grow together with the Party?"

The very thought of these stern questions sends a cold shiver down my spine and makes me wish for nothing but a place to hide in.\(^\text{26}\)

d. Colonialism as Politics alongside Capitalism

The Leninist interpretation of Marxian thought goes a step further in arming it with broader political goals when he takes up the case of a fight against colonialism as being politically important for the proletarian revolution, in his Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917). Though working still very much within the paradigm of interpreting colonialism as a fallout of capitalism and not really the articulation of a separate politics of race, Lenin does link the fate of colonies with the revolution saying, 'Imperialism is the eve of

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 133-34.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., 179.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 255.
the social revolution of the proletariat. Lenin credits the growth of imperialism to a change in production from free competition to monopoly and from the domination of capital to that of finance capital. Lenin gives four reasons for imperialism being connected to the proletarian revolution. The first is that the export of capital to the colonies by the finance capitalist imperialists drains the land of capital, stalls development, and enhances the revolution:

Typical of the old capitalism, when free competition held undivided sway, was the export of goods. Typical of the latest stage of capitalism, when monopolies rule, is the export of capital... As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilised not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries.

The second reason is that the capitalist attempt to tap more colonial resources to ensure their monopoly, leads to a battle amongst the capitalist nations, weakening them and providing an opportunity not only for the colonized nations but also the proletariat to free themselves:

The principal feature of the latest stage of capitalism is the domination of monopolist associations of big employers. These monopolies are most firmly established when all the sources of raw materials are captured by one group... Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle against competitors... The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate the struggle for the acquisition of colonies.

Thirdly, Lenin says that as finance capitalism sets in, the state becomes a ‘rentier’, a usurer, its ‘parasitic’ and ‘decaying’ condition calling for a revolutionary working-class movement:

The rentier state is a state of parasitic, decaying capitalism, and this circumstance cannot fail to influence all the socio-political conditions of the countries concerned, in general, and the... fundamental trends in the working-class movement, in particular.

The final reason Lenin gives is that the emigration of colonial labour creates a disparity in the situation of the working-class, forcing the proletariat to revolt. He says,

One of the special features of imperialism connected with the facts I am describing, is the decline in emigration from imperialist countries and the increase in immigration into these countries from the more backward countries where lower wages are paid... Imperialism has the tendency to create privileged sections also among the workers, and to detach them from the broad masses of the proletariat.

Thus, one can notice in Lenin three features—the connection of knowledge to power, the introduction of discontinuity and non-linearity in the place of reductionism in resistant political thought, and the foregrounding of an apparently superstructural category like colonialism, all of which might well augur a working towards the episteme of Foucault.

29 Ibid., 732.
30 Ibid., 747.
31 Ibid., 750-51.
III. Antonio Gramsci and the Insistence on the Politics of Culture

a. Philosophy and Politics: Marxism and ‘Common Sense’

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), a founding member of the Italian Communist Party, and who spent the most productive part of his short life in imprisonment under the Fascist regime of Mussolini, takes the argument of Lenin further by showing how philosophy and politics are interlinked. In a 1919 article, Gramsci states how there is nothing ‘apolitical’:

The apoliticism of the apoliticals was merely a degeneration of politics: to reject the State and fight against it is just as much a political act as to take part in the general historical activity that is channelled into Parliament and the municipal councils, the popular institutions of the State.32

This surely means that philosophy itself can only be political, and Gramsci shows in his Prison Notebooks how philosophy lies in political and historical praxis. He says,

Separated from the theory of history and politics philosophy cannot be other than metaphysics, whereas the great conquest in the history of modern thought, represented by the philosophy of praxis, is precisely the concrete historicization of philosophy and its identification with history.33

This insistence on praxis leads Gramsci to Marxism, but he observes clearly that a practice of Marxism itself requires a cultivation of superstructural categories like art and philosophy:

A systematic treatment of the philosophy of praxis cannot afford to neglect any of the constituent parts of the doctrines of its founder [Marx]. But how should this be understood? It should deal with all the general philosophical part, and then should develop in a coherent fashion all the general concepts of a methodology of history and politics and, in addition, of art, economics and ethics, finding place in the overall construction for a theory of the natural sciences.34

Thus Marxism is essentially connected to philosophical practice, and this is where Gramsci differs from the so-called ‘orthodox’ Marxists, who deny the cultural role of Marxism and treat it, from a reductionist perspective, as mere traditional materialism. For Gramsci,

Marxism has been a potent force in modern culture and, to a certain extent, has determined and fertilised a number of currents of thought within it. The study of this most significant fact has been either neglected or ignored outright by the so-called orthodox (Marxists), and for the following reasons: the most significant philosophical combination that occurred was that in which Marxism was blended with various idealist tendencies, and was regarded by the orthodox, who were necessarily bound to the cultural currents of the last century (positivism, scientism), as an absurdity if not sheer charlatanism.35

Gramsci is therefore of the opinion that the primary role of Marxism is to create an alternate culture, an alternate body of intellectuals, and to spread education among the masses. He says,

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34 Ibid., 35-36.
Marxism was confronted with two tasks: to combat modern ideologies in their most refined form in order to create its own core of independent intellectuals; and to educate the masses of people whose level of culture was medieval... [This is so because] modern culture, particularly the idealist has been unable to elaborate a popular culture and has failed to provide a moral and scientific content to its own educational programmes... It is still a culture of a narrow intellectual aristocracy which is able to attract the youth only when it becomes immediately and topically political. 36

The claim that Marxist praxis has to create an alternate philosophy assumes that the masses already have access to philosophy, and Gramsci goes on to show how it is so because of the universal access to the 'spontaneous philosophy' of language, 'common sense' and religion:

It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing... It must first be shown that all men are "philosophers", by defining the limits and characteristics of the "spontaneous philosophy" which is proper to everybody. This philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself... 2. "common sense" and "good sense"; 3. popular religion and... "folklore". 37

Since I take up Gramsci's discussion of language and folklore later, here I can show how Gramsci conceives of the political nature of 'common sense'. Common sense being what the populace generally holds as true, Gramsci shows how the constitution of this body of beliefs is done at the behest of the political demands of dominant ideology, when he says, "The relation between common sense and the upper level of philosophy is assured by "politics"." 38

The alternate philosophy that Gramsci proposes is therefore one that debunks common sense and religion and sets up the progressive and practical 'good sense' in its place. He says,

Philosophy is intellectual order, which neither religion nor common sense can be. It is to be observed that religion and common sense do not coincide either, but that religion is an element of fragmented common sense. Moreover common sense is a collective noun, like religion: there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product of history and a part of the historical process. Philosophy is criticism and the superseding of religion and "common sense". In this sense it coincides with "good" as opposed to "common" sense. 39

The purpose of Marxist praxis is thus to replace 'common sense' with a radical and progressive philosophical perspective, and Gramsci shows how this can only be possible through a relentless questioning of commonsensical premises as well as educating the masses and producing a new class of intellectuals who emanate from the masses and work for them:

Specific necessities can be deduced from this for any cultural movement which aimed to replace common sense and old conceptions of the world in general:

1. Never to tire of repeating its own arguments... repetition is the best didactic means for working in the popular mentality.

2. To work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the populace, in other words, to give a personality to the amorphous mass element. This means working to produce elites of intellectuals of a new type which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were, the whalebone in the corset. 40

36 Ibid., 85.
38 Ibid., 331.
39 Ibid., 325-26.
40 Ibid., 340.

It is understandable from what has been observed about Gramsci’s political philosophy that for him power is not exercised exclusively through coercive economic apparatuses but also through superstructural cultural forms, which ensure what Gramsci calls the ‘hegemony’ of one class over the other. In a letter written in 1931 to Tatiana Schucht, his sister-in-law, Gramsci states how unearthing this hegemony is the objective of his research:

>This research will also concern the concept of the State, which is usually thought of as political society—i.e., a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production or economy—and not as a balance between political society and civil society, by which I mean the hegemony of one social group over the entire nation, exercised through so-called private organizations like the church, trade unions, or schools.41

In another letter to Tatiana in 1932, Gramsci shows how the philosophy of praxis that studies ‘hegemony’ can do away with the pitfalls of reductionist ‘economic determinism’:

>...the great modern theoreticians of the philosophy of praxis were elaborating their theories...systematically re-evaluating the moment of “hegemony” and cultural leadership in order to eliminate mechanistic, fatalistic conceptions of “economic determinism”.42

This attack against economist reductionism automatically implies that Gramsci would be opposed to the over-determining status of the economic base, and in his *Prison Notebooks*, he shows how the insistence on the base is anti-Marxist and ‘primitive infantilism’:

>The claim presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works.43

Gramsci shows how power does not rest in the repressive role of the State. He attacks the juridical perception of power and shows instead how power is exercised through hegemony over ideological apparatuses, which comprise collectively what he calls the ‘civil society’:

>In the (anyway superficial) polemic over the functions of the State (which here means the State as a politico-juridical organisation in the narrow sense), the expression “the State as veilleur de nuit” corresponds to the Italian expression “the State as policeman” and means a State whose functions are limited to the safeguarding of public order and of respect, for the laws. The fact is glossed over that in this form of regime (which anyway has never existed except on paper, as a limiting hypothesis) hegemony over its historical development belongs to private forces, to civil society...44

This assertion does not make Gramsci rule out the role of the State altogether, but he insists that the hegemony exercised over the ‘subaltern classes’ can only function through an interaction between the State and the cultural apparatuses of ‘civil society’. He says,

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The historical unity of the ruling classes is realised in the State, and their history is essentially the history of States and of groups of States. But it would be wrong to think that this unity is simply juridical and political...the fundamental historical unity...results from the organic relations between State or political society and "civil society".

The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State"; their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States.

Thus, Gramscian philosophy of praxis does not undermine the 'ethico-political' demand of waging an economic and political struggle, but simply claims that the revolution, in order to be exhaustive, has to take into account cultural considerations too. Gramsci says,

One can say that not only does the philosophy of praxis not exclude ethico-political history but that, indeed, in its most recent stage of development, it consists precisely in asserting the moment of hegemony as essential to its conception of the state and to the 'accrediting' of the cultural fact, of cultural activity, of a cultural point as necessary alongside the merely economic and political ones.

The purpose of revolution is thus not just to change the class structure and take over the State, but 'to make the governed intellectually independent of the governing...to destroy one hegemony and create another, as a necessary moment in the revolutionizing of praxis.'

Therefore, the Gramscian revolution does not lie in a militant overthrow of the State, but in a 'passive revolution', whereby the existing socio-cultural parameters are changed first:

The concept of "passive revolution" must be rigorously derived from the two fundamental principles of political science: 1. that no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further forward movement; 2. that a society does not set itself task for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated, etc.

Thus Gramsci make a pragmatic appeal against anarchic adventurism, in his *The Modern Prince*, showing how 'compromise' has greater revolutionary potential than armed struggle:

If the union of two forces is necessary in order to defeat a third, a recourse to arms and coercion (even supposing that these are available) can be nothing more than a methodological hypothesis; the only concrete possibility is compromise.

This 'passivism' in Gramsci should not be interpreted as a submission to oppression, but as a radical step towards the final revolution because Gramsci believes that cultural reforms can only take place in tandem with economic reforms, engendering the revolution. He says,

Can there be cultural reform, and can the position of the depressed strata of society be improved culturally, without a previous economic reform and a change in their position in the social and economic fields? Intellectual and moral reform has to be linked with a programme of economic reform—indeed the programme of economic reform is precisely the concrete form in which every intellectual and moral reform presents itself.

Thus, in the Gramscian schema, education and culture become integral to the revolution.

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45 Ibid., 52.
47 Antonio Gramsci, '[Political Ideologies]' (in Quaderno 10, II §41. xii, 1932-35) in Ibid., 196.
50 Ibid., 133.
c. The Role of Education and Culture in the Revolution

It has already been established how, for Gramsci, education and culture are absolutely important for the revolution. Gramsci says in a 1920 article that the revolutionary proletariat has to seize cultural and intellectual power along with political and economic power:

Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. Just as it has thought to organize itself politically and economically, it must also think about organizing itself culturally.51

Gramsci shows in a 1916 article, that the acquisition of culture does not involve mere empirical knowledge, but one that is intended to give the proletariat its ‘historical value’:

We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts... This form of culture is really dangerous, particularly for the proletariat... Culture is something quite different. It is organization, discipline of one’s inner self, a coming to terms with one’s own personality... understanding one’s own historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and obligations. But none of this can come about through spontaneous evolution...52

Having observed that such a revolutionary change in culture acquisition cannot be achieved spontaneously, Gramsci suggests that for this type of education it is necessary to set up special schools for the proletariat. In a 1919 article, he shows how the bourgeoisie takes no interest in the educational apparatus and it is the communist imperative to develop the school:

The problem of the school is at once both technical and political... It cannot...be claimed that the bourgeois class moulds the school to its own ends of domination. If this were to happen, it would mean that the bourgeois class had an educational programme... This is not the case. The bourgeoisie, as the class which controls the state, takes no interest in the school... Indeed to the development and success of the school is linked the development of the communist state, the advent of a democracy in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is absorbed.53

In a 1916 article, Gramsci shows how this new type of school, intended to impart culture on to the proletariat, has to be different from the bourgeois technical schools, which make machines out of human beings, and has to instead arm the proletariat with a ‘general culture’:

What the proletariat needs is an educational system that is open to all. A system in which the child is allowed to develop and mature and acquire those general features that serve to develop character... A school of freedom and free initiative, not a school of slavery and mechanical precision... Technical schools should not be allowed to become incubators of little monsters ardily trained for a job, with no general ideas, no general culture, no intellectual stimulation, but only an infallible eye and a firm hand... Of course, meanly bourgeois industrialists might prefer to have workers who were more machines than men. But...the proletariat must stay alert, to prevent another abuse being added to the many it has already suffered.54

Accordingly, the first step towards the revolution is, for Gramsci, to raise the demand for the replacement of the bourgeois educational apparatus. He says in a 1916 article,

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The proletariat must constrain the state to cut out of the national organism many universities, suppurating sores which produce prattlers and misfits, as well as many licei and ginnasi which cost a fortune and give neither culture nor dignity. It must replace these old producers of administrators incapable of administering with schools of labour, out of which can swarm the new generation of producers, who will give the country fewer sonnets and novels and more machines and factory chimneys.55

Culture and education gain primacy in Gramscian revolutionary praxis also because it is only through the acquisition of culture that the proletariat can rise towards the communist goal of internationalism. Gramsci shows in a 1917 article how this makes a spread of knowledge and literacy an imperative for a movement towards Socialism, as also a Socialist regime:

Socialist propaganda directly arouses a sharp sense of not being just an individual within a little circle of immediate interests (the local community and the family), but a citizen of the wider world, with whose other citizens one needs to exchange ideas, hopes and sufferings. Culture, literacy, has thus acquired a purpose, and for as long as this purpose remains alive in people’s consciousness, love of knowledge will be a compelling force. It is a sacrosanct truth of which the Socialists can be proud: illiteracy will disappear completely only when socialism has made it disappear...56

It is thus clear how, for Gramsci, education and culture are the most important prerequisites of the revolution and the school is the apparatus for forging revolutionaries. I can end this discussion with a quote from a 1920 article by Gramsci where he says, ‘Tomorrow, like today, the school will undoubtedly be a crucible where the new spirits will be forged.’57

d. The Intellectual and Resistant Political Practice

From the premium Gramsci puts on the role of culture and education in the revolution, it can be expected that he would credit the intellectual with a big responsibility in political praxis. In his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci shows how this is especially so because the ‘philosophy of praxis’ has to involve the whole of the cultural and philosophical past:

The philosophy of praxis presupposes all this cultural past: Renaissance and Reformation, German philosophy and the French Revolution, Calvinism and English classical economics, secular liberalism and this historicism which is at the root of the whole modern conception of life.58

Having established the necessity of the intellectual in revolutionary practice, Gramsci stresses how this revolutionary intellectual will be produced from within the school he proposes:

School is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated. The complexity of the intellectual function in different states can be measured objectively by the number and gradation of specialised schools: the more extensive the “area” covered by education and the more numerous the “vertical” “levels” of schooling, the more complex is the cultural world, the civilisation of a particular state.59

56 Antonio Gramsci, ‘Illiteracy’ (in La Città Futura, February 11, 1917) in Ibid., 68.
59 Ibid., 10-11.
Having outlined the rationale and the origin of the intellectual, Gramsci classifies intellectuals into two categories. The first is the ‘organic intellectual’, who originates organically from a particular mode of production and gives that mode its cultural coherence. Gramsci says,

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.  

The second category is that of the ‘traditional intellectual’, who exists from the erstwhile age and represents the now outmoded residual mode of production and its functions. For Gramsci,

However, every “essential” social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of the development of this structure, has found (at least in all history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms.

This classification shows that the intellectual’s role is defined by the mode of production he or she originates from or identifies with. Thus, for Gramsci, intellectuals are ‘functionaries’ of the dominant group, performing the ‘subaltern functions’ of legitimizing its power in the sphere of hegemony in ‘civil society’ as well as coercion in the political domain of the State:

The relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, “mediated” by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the “functionaries”… The intellectuals are the dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.

This very fact of the intellectual being inextricably connected to the political functions of the ideology he or she adheres to, makes it possible for Gramsci to conceive the organic intellectual of the working class, who having either originated in or having empathized with the proletarian condition can perform the subaltern function of forwarding its revolutionary ideology. Gramsci also notices how the relationship between such an organic proletarian intellectual and the masses is dialectical so that the proletarian populace raises its own level of consciousness and culture as the intellectual interact with it in his or her quest for knowledge:

The process of development is tied to a dialectic between the intellectuals and the masses. The intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap forward towards a new breadth and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement on the part of the mass of the “simple”, who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialised intellectuals, producing outstanding individuals and groups of greater or less importance.

For Gramsci, the task of such an intellectual would be to create a ‘popular’ consciousness instead of a ‘national’ cultural identity, and he observes with much lament that it is not the case in Italy, where the intellectuals are quite distant from the populace. He says,

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60 Ibid., 5.
61 Ibid., 6-7.
62 Ibid., 12.
63 Ibid., 334-35.
One should note that in many languages, 'national' and 'popular' are either synonymous or nearly so... In Italy the term 'national' has an ideologically very restricted meaning, and does not in any case coincide with 'popular' because in Italy the intellectuals are distant from the people, i.e. from the 'nation'. They are tied instead to a caste tradition that has never been broken by a strong popular or national political movement from below.\(^64\)

Having seen how Gramsci envisages the role of the intellectual in revolutionary practice, it can now be examined what specific responsibilities he gives to him or her.

It was observed earlier how popular philosophy has three forms—language, common sense, and folklore—and while the role of the intellectual vis-à-vis common sense has been hinted at, now I can mention what Gramsci says about the intellectual criticism of literature and folklore. For Gramsci, literary criticism cannot be purely aesthetic, and it is the task of the intellectual to fuse artistry with the political quest for a new revolutionary culture:

In short, the type of literary criticism suitable to the philosophy of praxis...must fuse the struggle for a new culture (that is, for a new humanism) and criticism of social life, feelings and conceptions of the world with aesthetic or purely artistic criticism, and it must do so with heat and passion, even if it takes the form of sarcasm.\(^65\)

Gramsci states further that the new literary use of language cannot simply derive itself from the historical and the political, it has to have its roots in the popular. The function of the intellectual is thus to foreground popular literature and linguistic forms, even if they appear less artistic than and sub-standard to the so-called 'high' culture and literature. He says,

The premiss of the new literature cannot but be historical, political and popular. It must aim at elaborating that which already is, whether polemically or in some other way does not matter. What does matter, though, is that it sink its roots into the humus of popular culture as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is backward and conventional.\(^66\)

Coming to the intellectual's role in dealing with the other element of popular philosophy, namely folklore, Gramsci shows how, as opposed to the usual inane method of studying these cultural forms, attempts should be made to see how folklore represents a historically conditioned popular world view that stands in resistance to forms of dominant ideology:

One can say that until now Folklore has been studied primarily as a 'picturesque' element... Folklore should instead be studied as a 'conception of the world and life' implicit to a large extent in determinate (in time and space) strata of society and in opposition (also for the most part implicit, mechanical and objective) to 'official' conceptions of the world (or in a broader sense, the conception of the cultured parts of historically determinate societies) that have succeeded one another in the historical process.\(^67\)

Having dealt with how Gramsci conceives the role of the intellectual in revolutionary practice I will now turn to another topic that he also talks about, namely imperialism.

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\(^{65}\) Antonio Gramsci, 'Art and Struggle for a New Civilization' (in Quaderno 23 §3, 1934) in Ibid., 394.

\(^{66}\) Antonio Gramsci, 'Literary Criticism' (in Quaderno 15 §58, 1933) in Ibid., 397.

\(^{67}\) Antonio Gramsci, 'Observations on Folklore' (in Quaderno 27 §1, 1935) in Ibid., 360.
e. Fascism, Colonialism and the Revolution

Just as in the case of Lenin, it was seen that an insistence on the importance of a superstructural element like culture and the corollary undercutting of the reductionist over-determining role of the economic base led to a consciousness of the politics of colonialism as one existing parallel to that of capitalist oppression, in Gramsci too a similar insistence on the multiplicity of agencies of power leads to a concern about the politics of race, as expressed through Fascism and colonialism. Having to work under the strictures of a fascistic state, and finally being imprisoned and dying under its regime, Gramsci finds in Fascism an obvious enemy. What is interesting, however, is the fact that for Gramsci, Fascism, which believes in the superiority of a certain national race, is an 'international phenomenon', representing a global capitalist reaction against proletarian upsurge. He says in a 1920 article,

This "reaction" is not purely Italian: it is an international phenomenon, because capitalism has become incapable of coming to terms with the productive forces not only in Italy, but all over the world. The phenomenon of "fascism" is not purely Italian, in the same way that the formation of the Communist Party is not purely Italian. "Fascism" is the preparatory phase of the restoration of the State, i.e. of a resurgence of capitalist reaction, an embittering of the capitalist struggle against the most elementary needs of the proletarian class. Fascism is the illegal aspect of capitalist violence... 68

Fascism is intimately connected to imperialism, and Gramsci notes how the colonial and expansionist desires of a nation arise from the same reactionary attitude of the dying capitalist order as Fascism. He notices, however, in another 1920 article that this reaction, culminating in Fascism and imperialism can itself engender the proletarian resistance to it:

Here lies the source of reaction: a wild fear of death through exhaustion, mingled with a frantic desire to hurl ourselves at the body of a neighbouring nation... to devour it, to save ourselves a blood transfusion. And here too lies the source of communism, which is a consequence of reaction. Communism is the response of the working class to reaction. 69

The proletarian revolution thus gets associated with resistance to imperialism and colonialism. Gramsci states in a 1919 article that race takes the form of class in the colonies and the worldwide struggles of the colonized people are analogous to a communist revolution. He further notices in such struggles the future of an international revolution of the oppressed:

...today flames of revolt are being fanned throughout the colonial world. This is the class struggle of the coloured peoples against their white exploiters and murderers. It is the vast irresistible drive towards autonomy and independence of a whole world, with all its spiritual riches. Connective tissues are being recreated to weld together once again peoples whom European domination seemed to have sundered once and for all. 70

Thus, for Gramsci, politics is not located only in the 'material' domain of class, but also in the 'mental' domains of culture and race, and his inclusion of these 'superstructural' categories into the ambit of revolutionary practice ushers in the possibility of the Foucauldian episteme.

69 Antonio Gramsci, 'Reaction' (in Avanti!, Vol. XXIV, No. 266, October 17, 1920) in Ibid., 355.
IV. Louis Althusser and the Politics of the Superstructure

a. Marxist 'Theory' and Political 'Practice'

Louis Althusser (1918-1990) takes the argument forwarded by Lenin and Gramsci on the role of knowledge in political practice further forward when he says in his 'Introduction' to *For Marx* (1965) that Marxist practice is essentially connected to the intellectual:

The founders of historical and dialectical materialism were intellectuals (Marx and Engels), their theory was developed by intellectuals (Kautsky, Plekhanov, Labriola, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Gramsci).... [Thus] on the one hand, the 'spontaneous' ideology of the workers, if left to itself, could only produce utopian socialism, trade-unionism, anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism; on the other hand, Marxist socialism...could only be the work of men with a thorough historical, scientific and philosophical formation, intellectuals of very high quality.

While such a claim gives Marxism the status of a philosophy, Althusser shows, in a 1963 article, that it, as embodied by dialectical materialism and historical materialism, is different from idealistic 'philosophy' and Althusser labels it as 'Theory'. He says,

I shall call Theory (with a capital T), general theory, that is, the Theory of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences), which transforms into 'knowledges' (scientific truths) the ideological product of existing 'empirical' practices (the concrete activity of men). This Theory is the materialistic dialectic which is none other than dialectical materialism... When Lenin said 'without theory, no revolutionary action', he meant one particular theory, the theory of the Marxist science of the development of social formations (historical materialism).

This demarcation of Marxism as a 'Theory' distinct from other bourgeois philosophies makes, as Althusser states in a 1968 interview, the task of resistant political practice comprise a resistance to the four forms that I have already identified: reductionist economism, phenomenological subjectivism, neo-positivist logical analysis and structuralism. He says,

The crucial tasks of the Communist movement in theory...to struggle against the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois world outlook... The general form of this world outlook: *Economism* (today 'technocracy') and its 'spiritual complement' *Ethical Idealism* (today 'Humanism')... The current philosophical form of this world outlook: *neo-positivism* and its 'spiritual complement' existent as phenomenological subjectivism. The variant peculiar to the Human Sciences: the ideology called 'structuralist'.

For Althusser, political practice rests in what Lenin calls *intervention*, 'drawing a dividing-line' between ideas which are scientific and 'true' and those which are ideological and false:

A single word sums up the master function of philosophical practice: *to draw a dividing line* between the true ideas and false ideas. Lenin's words.

But the same word sums up one of the essential operations in the direction of the practice of class struggle: *to draw a dividing line* between antagonistic classes. Between our class friends and our class enemies.

**It is the same word.** A theoretical line between the people (the proletariat and its allies) and the people's enemies.

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This has two implications. On the one hand, it means that Marxism is different from any philosophy in its insistence on practice, so much so that Althusser says in a 1968 address, ‘Marxism is not a (new) philosophy of praxis, but a new practice of philosophy.’ On the other, the identification of Marxian thought with the sciences, makes it emerge as a ‘science’.

Combining the two, Althusser shows how philosophy can be political as well as scientific:

We can now advance the following proposition: philosophy is a certain continuation of politics, in a certain domain, vis-à-vis a certain reality. Philosophy represents politics in the domain of theory, or to be more precise: with the sciences—and, vice versa, philosophy represents scientificity in politics, with the classes engaged in the class struggle.

This makes Althusser conclude that Marxism comprises a ‘science’, in the form of dialectical materialism, as well as a ‘philosophy’, in the form of historical materialism, and the proletarian revolution lies in assimilating the two. He explains this in a 1968 interview:

Marxist-Leninist theory includes a science (historical materialism) and a philosophy (dialectical materialism).

Marxist-Leninist philosophy is therefore one of the two theoretical weapons indispensable to the class struggle of the proletariat. Communist militants must assimilate and use the principles of the theory: science as a philosophy. The proletarian revolution needs militants who are both scientists (historical materialism) and philosophers (dialectical materialism) to assist in the defence and development of theory.

Althusser also explains how the two reactions to Marxism, positivism and subjectivism, stem from a failure to consider this dual role of Marxism. Qualifying the two ‘deviations’ as ‘rightist’ and ‘leftist’ respectively, Althusser shows how the rightist deviation of positivism suppresses philosophy so that only science is left, while the leftist deviation of subjectivism suppresses science so that only philosophy is left. The struggle inherent in Marxist practice in defending its dual character against such reductionist deviations is coupled with another struggle, whereby the intellectual, who rises from the bourgeoisie, has to struggle against his or her own ‘class instincts’ to imbibe the resistant proletarian ideology. Althusser says,

To become ‘ideologists of the working class’ (Lenin), ‘organic intellectuals’ (Gramsci), intellectuals have to carry out a radical revolution in their ideas: a long, painful and difficult re-education. An endless external and internal struggle.

Proletarians have a ‘class instinct’ which helps them on the way to proletarian ‘class positions’. Intellectuals, on the contrary, have a petty-bourgeois class instinct which fiercely resists this transition.

Thus, Marxism represents a break in thought in its assimilation of the separate registers of philosophy and science, while a practice of Marxian thought itself represents a break for the intellectual. Marxism represents thus what Althusser calls an ‘epistemological break’.

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76 Ibid., 64-65.
78 Ibid., 12-13.
b. Marxism as an 'Epistemological Break'

As has been stated, Marxism represents an epistemological break both in terms of the theory it posits as also what the intellectual who formulates or practises it undergoes. Althusser takes up these two different types of breaks one after the other. On the one hand, he shows how Marx introduces a new ‘continent’ of History to the world of science previously comprising the continents of Mathematics and Physics alone. He says in a 1968 address,

If in fact we consider the great scientific discourses of human history, it seems that we might relate what we call the sciences, as a number of regional formations, to what I call the great theoretical continents... before Marx two continents only had been opened up to scientific knowledge by sustained epistemological breaks: the continent of Mathematics with the Greeks... and the continent of Physics (by Galileo and his successors)... Marx has opened up to scientific knowledge a new third scientific continent, the continent of History, by an epistemological break whose first still uncertain strokes are inscribed in The German Ideology, after having been announced in the Theses of Feuerbach.79

On the other hand, he shows how Marx himself undergoes a ‘rupture’ in moving from the petty-bourgeois neo-Hegelian thought of his origins to the resistant proletarian doctrine he formulates. In his ‘Preface’ to a French translation of Capital, Althusser says,

Marx’s whole intellectual history can and must be understood in this way: as a long, difficult and painful rupture by which he moved from the petty-bourgeois class instinct to proletarian class positions, to whose definitions he contributed decisively in Capital.80

Althusser shows how Marx, in his critique of Hegel, began with neo-Hegelianism, which was a retreat from Hegel to Kant and Fichte, moved on to Feuerbachianism next, and finally, through a critique of Feuerbach and through an assimilation of Hegel into materialist thought, arrived at his own theory. Althusser identifies this ‘epistemological break’ in The German Ideology (1845), and shows how this text divides Marx’s thought into two periods: the ‘ideological’ period before and the ‘scientific’ period after it. In spite of admitting the diverse sources of Marxian thought, it being always oriented towards a critique of Hegel, Althusser refutes, in his ‘Introduction’ to For Marx, the allegation that Marx was initially a Hegelian:

Young Marx was never strictly speaking a Hegelian, except in the last text of his ideologico-philosophical period [1844 Manuscripts]; rather he was first a Kantian-Fichtean, then a Feuerbachian. So the thesis that the Young Marx was a Hegelian, though widely believed today, is in general a myth.81

Althusser shows how attempts to label the young Marx either as a Hegelian or as a Marxist are both erroneous, because both these views overlook the epistemological break that Marxism constitutes, and both consider philosophy as essential and non-changing. Althusser suggests instead, in a 1961 article, that one needs to study the young Marx separately:

So these good critics leave us with but a single choice: we must admit that *Capital* (and 'mature Marxism' in general) is *either an expression of Young Marx's philosophy, or its betrayal*. In either case, the established interpretation must be totally revised and we must return to the Young Marx, the Marx through whom spoke the Truth.

This is the location of the discussion: the Young Marx. Really at stake in it: Marxism. The terms of the discussion: whether the Young Marx was already and wholly Marx.  

Althusser shows how instead of taking the works of an author as a composite whole, it is necessary to consider it historically, in terms of the 'ideological field' within which it develops. Thus, while reiterating that Marx was not a Hegelian, Althusser stresses on the importance of studying the young Marx from the perspective of contemporary thought:

If the problem of Marx's Early Works is really to be posed, the first condition to fulfil is to admit that *even philosophers* are young men for a time. They must be born somewhere, some time, and begin to think and write. The scholar who insisted that his earlier works should never be published, or even written...was certainly no Hegelian...for from the Hegelian viewpoint, Early Works are as inevitable...as all beginnings...[However] Marx...grew up in this world, in it he learned to live and move, with it he 'settled accounts', from it he liberated himself.

For Althusser, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud represent a major epistemological break, and he lauds them for having braved the plight of 'fatherless children', in a 1964 article:

To my knowledge, the nineteenth century saw the birth of two or three children that were not expected: Marx, Nietzsche and Freud...[children of] the unmarried mother, hence the absence of a legal father. Western Reason makes a fatherless child pay heavily. Marx, Nietzsche and Freud had to foot the often terrible bill of survival: a price compounded of exclusion, condemnation, insult, poverty, hunger and death, or madness.

### c. Contradiction and Over-Determination

In Marxist practice, contradiction between the forces and relations of production and also between the two classes is of utmost importance. Althusser, however, gives this notion a radical turn when he claims in a 1962 article that the revolution can be possible only when these principal contradictions 'fuse' with circumstantial secondary contradictions:

Marxist revolutionary experience shows that, if the general contradiction (it has already been specified: the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production, essentially embodied in the contradiction between two antagonistic classes) is sufficient to define the situation when revolution is the 'task of the day', it cannot of its own simple, direct power induce a 'revolutionary situation'...If this contradiction is to become 'active' in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of 'circumstances' and 'currents' so that whatever their origin and sense...they 'fuse' into a ruptural unity...

Althusser substantiates his point by quoting Mao, who said, 'A simple process contains only a single pair of opposites, while a complex process, contains more' because 'there are many
contradictions in the course of development of any major thing. He goes on to show how this means that the secondary contradictions belonging to the context are not necessarily determined and dominated by some basic primary contradiction, and he claims, in a 1963 article, that it is reductionist economism, and not ‘true’ Marxism that identifies contradictions in the economic domain as dominant and determinant over the others. He says,

It is ‘economism’ (mechanism) and not the true Marxist tradition that sets up the hierarchy of instances once and for all... It is economism that identifies eternally in advance the determinant-contradiction-in-the-last-instance with the role of the dominant contradiction...

Though Althusser critiques the anti-Marxist monist tendency, which credits the structural contradictions the dominating role, he also steers clear of anarchist and nihilistic tendency of ‘pluralism’, and Marxism derives its ontological unity from within complexity itself:

In this complex whole ‘containing many contradictions’ we cannot ‘find’ one contradiction that dominates the others... So to claim that this unity is not and cannot be the unity of a simple, original and universal essence is not, as those who dream of that ideological concept foreign to Marxism, ‘monism’, think, to sacrifice unity on the altar of ‘pluralism’—it is to claim...that the unity discussed by Marxism is the unity of the complexity itself, that the mode of organization and articulation of the complexity is precisely what constitutes its unity. It is to claim that the complex whole has the unity of a structure articulated in dominance...This principle must be grasped and intransigently defended if Marxism is not to slip back into the confusions from which it had delivered us...into the twin confusions of ‘mechanistic materialism’ and the idealism of consciousness.

This idea of the primary contradictions determining the contextual factors while itself being determined by them leads to Althusser’s notion of ‘overdetermination’, which leads to the idea of a ‘complex whole’ from within the Marxist dialectic. Althusser says,

This reflection of the conditions of existence of the contradiction within itself, this reflection of the structure articulated in dominance that constitutes the unity of the complex whole within each contradiction; this is the most profound characteristic of the Marxist dialectic, the one I have tried recently to encapsulate in the concept of ‘overdetermination’.

The observation that secondary contradictions are not mere derivatives of the principal contradiction, but its very constitutive categories leads Althusser to proclaim a radical reversal of the reductionist Marxist schema of viewing the superstructure as essentially dependent on the economic base. Claiming this to be a true interpretation of Marx, he says,

...‘secondary’ contradictions are not the pure phenomena of the ‘principal’ contradiction... On the contrary...the secondary contradictions are essential even to the existence of the principal contradiction... The superstructure is not the pure phenomena of the structure, it is also its condition of existence. This follows from Marx’s principle...that production without society, that is, without social relations, exists nowhere...

87 Louis Althusser, in Ibid., 213.
88 Ibid., 201-02.
89 Ibid., 206.
90 Ibid., 205.
Calling its relative autonomy of and its reciprocal role in overdetermination \textquote{specific effectivity of the superstructure}, Althusser shows in a 1962 article how it is necessary to elaborately study elements of the superstructure for a proper revolutionary practice:

\ldots it has to be said that the theory of the specific effectivity of the superstructures and other \textit{circumstances} largely remains to be elaborated; and before the theory of their effectivity \ldots there must be elaboration of the theory of the particular essence of the specific elements of the superstructure \ldots this task is indispensable if we are to be able to express even propositions more precise than these approximations on the character of the overdetermination of Marxist contradiction, based primarily on the existence and nature of the superstructures.\footnote{Louis Althusser, \textquote{Contradiction and Overdetermination: Notes for an Investigation} (in \textit{La Pensée}, December 1962), in \textit{For Marx (Pour Marx}, François Maspero, Paris: 1965), trans. Ben Brewster, Allen Lane, London: 1969, pp. 113-14.}

This is especially so because, as Althusser observes, an economic upheaval itself does not ensure a corresponding change in the domain of the relatively autonomous superstructure, with ideological forms surviving a mere economic revolution. As an explanation, he says,

How, then, are we to think these survivals? Surely with a number of realities, which are precisely realities for Marx, whether superstructures, ideologies \textquote{national traditions} or the customs and spirit of a people, etc? Surely with the overdetermination of any contradiction and of any constitutive element of a society, which means: (1) that a revolution in the structure does not \textit{ipso facto} modify the existing superstructures particularly the ideologpies at one blow (as it would if the economic was the \textit{sole determinant factor}) \ldots (2) that the new society produced by the Revolution may itself ensure the survival, that is, the reactivation, of older elements through both the forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international) \textquote{circumstances}.\footnote{Ibid., 115-16.}

This is how Althusser takes Marxian thought beyond the pitfalls of reductionist economism, and provides within it the scope for broader political studies and resistance.

\textbf{d. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses}

The Althusserian insistence on the importance of the superstructure in hierarchic formation leads to his formulation about Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), articulated primarily in a 1970 article. He begins this article with the claim that a social system can sustain itself only as long as it reproduces its conditions of production. For Althusser,

The ultimate condition of production is \ldots the reproduction of the conditions of production \ldots It follows that, in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce:

1. the productive forces,

Forces of production comprise the means of economic production as well as labour power. Commonsensically, this reproduction is managed materially, i.e. the supply of raw materials and capital is ensured through trade and innovations, and the sustenance of the labour force is
ensured through wages enough to allow labour to reproduce itself. Althusser observes, however, that this is not enough, and though material reproduction might suffice for the means of production, to ensure the sustenance of the labour force, perpetrating the dominant ideology is necessary, to keep the labour force under perpetual domination. Althusser says,

To put it more scientifically, I shall say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words' 94

This makes the superstructural category of ideology an absolutely important operative factor in class domination, and for Althusser, 'it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power.' 95 The role of ideology in production becomes even more accentuated in the case of reproduction of the relations of production, and Althusser proceeds next to explain it.

Althusser observes how, for traditional Marxism, the State is always seen as a repressive apparatus that coercively makes people serve dominant class interests, while in reality this 'descriptive theory' is rather limited and needs to be supplemented. He says,

And yet the descriptive theory of the State represents a phase in the constitution of the theory which itself demands the 'supersession' of this phase... That is why I think that, in order to develop this descriptive theory into theory as such, i.e. in order to understand further the mechanisms of the State in its functioning, I think that it is indispensable to add something to the classical definition of the State as a State apparatus. 96

The concept with which Althusser attempts this supplementation is that of 'Ideological State Apparatuses', which are institutions controlled in the last instance by the State, but which are relatively autonomous and work in a non-repressive way, much like Gramsci's 'civil society':

I shall call this reality by its concept: the ideological State apparatuses... They must not be confused with the (repressive) State apparatus... I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. 97

Having introduced the Ideological State Apparatus, Althusser proceeds to distinguish it from the repressive State Apparatus, and lists three main differences between the two:

As a first moment, it is clear that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses... As a second moment, it is clear that whereas the—unified—(Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the public domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the private domain... [Moreover,] the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function 'by ideology'. 98

94 Ibid., 132-33.  
95 Ibid., 133.  
96 Ibid., 139-40.  
97 Ibid., 142-43.  
98 Ibid., 144-45.
Having qualified the ISA as being a plural body of relatively private non-coercive institutions, Althusser lists next the different types of ISAs—religious, educational, legal, political, cultural, familial institutions as well as structures like trade-unions and systems of communication—and argues that it is with these, in collusion with the Repressive State Apparatus, that the relations of production are reproduced. Althusser states,

*How is the reproduction of the relations of production secured?... I shall say: for the most part, it is secured by the exercise of State power in the State Apparatuses, on the one hand the (Repressive) State Apparatus, on the other the Ideological State Apparatuses.*

Having situated the role of ideology in the reproduction of conditions of production (both the forces and relations) Althusser explains next how ideology works through its apparatuses.

In this connection, Althusser presents two theses about the functioning of ideology. The first thesis is that ideology represents, instead of the real existing relations of production, the imaginary relationship of individuals to the relations, while projecting them as real:

**Thesis I:** Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence... The essential point is that on condition that we interpret the imaginary transposition (and inversion) of ideology we arrive at the conclusion that in ideology 'men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form'.

The second thesis is that ideology is material and gets exercised through material apparatuses:

**Thesis II:** Ideology has a material existence... While discussing the ideological State apparatuses and their practices, I said that each of them was the realization of an ideology... I now return to this thesis: an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material.

This thesis entails that ideological practice controls the material actions of human subjects through its material apparatuses and determines his or her ideas. Althusser says,

I shall therefore say that, where only a single subject (such and such an individual) is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject.

Thus, not only do individual subjects constitute ideology, but ideology itself constitutes 'subjects' out of individuals, determining through the material action of its apparatuses the ideas and actions of individuals, and also urging them to function as such. Althusser says,

I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning.
Explaining how ideology constitutes subjective action out of individuals, Althusser formulates his well-known thesis: *ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*, or that ideology 'hails' and recruits individuals for a set of motivated material actions. He says,

> As a first formulation I shall say: *all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the function of the category of the subject... I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' 104

Althusser observes how this interpellation has a 'duplicate mirror-structure', because while ideology urges every individual to subjective action, it is always 'centred', with particular normative actions, those of an ideal Subject, being the only promoted ones. Althusser shows this is how power legitimizes the dominant code and maintains its hegemonic status quo:

> The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously:
> 1. The interpellation of 'individuals' as subjects;
> 2. Their subjection to the Subject;
> 3. The mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself;
> 4. The absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen—'So be it'. 105

The non-repressive stance of the ISAs thus serves better towards a complete domination, and though repression might be necessary to control some 'bad subjects', usually, ideological interpellation suffices, making oppression appear self-inflicted and thus legitimate:

> ...the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'.* 106

Therefore, though the strategy of ideological control is to make itself appear legitimate and truistic, for Althusser, it can gain ascendancy only through the material action of ISAs, which itself follows the path of a bitter and continuous class struggle. For Althusser:

> The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of seizing the State power alone. It is by installation of the ISAs in which this ideology is realized and realizes itself that it becomes the ruling ideology. But this installation is not achieved all by itself; on the contrary, it is the stake in a very bitter and continuous class struggle: first against the former ruling classes and their positions on the old and new ISAs, then against the exploited class. 107

Althusser's views on the role of superstructural ideology in class control provide a means to look beyond the reductionist and deterministic orthodox Marxist practice of the economic base. Demolishing the repressive hypothesis of power, and introducing the superstructure into resistant practice, this surely moves towards constituting the Foucauldian *episteme*.  

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104 Ibid., 173-74.  
105 Ibid., 180-81.  
106 Ibid., 182.  
107 Ibid., 185.
Jean-Paul Sartre: of Matter and the Being

Sartre's Philosophy of Existentialism

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is known best for his existentialist philosophy, and therefore, I would begin my examination of how he contributes towards the formation of the episteme under discussion with an exposition of Sartrean existentialism, as laid out primarily in his *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946). Sartre begins by stating (quite contrary to the popular views on existentialism) that human action involves both the subject and the context:

...we can begin by saying that existentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity.

For Sartre, what binds the two kinds of existentialists—the 'Christians' like Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, and the 'existential atheists' like Heidegger and the French existentialists—is the common belief that existence precedes essence, or that a human being is the maker of his or her individual destiny. Citing this as the 'first principle of existentialism', Sartre says,

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is... Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.

While this might look like transcendental subjectivism, Sartre makes it clear that in shaping the self, every individual being also gives shape to the whole of humanity. For Sartre, 'I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself I fashion man.' This great social responsibility in spite of being 'abandoned' to one's own self provides existentialism with its key terms:

This may enable us to understand what is meant by such terms—perhaps a little grandiloquent—as anguish, abandonment and despair... The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follows—When a man commits himself to anything, fully realising that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind—in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility... Who, then, can prove that I am the proper person to impose, by my own choice, my conception of man upon mankind? I shall never find any proof whatever; there will be no sign to convince me of it.

It is the total freedom of action that, therefore creates the existential anguish, and Sartre says, 'We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free.' This also shows that existentialism does not comprise quietism or inaction, because according to it, the very nature of reality lies in constant action. Sartre says.

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Quietism is the attitude of people who say, "let others do what I cannot do." The doctrine I am presenting before you is precisely the opposite of this, since it declares that there is no reality except in action. It goes further, indeed, and adds, "Man is nothing else than what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realises himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is."[113]

There is a second point to existentialism, which connects subjectivism to the notion of power as manifest in the domain of contextual practice. This is the idea of the constant dialectics between the being and the other, which introduces three features to the existentialist schema, all of which contribute towards the episteme under examination. First, it introduces the notion of a two-way dialectic in subjective practice; secondly, it introduces the notion of power into individual existence; and finally, it brings in the contextual world, because the being-other pair together comprises the 'inter-subjective' global domain. For Sartre,

I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself. Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the same time the revelation of the other as a freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me. Thus, at once, we find ourselves in a world which is, let us say, that of "inter-subjectivity". It is in this world that man has to decide what he is and what others are.[114]

Thus, the world gets defined for the existentialist neither through isolated subjective practice, nor through mere 'unconscious' materialism, but, in a dialectical way, through an interaction between the being, its others and the universe they subtend. Submitting neither to subjective idealism, nor to the reductionisms of orthodox materialism, Sartre says,

All kinds of materialism lead one to treat every man including oneself as an object—that is, as a set of pre-determined reactions, in no way different from the patterns of qualities and phenomena which constitute a table, or a chair or a stone. Our aim is precisely to establish the human kingdom as a pattern of values in distinction from the material world. But the subjectivity which we thus postulate as the standard of truth is no narrowly individual subjectivism, for as we have demonstrated, it is not only one's own self that one discovers in the cogito, but those of others too.[115]

Therefore, for Sartre, liberation does not necessarily lie in the overthrow of the State, and though he admires the immediate consequences of the Russian revolution, he is doubtful whether the Soviet state can truly lead to a freedom for the proletariat. He says,

I do not know whither the Russian revolution will lead. I can admire it and take it as an example in so far as it is evident, to-day, that the proletariat plays a part in Russia which it has attained in no other nation. But I cannot affirm that this will necessarily lead to the triumph of the proletariat...[116]

Thus, not only does Sartrean existentialism attempt to fuse individual subjectivity with social commitment, introduce dialectics as a method towards it, inject a concern for power in the practice of existence, and conceive of a contextual world-view emerging from this practice, it also expresses direct concern about Marxist praxis, and this is what I would examine next.

[113] Ibid., 41.
[114] Ibid., 45.
[115] Ibid., 45.
[116] Ibid., 40.
b. **Sartre’s Conception of the Marxist Dialectic**

In attempting to free Marxist practice from economistic reductionism, Sartre stresses in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), just like Lenin, Gramsci or Althusser, on the intellectual content of Marxism. He says, ‘The attempt to ground the Marxist dialectic on anything other than its content, that is to say, the knowledge which it provides, might be denounced as idealism.’ He goes on to show how, while Marx opposes himself to Hegelian idealism by posing the dialectic of being and knowledge, the orthodox Marxists have, in their failure to understand the dialectic, regressed to positivism. He says,

Marx’s originality lies in the fact that, in opposition to Hegel, he demonstrated that History is in development, that Being is irreducible to Knowledge, and, also, that he preserved the dialectical movement both in Being and in Knowledge... But having failed to re-think the dialectic, Marxists have played the Positivist game... Marxism as dialectic must reject the relativism of the positivists.

Sartre shows how the abandonment of the true nature of the Marxian dialectic has made Marxists find an antinomy between being and thought, in attempting to solve which, they have regressed to a holism of matter alone, constituting an ‘external’ dialectical materialism:

This difficulty has appeared insurmountable to modern Marxists. They have seen only one solution: to refuse to acknowledge thought itself as a dialectical activity, to dissolve it into the universal dialectic, and to eliminate man by dispersing him into the universe. This enables them to substitute Being for Truth... This gigantic—and, as we shall see, abortive—attempt to allow the world to unfold itself by itself and no one, we shall call external, or transcendental, dialectical materialism (le matérialisme dialectique du dehors ou transcendental).

Thus, for Sartre, reductionist Marxists have resorted to an absolutist ‘materialist idealism’ as opposed to the ‘realist materialism’ of Marx that is situated in a dialectic praxis:

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

This is how, Sartre arrives, much like the thinkers I have already discussed, to the primacy of ‘praxis’, whereby materialism can only be true in relation to society and human history:

...if there is such a thing as dialectical reason, it is revealed and established in and through human praxis, to men in a given society at a particular moment of its development... A materialist dialectic will be meaningless if it cannot establish, within human history, the primacy of material conditions as they are discovered by the praxis of particular men and as they impose themselves on it. In short, if there is to be any such thing as dialectical materialism, it must be a historical materialism... Consequently, this materialism, if it exists, can be true only within the limits of our social universe.

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This is how Sartre comes to propose the 'critical dialectic' in the place of 'dogmatic dialectic' of orthodox Marxism. In fact, he goes on to show how this 'critique' of dialectical reason can only be possible outside a dogmatic regime like that of Stalinist Russia:

...critical investigation could not occur in our history, before Stalinist idealism had sclerosed both epistemological methods and practices. It could take place only as the intellectual expression of that re-ordering which characterises, in this 'one World' of ours, the post-Stalinist period.\(^{122}\)

In trying to formulate his 'critical dialectic', Sartre shows how, like Marx, he believes in the dialectics between human beings and history, whereby socio-historical conditions limit all human relations, but, conversely, it is human relations and praxis that determines history:

My formalism, which is inspired by that of Marx, consists simply in recognising that men make History to precisely the extent that it makes them. This means that relations between men are always the dialectical consequence of their activity to precisely the extent that they arise as a transcendence of dominating and institutionalised human relations. Man exists for man only in given circumstances and social conditions, so every human relation is historical. But historical relations are human in so far as they are always given as the immediately dialectical consequence of praxis, that is to say, of the plurality of activities in a single practical field.\(^{123}\)

Sartre rounds up his discussion of this 'truly' Marxist method with an explanation of the two terms it involves. He says that the method is 'critical' because it tries to examine the limits of dialectical reason and find how it can regress to a positivist analytical reason, and the method is 'dialectic' because its primary objective is to establish the real nature of the dialectic:

Our approach will therefore be critical in that it will be an attempt to determine the validity and the limits of dialectical Reason, and this will mean identifying both the oppositions and the connections between this Reason and positivist analytical Reason. But it must also be dialectical, since dialectic is necessary for dealing with dialectical problems.\(^{124}\)

Sartre's conception of the Marxian dialectic shows that he, while firmly believing in Marx, he wishes to do away with some of the reductionist and idealistic deviations in orthodox Stalinist practice, and one can note how, in a 1969 interview, Sartre shows that contemporary Communist Parties are hierarchic in nature, and visualizes an alternate Marxist organization:

The central question is whether in the end the only possible type of political organization is that which we know in the shape of the present CPs: hierarchical division between leadership and rank-and-file, communications and instructions proceeding from above downwards only, isolation of each cell from every other, vertical powers of dissolution and discipline, separation of workers and intellectuals?... But does a proletarian party have to resemble the present-day Communist Parties? Is it not possible to conceive of a type of political organization where men are not barred or stifled?\(^{125}\)

It is this alternate Marxism, the 'Marxist Existentialism' of Sartre, that I discuss next.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 50.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 97-98.

\(^{124}\) 'Preface' to Critique de la Raison Dialectique (1960), as 'Annexe', in Ibid., 823.

c. *Sartre’s Conception of ‘Marxist Existentialism’*

I will examine how Sartre fuses existentialism and Marxism, primarily through an analysis of his *Problem of Method* (1960). Sartre begins the text by connecting the key issues at stake—philosophy, class, and consciousness—by saying, ‘A philosophy is first of all a particular way in which the “rising” class becomes conscious of itself.’\(^{126}\) Having set the stage for something like the Gramscian and Althusserian ‘philosophical practice’, Sartre shows how ‘Every philosophy is practical, even the one which at first appears to be the most contemplative. Its method is a social and political weapon.’\(^{127}\) Having equated philosophy and politics, it is easy for Sartre to claim that ‘Existentialism and Marxism... aim at the same object’,\(^ {128}\) and he elaborates the statement by showing how the objectives are same for both:

> Existentialism, like Marxism, addresses itself to experience in order to discover there concrete syntheses: it can conceive of these syntheses only within a moving, dialectical totalization which is nothing else but history or—from the strictly cultural point of view which we have adopted here—“philosophy-becoming-the-world”.\(^{129}\)

Sartre moves on next to show what the fundamental difference between his philosophy and orthodox Marxism is. He says that as opposed to the ossified economism of orthodox Marxism, ‘It is already evident that we do not conceive of economic conditions as the simple, static structure of an unchangeable society; it is the contradictions within them which form the driving force of history.’\(^{130}\) Contradictions, or superstructural inputs being the shapers of history, Sartre gives the classic example of every petit bourgeois intellectual not being identical to Valéry, to show how multiple ‘mediations’ work beyond the obviousness of class:

> Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry. The heuristic inadequacy of contemporary Marxism is contained in these two sentences. Marxism lacks any hierarchy of mediations which would permit it to grasp the process which produces the person and his product inside a class and within a given society at a given historical moment.\(^ {131}\)

Sartre also shows how traditional Marxism leaves out historically meaningful phases like the childhood and proposes a fusion of psychoanalysis and Marxism to remedy the same:

> Today’s Marxists are concerned only with adults; reading them, one would believe that we are born at the age when we earn our first wages. They have forgotten their own childhood... Dead set against interpretations too exclusively sexual, Marxists make use of them in order to condemn a method of interpretation which claims only to put History in place of nature in each person... Existentialism, on the contrary, believes that it can integrate the psychoanalytic method which discovers the point of insertion for man and his class—that is, the particular family—as a mediation between the universal class and the individual.\(^ {132}\)

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\(^{131}\) *Ibid.*, 56.

Orthodox Marxism being flawed in excluding the subject from knowledge, Marxist Existentialism, or what Sartre calls here ‘Marxist anthropology’, wishes to supplement it by locating the class struggle in relation to the individual situation of existence. Sartre says,

It is inside the movement of Marxist thought that we discover a flaw of such a sort that despite itself Marxism tends to eliminate the questioner from his investigation and to make of the questioned the object of an absolute knowledge... Existentialism too, wants to situate man in his class and in the conflicts which oppose him to other classes, starting with the mode and the relations of production. But it can approach this “situation” in terms of existence—that is, of comprehension. It makes itself the questioned and the question as questioner... Thus the comprehension of existence is presented as the human foundation of Marxist anthropology.133

This attempt, as has already been stated, is not to displace Marxism, but to ‘better’ it and make it more suited for actual practice. Sartre makes this very clear when he says that contemporary thought can only rise from the ground of Marxism, and develop it further:

Far from being exhausted, Marxism is still very young, almost in its infancy; it has scarcely begun to develop. It remains, therefore, the philosophy of our time. We cannot go beyond it because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it. Our thoughts, whatever they may be can be formed only upon this humus; they must be contained within the framework which it furnishes for them or be lost in the void or retrogress.134

Thus, for Sartre, the purpose of existentialism is just intermediary, and its only rationale lies in correcting the flaws of orthodox Marxist thought, and leading it to a true revolution:

From the day that Marxist thought will have taken on the human dimension (that is, the existential project) as the foundation of anthropological Knowledge, existentialism will no longer have any reason for being.135

This being the function of philosophy in Sartrean thought, it is expected that he would conceive of a political role for the intellectual, and this is what I take up next.

d. *The Political Role of the Intellectual*

Sartre says in a 1969 interview that the objective of philosophy is ‘how to give man both his autonomy and his reality among real objects, avoiding idealism without lapsing into a mechanistic materialism.’136 This political function of philosophy in not only liberating human individuals but also breaking through the tyrannical modes of both dogmatic idealism and materialism can only be ushered in by the ‘intellectual’. To define the ‘intellectual’, Sartre shows how there are two types of practitioners of knowledge: mere ‘technicians of knowledge’, or ‘false intellectuals’, who serve the functions allocated by dominant ideology, and true ‘intellectuals’, who can resist this role, and serve ‘particular’ liberating goals. Sartre elaborates upon this distinction in a 1970 interview saying.

133 Ibid., 75-76.
134 Ibid., 30.
135 Ibid., 181.
...all we have are technicians of practical knowledge who either accommodate themselves to their contradiction or manage to avoid suffering from it. But when one of them becomes aware of the fact that despite the universality of his work it serves only particular interests, then his awareness of this contradiction is precisely what characterizes him as an intellectual.\(^{137}\)

Sartre discusses these two types in detail in some lectures delivered in 1965. On the one hand, he shows how the 'technicians of knowledge' follow the dictate of dominant ideology:

It thus educates them *a priori* to fulfill two roles: it turns them simultaneously into specialists in research and servitors of hegemony, that is to say custodians of tradition. In their second role they become 'functionaries of the superstructures', to use another of Gramsci's expressions... At this level they are the agents of an ideological *particularism*.\(^{138}\)

On the other hand, the 'intellectual' performs a dialectical social role, which steers clear of both absolute objectivism and subjectivism in its study of the self and society. For Sartre,

The intellectual will both seek to understand himself within society so far as he is a product of society, and at the same time to study the total society which is a perceptual reversal of perspectives: the self is referred to the world and the world is referred to the self... the intellectual cannot consider the social whole *objectively*, because he discovers it within himself as his fundamental contradiction. Nor, on the other hand, can he be satisfied with a merely *subjective* questioning of himself, since he is precisely inserted into a determinate society that has fashioned him.\(^{139}\)

This makes Sartre conclude that radical political practice lies in the committed activity of the intellectual, and he says, 'In actual fact radicalism and intellectual commitment are one and the same'.\(^{140}\) For Sartre, the real role of the intellectual lies in providing the masses with 'practical truth' and 'class consciousness' rather than mythical representations of themselves:

The exploited classes... do not need an ideology so much as the practical truth of society. That is to say, they have no need of a mythical representation of themselves; they need knowledge of the world in order to change it... In short, they need to possess their own practical truth, which means they seek to grasp themselves both in their *historical particularity*... and in their struggle for universalization... The dialectical relationship between the two exigencies is what is called class consciousness. Now it is at this level that the intellectual can serve the people.\(^{141}\)

Finally, I might cite how, intellectual practice being all about socio-political commitment, Sartre states in a 1959 interview that there is nothing like 'pure' literature, whose purpose is only aesthetic. Literature, like all other intellectual practice has to have a political relevance:

...'pure' literature is a dream... If literature is not everything, it is worth nothing. This is what I mean by 'commitment'. It withers if it is reduced to innocence, or to songs. If a written sentence does not reverberate at every level of man and society, then it makes no sense. What is the literature of an epoch but the epoch appropriated by its literature?\(^{142}\)

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\(^{140}\) *Ibid.*, 252.


e. **Body and Power: the Being and the Other**

It has been observed in the three authors I have discussed earlier that the unilateral political discourse of class gives way in their thought to the possibility of superstructural categories, resulting in the inclusion of the domain of mentality, as represented by ideology and race, within their resistant political discourse. However, in none of the three authors has a similar stance towards hierarchies in the domain of physicality, comprising gender and the general politics of the body, been noticed. It is fortunate that in Sartre, one notices a concern for the politics of the body, leading to the possibility of tri-hierarchization. In some 1965 lectures, Sartre, talking about the role of ‘technicians of knowledge’, shows how, through them, dominant ideology creates hierarchies in all the three domains of class, race and gender:

> In this way they contributed to the maintenance of bourgeois humanism—all men are equal except colonial who are merely shadows of men. Other studies established in the same way the inferiority of women: humanity was bourgeois, white and masculine.\[143\]

Sartre presents a more elementary picture of the play of power in the body in a work as early as *Being and Nothingness* (1943), where he shows that the basic dialectical existential relation between the being and the other is located primarily in the body. For Sartre,

> ...since the original bond with the Other first arises in connection with the relation between my body and the Other’s body, it seemed clear to us that the knowledge of the nature of the body was indispensable to any study of the particular relations of my being with that of the Other.\[144\]

Basing himself on this notion of the primacy of the body in existential relations, Sartre shows how relations that are popularly conceived to be altruistic, like sexual love, are basically manifestations of a power play between the being and the other in the domain of the body. Sartre says, ‘My original attempt to get hold of the other’s free subjectivity through his objectivity-for-me is sexual desire.’\[145\] What is even more striking about this appropriation of the other’s subjectivity in sexual activity is that it happens in relation to the basic body alone, the body stripped of all cultural markers like cosmetics and clothes, and the body robbed of extraneous factors like locomotion, the body as ‘flesh’. Sartre says,

> Thus desire is the desire to appropriate the body as this appropriation reveals to me my body as flesh. But this body which I wish to appropriate I wish to appropriate as flesh. Now at first the other’s body is not flesh for me; it appears as a synthetic form in action... Ordinarily it is hidden by cosmetics, clothing, etc., in particular it is hidden by movements... Desire is the attempt to strip the body of its movements as of its clothing and to make it exist as pure flesh, it is an attempt to incarnate the Other’s body.\[146\]

Thus, with Sartre, one arrives at a point of crystallization of the *episteme*, where not only its methodological features but its particular ontological categories make their appearance.

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VI. André Breton and the Political Role of Art

a. The Relevance of Surrealism to Foucauldian Thought

While it has already been stated in the introductory section to this chapter that the thought of André Breton (1896-1966) is relevant for the framing of the Foucauldian episteme, it might appear at first sight rather strange to associate the apparently subjective surrealist movement to Foucault. This is, however, hardly an anomaly considering the fact that Foucault wrote two whole books on surrealist artists, *Death and the Labyrinth* (1963) on Raymond Roussel and *This is not a pipe* (1973) on René Magritte. In a letter published as 'Postscript' to the former book, Foucault shows how surrealism constituted a real break for him:

> I belong to that generation who as students had before their eyes, and were limited by, a horizon consisting of Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism. Interesting and stimulating as these might be, naturally they produced in the students completely immersed in them a feeling of being stifled, and the urge to look elsewhere. I was like all other students of philosophy at that time, and for me the break was first Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*... then reading the works of Blanchot, Bataille, and Robbe-Grillet... For my generation they represent the break with a perspective dominated by Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism.147

In the second volume, Foucault shows how surrealism cuts through the separation of visual and linguistic art, creating a holistic art at divergence with isolationist classical painting:

> Separation between linguistic signs and plastic elements; equivalence of resemblance and affirmation. These two principles constituted the tension in classical painting... Hence the fact that classical painting spoke—and spoke constantly—while constituting itself entirely outside language... Magritte knits verbal signs and plastic elements together, but without referring them to a prior isotopism.148

It is this power of surrealism to go beyond the traditional role of art that makes the movement important for the epistemic conditions of tri-hierarchist thought. When Breton asks in a 1924 writing, 'Must poetic creations assume the tangible character of extending, strangely, the limits of so-called reality?', it is this limited role of art that he is questioning. Surrealism thus attacks the mediocrity thrust upon art by dominant ideology, and Breton shows that the constitutive element of surrealism is to liberate language from this 'mediocrity'. He says,

> Does not the mediocrity of our universe depend essentially on our power of enunciation?... Thank God a slow but sure reaction against this has finally developed in men's minds. Things said over and over again today meet a solid barrier... What is to prevent me from throwing disorder into this order of words, to attack murderously this obvious aspect of things? Language can and should be torn from this servitude... Silence, so that I may pass where no one has ever passed.150

Thus, surrealism is all about radical liberation, and this is what makes it relevant to Foucault.

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b. *What is Surrealism?*

In trying to define what surrealism is, Breton shows in his *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) that, as opposed to the two contrary states of concrete ‘reality’ and unreal ‘dream’, surrealism aims to resolving the two into a ‘surreality’, an ‘absolute reality’:

I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession.151

This makes Breton define surrealism as a ‘psychic automatism’, whereby the human artistic subject transcends the controls of traditional aesthetic forms as if automatically:

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.152

This notion of ‘automatism’ makes surrealist production spontaneous, and Breton says,

It is true of Surrealist images as it is of opium images that man does not evoke them; rather they “come to him spontaneously, despottiically. He cannot chase them away for the will is powerless now and no longer controls the faculties."153

Though such a conception of artistic creation is bound to mark surrealism as disinterested and idealist, Breton shows how this is not so because the fundamental aim of surrealism is radical:

I believe in the pure Surrealist joy of the man who forewarned that all others before him have failed, refuses to admit defeat, sets off from whatever point he chooses along any other path save a reasonable one, and arrives wherever he can.154

Therefore, surrealism is inherently connected to a quest for ‘freedom’, and its employment of unbridles imagination is aimed at gaining freedom for human expression. Breton says,

The mere word “freedom” is the only one that still excites me. I deem it capable of indefinitely sustaining the old human fanaticism. It doubtless satisfies my only legitimate aspiration, among all the many misfortunes to which we are heir, it is only fair to admit that we are allowed the greatest degree of freedom of thought... Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what can be, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake (as though it were possible to make a bigger mistake).155

Surrealism being thus aimed at gaining freedom from oppressive modes of representation, its fundamental feature is that of ‘non-conformism’, whereby surrealism can attack all normative forms of artistic production and set up its own alternative form in their place. Breton says,

Surrealism, such as I conceive of it, asserts our complete nonconformism clearly enough so that there can be no question of translating it, at the trial of the real world, as evidence for the defense... Surrealism is the “invisible ray” which will one day enable us to win out over our opponents.156

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153 *Ibid.*, 36; the quote is from Baudelaire.
Thus, for surrealism, there is no form of knowledge that can claim omniscience, and Breton says in ‘Third Surrealist Manifesto’ (1942), that surrealism needs to steer clear of hierarchic categories, like an omniscient philosophy and God, to perform its non-conformist task:

There are no human shoulders that can bear the burden of omniscience. People once claimed that omniscience was an attribute of "God", and since man was supposedly made “in His image”, he was only too often urged to lay claim to this omniscience. These two pieces of nonsense must both be done away with at once.\(^\text{157}\)

This basic stance of non-conformism makes Breton conscious of the possibilities of dogmatic conformism within surrealism itself, and talking about how it needs to oppose such trends within itself, to keep up with its radical task to the full, Breton says,

The fact remains, moreover, that at the end of twenty years I find myself obliged, as I did in my youth, to take a public stand against every kind of conformism and in so doing attack as well a Surrealist conformism that is all too obvious... In 1942 more than ever the opposition must be strengthened at its very base. All ideas that win out hasten to their downfall. Man must be absolutely convinced that once there has been general consent on a given subject, individual resistance is the only key to the prison.\(^\text{158}\)

This total anti-dogmatism and non-conformism makes surrealism a means to intellectual resistance, and I will now see how Breton perceives intellectual production itself as political.

c. The Politics of Intellectual Production

In explaining the political interventionist role of intellectual production, Breton shows in a 1935 lecture that the apparently individualistic ‘psychic automatism’ is not an end in itself for surrealism, but rather just a means to involve itself with the collectivity:

Psychic automatism...has never constituted an end in itself for Surrealism and to claim the contrary is to show bad faith. The premeditated energy in poetry and in art that has its object the rediscovery, at any price, of the naturalness, the truth and the originality it once had...necessarily had someday to discover the immense reservoir from which symbols spring completely armed and spread to collective life through the work of a few men... In these conditions, thus, art is no longer a question of the creation of a personal myth, but rather, with Surrealism, of the creation of a collective myth.\(^\text{159}\)

In this context, Breton distinguishes, in a 1930 article, between two different motivations behind intellectual production, one aiming at the capitalistic needs and the other bypassing it:

In order to avoid any \textit{a priori} confusion, it is necessary to differentiate between two principal modes of ‘intellectual’ production: (1) that which has as its object the satisfaction of the \textit{appetite of the mind}, as natural as hunger; (2) that which aims at satisfying very different needs on the part of the producer (money, honours, glory...).\(^\text{160}\)


\(^{158}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 288-89.


Distinguishing the surrealist mode of intellectual production from the one that follows a mere capitalistic logic, Breton quotes Marx to show how on the one hand, art can have a use value without it being a commodity, and on the other how the only justification of art as commodity lies in its being able to transcend the dominant dictate and become socially productive:

The intellectual producer whom I want to consider quite apart from the above is the one who strives to satisfy by his product, before anything else, the personal needs of his mind. 'A thing can be useful and the product of man's work,' said Marx, 'without being a commodity. The man who satisfies a personal need with his product creates a use value but not a commodity. In order to produce commodities, he must produce not only a mere use value but one that may be useful to others, namely a social use value.'

This brings out the full import of the political nature of intellectual production, and the role of surrealism to resist capitalistic logic and even aim at a social liberation of the human being.

d. Surrealism and Human Liberation

In his Second Manifesto to Surrealism (1930), Breton fends off the allegation that surrealism is mere 'intellectual pastime', and shows how it is aimed at liberating those who are kept captive under what Foucault would later call the carceral regime:

There are still today in the Lycées, even in the workshops, in the street, the seminaries and the military barracks, pure young people who refuse to knuckle down. It is to them and them alone that I address myself, it is for them alone that I am trying to defend Surrealism against the accusation that it is, after all, no more than an intellectual pastime like any other. Let them in all objectivity try to ascertain what it is we have tried to do, let them lend us a hand, let them take our places one by one if need be.

It is with this revolutionary goal of surrealism in mind, that Breton gives the call, in a 1925 article, to end social coercion by disbanding repressive structures like prisons and the army:

Social coercion has had its day. Nothing—neither recognition of an accomplished fault nor contribution to the national defence—can force man to give up freedom... 'Sacred unity' before knives or machine guns—how can this discredited argument be cited any longer? Send the soldiers and convicts back to the fields...

OPEN THE PRISONS!
DISBAND THE ARMY!

Breton credits surrealism with a political agenda of liberating human beings from the tyranny not only of certain modes of thought, but also of repressive state apparatuses. Accordingly, Breton states in a 1934 lecture that it is wrong to brand surrealism as 'transcendental':

A certain immediate ambiguity contained within the word surrealism is capable, in fact, of leading one to suppose that it designates I know not what transcendental attitude, when on the contrary it expresses—and always has expressed for us—a desire to deepen the foundations of the real; to bring about an ever clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses.

161 Ibid., 65-66.
164 André Breton, 'What is Surrealism?' (lecture delivered in Brussels, June 1934), in ibid., 115.
There is no doubt that surrealism starts off in a subjective way, and aims initially at liberating the individual mind, but Breton shows how this point of departure, which is influenced by psychoanalysis, soon leads to the social emancipatory path of dialectical materialism. Claiming that the liberation of the mind is just a step towards the liberation of people, Breton states in the lecture that the final aim of surrealism is the proletarian revolution:

In reality, we are faced with two problems, one which is the problem raised, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the discovery of the relations between the conscious and the unconscious... We were the first to apply to its resolution a particular method which we have not ceased to consider both the most suitable and the most likely to be brought to perfection.... The other problem facing us is that of the social action we should pursue. We maintain that this action has its own method in dialectical materialism... I repeat, we hold the liberation of man to be the *sine qua non* of the liberation of the mind, and we can expect this liberation of man to result only from the proletarian revolution.\(^{165}\)

Placing surrealism in the context of 1930s Europe, where the capitalist society was getting bankrupt by the day, fascism was raising its ugly head, and traditional bourgeois humanism could only be an abettor of oppression, Breton shows how the objective of surrealism is to usher in the proletarian revolution and liberate both the humankind and its mind. He says,

In capitalist society, hypocrisy and cynicism have now lost all sense of proportion and are becoming more outrageous every day. Without making exaggerated sacrifices to humanitarianism, which always involve impossible reconciliations and truces to the advantage of the stronger, I should say that thought cannot in this atmosphere contemplate the exterior world without immediately shuddering. Everything we know about fascism shows that it is precisely the confirmation of this state of affairs, aggravated to its uttermost by the lasting resignation that it seeks to attain from those who suffer...today, more than ever, the *liberation of the mind*, the express aim of surrealism, demands as a primary condition, in the opinion of the surrealists, the *liberation of man*, which implies that we must struggle against our fetters with all the energy of despair; that today more than ever, the surrealists rely entirely, for the bringing about of human liberation, on the proletarian revolution.\(^{166}\)

Thus, surrealism becomes a context-bound politically motivated artistic form of liberation.

e. *Surrealism and Marxism: towards a ‘Political’ Art*

Breton shows in a 1938 article co-authored with Trotsky, how the ruse of apoliticism is a conservative ploy, and ‘true art’ cannot but be revolutionary, cannot but aim at bringing a radical change in society through aiding the proletarian revolution. Breton and Trotsky say,

It goes without saying that we do not identify ourselves with the currently fashionable catchword, ‘Neither fascism, nor communism!’—a shibboleth which suits the temperament of the philistine, conservative and frightened, clinging to the tattered remnants of the ‘democratic’ past. True art, which is not content to play variations on ready-made models but rather insists on expressing the inner needs of man and of mankind in its time—true art is unable not to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society.\(^{167}\)


The same article highlights the point further by showing how art cannot but be political:

It should be clear by now that in defending freedom of thought we have no intention of justifying political indifference, and that it is far from our wish to revive a so-called pure art which generally serves the extremely impure ends of reaction. No, our conception of the role of art is too high to refuse it an influence on the fate of society. We believe that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution.\(^\text{168}\)

The political nature of surrealism gets even clearer when one sees that the surrealists had no qualms in expelling Dali, one of their best known exponents, from their fold for being what Breton calls in a 1960 article, ‘Hitler’s one time apologist, the fascist painter, the religious bigot, the avowed racist’.\(^\text{169}\) Having established the proximity of surrealism to Marxian practice, in the Second Manifesto, Breton qualifies its political intent in a somewhat different direction by showing how it wishes to take the Marxist goal of revolution to superstructural categories like ‘love, dreams, madness, art, and religion’. Breton says,

Surrealism...is analogous...with historical materialism in that it too tends to take as its point of departure the “colossal abortion” of the Hegelian system... How can one accept the fact that the dialectical method can only be validly applied to the solution of social problems?... I really fail to see...why we should refrain from supporting the Revolution, provided we view the problems of love, dreams, madness, art, and religion from the same angle as they do.\(^\text{170}\)

This makes Breton add, much like Althusser or Sartre, a critical comment on reductionist Marxian practice. His belief in revolutionizing the superstructure and bringing forth a ‘true’ proletarian revolution, makes Breton critique the authoritarian and deviant role played by the party in Stalinist Russia, and he shows concern over the decline in its ideological level:

How is it possible not to be extremely concerned about such a noticeable decline in the ideological level of a party which not long ago had sprung so brilliantly armed from two of the greatest minds of the nineteenth century!\(^\text{171}\)

Thus, Breton gives the call for reinforcing Marxian practice not only by introducing art and the superstructure within its revolutionary schema, but also by showing how other radical modes of thought like Freudianism have to be fused with Marxism to achieve the same:

To be sure, Surrealism, Which as we have seen deliberately opted for the Marxist doctrine in the realm of social problems, has no intention of minimizing Freudian doctrine as it applies to the evaluation of ideas: on the contrary, Surrealism believes Freudian criticism to be the first and only one with a really solid basis.\(^\text{172}\)

It is thus clear how Breton and the entire surrealist movement contribute towards formulating the episteme in which Foucault could work, by taking resistant politics to the superstructural ideological domain and supplementing reductionist Marxism with other philosophies.

\(^{168}\) Ibid., 186.


\(^{171}\) Ibid., 143.

\(^{172}\) Ibid., 159-60.
VII. Bakhtin and the Role of Politics in Language and the Body

a. The Sign and Society: Language and Ideology

Finally, I come to Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975), the last among the six authors I have reserved for discussion in this chapter, a thinker much misunderstood by Marxists and much misappropriated by anti-Marxists, a thinker in whom class politics, language and the body come together to lead directly to the possibility of 'tri-hierarchization'. Under strict surveillance and censorship from the Stalinist regime, Bakhtin is believed to have written many of his texts in the names of his friends Vološinov and Medvedev, and in this section, I would follow established Bakhtinian scholarship to treat certain texts under these two names as having been written by Bakhtin.

Showing how the ideological political domain and the domain of language are interrelated, Bakhtin says in his Marxism and Philosophy of Language (1930), 'Everything ideological possesses meaning: It represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. Without signs, there is no ideology.' On the other hand, he goes on to show how '...consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs.' Thus, for Bakhtin, human consciousness is essentially connected to the ideological domain with language and related representational forms acting as the operative category. He says in his The Formal Method of Literary Scholarship (1928),

Human consciousness does not come into contact with existence directly, but through the medium of the surrounding ideological world... In fact, the individual consciousness can only become a consciousness by being realized in the forms of the ideological environment proper to it: in language, in conventionalized gesture, in artistic image, in myth, and so on.

This makes Bakhtin say in his Marxism and Philosophy of Language that 'The individual consciousness is a social-ideological fact', and he shows how language being the site of this formation, language, or to be more specific the sign, becomes the locus of class struggle:

By an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community, i.e.... with the community, which is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of class struggle.

This makes Bakhtin posit a political theory of language, which I would elaborate now.

174 Ibid., 11.
177 Ibid., 23.
Bakhtin comes down heavily on structuralist and formalist linguistic tendencies, which consider language as conventional and arbitrary and treat signs mathematically. Bakhtin calls such tendencies, which do not take the ideological nature of language into consideration, 'rationalist' and showing how they are out of touch with reality, he says,

The idea of the conventionality, the arbitrariness of language, is a typical one for rationalism as a whole, and no less typical is the comparison of language to the system of mathematical signs. What interests the mathematically minded rationalists is not the relationship of the sign to the actual reality it reflects nor to the individual who is its originator, but the relationship of sign to sign within a closed system already accepted and authorized. In other words, they are interested only in the inner logic of the system of signs itself, taken, as in algebra, completely independently of the ideological meanings that give the signs their content.  

Thus, Bakhtin changes the Saussurean conception of the sign, and shows that the sign is external, organized socially, concretely historical and inseparably linked with voice and authority. In fact, he criticises both 'abstract objectivism' and 'individualistic subjectivism' as inadequate means for the study of language, and shows how only a 'dialectical synthesis' of the two can lead one to the 'Marxist philosophy of language'. He says,

We believe that in this instance, as everywhere else, the truth is not to be found in the golden mean and is not a matter of compromise between thesis and antithesis, but lies over and beyond them, constituting a negation of both thesis and antithesis alike, i.e., constituting a dialectical synthesis.

Having identified the method to the Marxist philosophy of language, Bakhtin identifies next its basic unit in the actual act of verbal communication, i.e. the 'utterance'. He says, 'Marxist philosophy of language should and must stand squarely on the utterance as the real phenomenon of language—speech and as a socioideological structure.' This insistence on the actual act of communication makes Bakhtin put special emphasis on the dialogue and the 'dialogic'. Labelling 'dialogic words' or utterances as 'Theme' and 'dictionary words' as 'meaning', Bakhtin shows how meaning can express itself only in the dialogic situation:

Theme is the upper, actual limit of linguistic significance; in essence, only theme means something definite. Meaning, in essence, means nothing; it only possesses potentiality—the possibility of having a meaning within a concrete theme.

In The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship, Bakhtin shows how it is the dialogic utterance that is connected to the 'sociohistorical act', and therefore, it is this unit, rather than any other, that can lead to the 'theme' of a linguistic work and hence to its meaning. He says,

It is the whole utterance as speech performance that is directed at the theme, not the separate word, sentence, or period. It is the whole utterance and its forms, which cannot be reduced to any linguistic forms, which control the theme. The theme of the work is the theme of the whole utterance as a definite sociohistorical act.
In an essay, Bakhtin shows how all historical changes in language are invariably related to changes in the dialogic domain of the utterance, in the actual forms taken by 'speech genres':

Historical changes in language styles are inseparably linked to changes in speech genres... one must develop a special history of speech genres (and not only secondary, but also primary ones) which reflects more directly, clearly, and flexibly all the changes taking place in social life.183

Returning to the role language plays in the socio-ideological domain, Bakhtin shows, in Marxism and Philosophy of Language, how language, generated in the dialogic interpersonal domain of social communication, gives rise, in turn, to human personality. For him,

Personality is itself generated through language, not so much, to be sure, in the abstract forms of language, but rather in the ideological themes of language... The inner personality is generated along with language, in the comprehensive and concrete sense of the word, as one of its most important and most profound themes. The generation of language, meanwhile, is a factor in the generative process of social communication, a factor inseparable from that communication and its material base.184

Thus, human consciousness, personality and culture are generated through the dialogic action of language, and now I will turn to Bakhtin’s postulates on the novel, to see how he conceives the working of the dialogic within a linguistic expression of human culture, namely literature.

b. Heteroglossia and Chronotope: the Dialogic Novel

Bakhtin shows in an article how ‘social evaluations’ determine the form of a literary work. This brings one straight to the role of ideology and social factors in literature. He says,

In literature, assumed value judgments play a role of particular importance. We might say that a poetic work is a powerful condenser of unarticulated social evaluations—each word is saturated with them. It is these social evaluations that organize form as their direct expression.185

In his Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1929), Bakhtin shows how this social articulation in literature does not take a purely linguistic form, but the ‘dialogical angle’. He says,

The point is not the mere presence of several linguistic styles, social dialects, etc., a presence which is measured by purely linguistic criteria; the point is the dialogical angle at which they (the styles, dialects, etc.) are juxtaposed and counterposed in the work. But that dialogic angle cannot be measured by means of purely linguistic criteria, because dialogic relationships, although they belong to the province of the word, fall outside the province of its purely linguistic study.186

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This takes away the thrust of literary studies from a mere formalistic stylistics to a dialogic between the word and the idea. Bakhtin shows how the idea itself is not 'monologic', social articulation in literature thereby depending on the dialogic between language and thought:

The idea is a *living event* which is played out in the point where two or more consciousnesses meet dialogically. In this respect the idea resembles the *word*, with which it forms a dialogical unity. Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and "answered" by other voices from other positions. Like the word, the idea is by nature dialogical, the monolog being merely the conventional form of its expression which arose from the soil of the ideological monologism of modern times.\(^\text{187}\)

Having explained how Bakhtin foregrounds the category of the dialogic in language and literature, what needs to be seen is how he distinguishes it from dialectics. The difference, as Bakhtin shows in some 1970-71 notes, lies in the fact that dialogic deals with the actuality of interpersonal communication, while dialectics deals with 'abstract consciousness':

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices...remove the intonations... Carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics.\(^\text{188}\)

Thus, for Bakhtin, the all-important category of interpersonal dialogic represents the multiplicity of actuality, as opposed to the possible reductionisms of a person-matter dialectic. I will now examine how Bakhtin shows the working of this multiple dialogism in the novel.

For Bakhtin, the novel is the dialogic form *par excellence*, because the genre warrants the possibility of multiplicity. Bakhtin shows, in an essay included in *The Dialogic Imagination*, how the novel embodies this multiple dialogism through its three basic features:

I find three basic characteristics that fundamentally distinguish the novel in principle from other genres: (1) its stylistic three-dimensionality, which is linked with the multi-languaged consciousness realized in the novel; (2) the radical change it effects in the temporal coordinates of the literary image; (3) the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely, the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness.\(^\text{189}\)

Bakhtin goes on to show how these three characteristics of the novel that bring in the dialogic within it get articulated in the forms of a multitude of languages and spatio-temporal frames:

These three characteristics of the novel are all organically interrelated and have all been powerfully affected by a very specific rupture in the history of European civilization: its emergence from a socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society, and its entrance into international and interlingual contacts and relationships. A multitude of different languages, cultures and times became available to Europe, and this became a decisive factor in its life and thought.\(^\text{190}\)


\(^{190}\) *Ibid.*, 11.
Taking up the case of linguistic multiplicity first, Bakhtin shows at the very origin of the novel form and at the root of its success lies a ‘polyglossia’, or a multiple use of languages:

In contrast to other major genres, the novel emerged and matured precisely when intense activation of external and internal polyglossia was at the peak of its activity; this is its native element. The novel could therefore assume leadership in the process of developing and renewing literature in its linguistic and stylistic dimension.  

Polyglossia being intrinsic to the novel, Bakhtin shows in another essay in *The Dialogic Imagination*, how it frees the novel from linguistic tyranny and gives it a new ideology:

Only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language. Parodic-travestying forms flourish under these conditions, and only in this milieu are they capable of being elevated to completely new ideological heights.  

Bakhtin shows how a second type of multiplicity also evolves in the novel between the languages of the author and the fictional subjects. This multiplicity originating within a language itself, Bakhtin calls it ‘heteroglossia’ and shows how it operates as a ‘decentralizing tendency’ within language, creating different social strata of language use. He says,

Closely connected with the problem of polyglossia and inseparable from it is the problem of heteroglossia within a language, that is, the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language... This latecomer reflects, in its stylistic structure, the struggle between two tendencies in the languages of European peoples: one a centralizing (unifying) tendency, the other a decentralizing tendency (that is, one that stratifies languages).  

In a 1934-35 essay also included in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin shows how heteroglossia leads to ‘dialogization’ and becomes the distinguishing feature of the novel:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized... These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.  

Bakhtin also associates the decentralizing or ‘centrifugal’ and centralizing or ‘centripetal’ tendencies of heteroglossia in the novel to his already identified unit of dialogic utterance:

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity... Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).
What these two tendencies and the idea of heteroglossia imply is that 'Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others.' Thus, the novelist cannot but take into consideration the voices of the others, and his or her intentions can only be expressed in a 'refracted' form, in a dialogic relation to the intentions of others:

The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons...that open up behind heteroglot languages—rather, he welcomes them into his work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his new intentions, to serve a second master. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted...

Novels thus comprise a 'double-voiced discourse', whereby an internal dialogic always goes on between the centripetal authorial intentions and the centrifugal heteroglossic tendencies of other voices. Bakhtin shows how the novel is always characterized by this duality of meaning:

Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they—as it were—know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized.

The two voices and tendencies make analysing the novel itself have two functions: a process of 'canonization' of everything to the centre, and that of 're-accentuation' of marginal voices:

An analysis of novel style confronts a unique difficulty in the fact that the processes of transformation (to which every language phenomenon is subject) occur at a very rapid rate of change: the process of canonization, and the process of re-accentuation.

Either way, Bakhtin gives literature the notion of multiplicity in the domain of language.

Coming next to the second domain of multiplicity, that of space and time, Bakhtin shows in a 1937-38 essay how space and time get fused in literature to create a 'chronotope':

The process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature has a complicated and erratic history... We will give the name chronotope (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity... In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.

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196 Ibid., 294.
197 Ibid., 299-300.
198 Ibid., 324.
199 Ibid., 417.
Stating how a study of chronotopes leads one "toward a historical poetics", Bakhtin studies in the essay the evolving nature of chronotopes from the Greek romance to the Rabelaisian novel, and moves even beyond to novels of succeeding periods. Through these analyses, he establishes the multiple chronotopes as the organizing centres of a narrative, and says,

What is the significance of all these chronotopes? What is most obvious is their meaning for narrative. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative.201

Bakhtin shows, summing up the two types of multiplicity he identifies, that relations between the different chronotopes of a narrative are equivalent to the dialogism between the author and the phenomena he or she represents in 'a work, and concludes that the meaning of these dialogical relations lies in the chronotopic multiplicity of socio-historical time and space:

The author's relationship to the various phenomena of literature and culture has a dialogical character, which is analogous to the interrelationships between chronotopes within the literary work... But these dialogical relationships enter into a special semantic sphere that is purely chronotopic...202

This shows again how Bakhtin envisages a non-reductionist social role for cultural forms.

c. **Carnivalesque, Grotesque Realism, and the Body**

Having examined how Bakhtin brings together the domains of mentality (represented by language and literature) and materiality (represented by socio-political relevance), I would now see how he introduces physicality into the same, so that 'body' becomes the locus of dialogical social workings in literature. I will look into concepts evoked in Bakhtin's analysis of novels by Rabelais (c.1494-c.1553) in his *Rabelais and his World* (1940). The first of these concepts is that of the 'carnival', and Bakhtin shows how carnival festivities, so abundant in Rabelais, are means to create an alternate reality outside the officially sanctioned social life:

...they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year.203

Bakhtin stresses on the political potential of the carnival by showing how the 'second life' of carnivals liberates the hypoglossic strata from the political oppression of the feudal order:

In the framework of class and feudal political structure this specific character could be realized without distortion only in the carnival and in similar marketplace festivals. They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance.204

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Bakhtin shows that the ‘temporary suspension’ of class hierarchy within the carnival leads to the possibility of a type of liberating communication, which he calls the ‘carnivalesque’:

This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. A special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression was formed which we find abundantly represented in Rabelais’ novel.\textsuperscript{205}

The frankness and profanity of carnivalesque communication leads to the foregrounding of the body and the representation of some otherwise interdicted bodily functions. Bakhtin shows how this leads to a different form of aesthetic, which he calls the ‘grotesque realism’:

It is usually pointed out that in Rabelais’ work the material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life, plays a predominant role. Images of the body are offered, moreover, in an extremely exaggerated form… Actually, the images of the material bodily principle in the work of Rabelais… are the heritage… of that peculiar aesthetic concept which is characteristic of this folk culture and which differs sharply from the aesthetic concept of the following ages. We shall call it conditionally the concept of grotesque realism.\textsuperscript{206}

The essential principle of the carnivalesque being ‘degradation’, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract, Bakhtin shows how it is fulfilled through the grotesque realistic attribution of ‘topographical meaning’ to censored body parts and functions in terms of the implications they have in ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ movement:

Degradation and debasement of the higher do not have a formal and relative character in grotesque realism. “Upward” and “downward” have here an absolute and strictly topographical meaning. “Downward” is earth, “upward” is heaven… Such is the meaning of “upward” and “downward” in their cosmic aspect, while in their purely bodily aspect, which is not clearly distinct from the cosmic, the upper part is the face or the head and the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, the buttocks…it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth.\textsuperscript{207}

Grotesque realism is thus all about transgressive communication through the body, and Bakhtin shows how it foregrounds apertures, convexities and protrusions of the body, through which human beings can establish contact with others and the environment. He says,

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.\textsuperscript{208}

For Bakhtin this resistant representational form that transgresses class barriers through the body is in direct opposition to classical and Renaissance artistry, where dominant ideology sought to smoothen protrusions and orifices to maintain its hegemony through isolationism:

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 10. 
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 18. 
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 21. 
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., 26.
The concept of body in grotesque realism is of course in flagrant contradiction with the literary and artistic canon of antiquity, which formed the basis of Renaissance aesthetics and was connected to the further development of art. As conceived by these canons, the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; its protuberances and offshoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed.

Bakhtin makes two additional related points. The first is that there are two types of grotesque in European literature: medieval and Renaissance folk grotesque, which belonged to all the people, and the Romantic grotesque, which had a private "chamber" character. The second point is the theme of the mask, whose role is to attack conformity, and instead introduce notions of transition and change. Bakhtin also notices how grotesque realism is essentially historical. Talking about the contextuality of Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532) he says,

*Pantagruel* was conceived and written during the misfortunes suffered by France in 1532. True, these misfortunes were not catastrophic, but they were serious enough to affect the people's consciousness and to awaken their cosmic terror and eschatological expectations. Once again we have a remarkable example of a Renaissance piece of journalism based on the popular tradition of the marketplace. It is a militant echo of the events and thoughts of that historic period.

Thus, while introducing the body into his schema, Bakhtin makes it very clear that it is not just its biological essence that is being taken into consideration, but its immediate relation to history and to the politics of representation. He shows the historical nature of the grotesque:

Not the biological body, which merely repeats itself in the new generations, but precisely the historic, progressing body of mankind stands at the center of this system of images.

Thus, in the grotesque concept of the body a new, concrete, and realistic historic awareness was born and took form: not abstract thought about the future but the living sense that each man belongs to the immortal people who create history.

I will examine now how Bakhtin establishes this relationship between the body and politics.

d. Body and Society: Politics and Physicality

In his *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* (1927), Bakhtin criticises Freud's ahistorical reliance on the body, and shows, much like Vygotsky, how the forces of id and superego are not repressed inner realities but the results of a social dynamic. Attacking Freud, he says,

[For Freud.] what really counts in a human being is not at all what determines his place and role in history—the class, nation, historical period to which he belongs; only his sex and his age are essential, everything else being merely a superstructure. A person's consciousness is shaped not by his historical existence but by his biological being, the main facet of which is sexuality.

He goes on to show how Freud's biologism is nothing but an expression of the late bourgeois degeneracy, which, in its attempt to hold on to its last vestiges, was compelled to retreat from history and seek refuge in the reactionary isolationist schema of biologism. For Bakhtin,

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Whenever...a social class finds itself in a state of disintegration and is compelled to retreat from the arena of history, its ideology begins insistently to harp on one theme, which it repeats in every possible variation: *Man is above all an animal.*

Thus, for Bakhtin, Freudianism, or any philosophy that stresses ahistorically on the body alone, is constitutive of the degeneration of decadent late bourgeois thought. He says,

Thus, we see that the basic ideological motif of Freudianism is by no means its motif alone. The motif chimes in union with all the basic motifs of contemporary bourgeois philosophy. *A sui generis fear of history, an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and the historical, a search for this world precisely in the depths of the organic—these are the features that pervade all systems of contemporary philosophy and constitute the symptom of the disintegration and decline of the bourgeois world.*

Bakhtin goes on to conclude that there is nothing like the abstract biological person, and the individual and his or her body exist only in terms of socio-economic conditions, as their part:

The abstract biological person, biological individual...does not exist at all... Outside society, and, consequently, outside objective socioeconomic conditions, there is no such thing as a human being. *Only as part of a social whole, only in and through a social class, does the human person become historically real and culturally productive.*

Bakhtin credits Freud with having introduced the notion of struggle in the psychological domain, but he shows how Freud fails to identify the real processes behind this struggle, which lie beyond the subject in the social, economic and political dialectics of history:

Behind this struggle, as behind any ideological struggle of whatever scale, certain objective, material processes are covertly present. But Freudianism has not disclosed these processes. Indeed, to discover them would require going beyond the limits of subjective psychology... What we call the “human psyche” and “consciousness” reflects the dialectics of history to a much greater degree than the dialectics of nature. The nature that is present in them is nature already in economic and social refraction.

Thus, Bakhtin is of the view that psychology is necessarily a social phenomenon, and having ‘self-consciousness’ is no different from having ‘class consciousness’. He says,

In becoming aware of myself, I attempt to look at myself, as it were, through the eyes of another person, another representative of my social group, my class. Thus, *self-consciousness*, in the final analysis, always leads us to *class consciousness*, the reflection and specification of which it is in all its fundamental and essential respects.

What is clear from this is that Bakhtin brings together the three categories of literary and linguistic representation, class structure, and the body, and shows how the three are interrelated in the political games of dominant and resistant ideology. It should also be noted that in doing this he critiques the reductionist assumptions of orthodox Marxist practice and poses instead an alternate doctrine of multiplicity in resistant practice. It is clear that these two features combine to give rise to the possibility of what I have called *tri-hierarchization*, and it can be appreciated that at the end of the discussion of the six authors I had chosen, one reaches a crystallization of the basic features of what would be Foucault’s *episteme.*

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213 Ibid., 11.  
214 Ibid., 14.  
215 Ibid., 15.  
216 Ibid., 83.  
217 Ibid., 87.
VIII. The Features of the *Episteme* and onward to Foucault

This section having been titled 'To Foucault', its purpose was to examine why one needs to move in the direction of analysing Foucault and also how one can arrive at the Foucauldian type of thought. In the first chapter, I mentioned the general precepts of this thesis and identified the ontological category of 'tri-hierarchization' as the necessity to move in to Foucault. While the imperative was thereby established, a primary assumption at this level was that Foucauldian thought did not exist in an intellectual vacuum and did not come out of nowhere. Radically different as it may seem, it was argued, following Foucault's own 'order of things', that this type of thought must have been part of a broader intellectual milieu, an *episteme*, which itself must have been the result of a long-drawn epistemological break. The second chapter of the section accordingly tried to look for the epistemological break, and identified it in the steady attempt in seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western philosophy, of replacing the duality of matter and mind with a tripartition of mind, matter and body on the one hand, and of introducing the notion of power on the other, culminating in the three thinkers—Darwin, Marx and Freud. This break already warranting the new *episteme*, I proceeded in this chapter to see how it gets formed and what assumptions characterize it.

Let me use three terms—'archaeology/genealogy', 'tri-hierarchization', and 'dehierarchization'—to denote respectively the epistemological, ontological and ethical concerns that characterize Foucault's *episteme*. I have discussed some of the basic features of Foucault's methods, archaeology and genealogy, in the first chapter, and I take them up in greater detail in chapters six and seven. To be brief, however, one may mention certain salient features like dialectic, multiplicity, discontinuity, and the reliance on the notion of epistemological break. It can be noted how, in the six authors I have discussed these themes get stressed upon time and again. Ontologically, Foucauldian thought revolves around the relative autonomy of superstructural elements, their political nature, modes of subjectivization, and the not-necessarily-coercive nature of the apparatuses of power, which culminate in Foucault's tropological tool of 'tri-hierarchization', whereby the primacy of the material economic domain gives way to a consideration of representational mental forms and the physical body too as sites of power. My discussion of the six authors showed how these ontological features become a reality for Western thought in the twentieth century. The ethical concerns of Foucault revolve around two points—that of the primacy of knowledge and the role of the intellectual, and this role being necessarily one of critiquing normative hierarchies—which coalesce in what I have termed 'dehierarchization'. The six authors again show how the intellectual has a politically resistant role to play. Thus, this chapter establishes the formation of all the features of the *episteme* within which Foucault works, and now I can move straightaway 'in Foucault', to examine what the *episteme* finally leads to.